**John “Charlie” Thomas – 2017 Cabin Fever Fighter**

According to his mother, Crystal, 7 year-old Charlie Thomas has always been a smart, witty, and charming little boy. Charlie is quick to figure out a solution to any problem put in his way. He has the ability to capture the hearts and attention of everyone around him. Yet, in February of 2016, Charlie’s 1st grade teacher at Flynn Elementary School began to notice that Charlie was not being his charismatic, entertaining self. He was acting very lethargic and he appeared quite pale. She alerted Crystal and his father, J.C., of the symptoms she noticed. On February 13th, 2016, they went to check on Charlie in his bedroom. They were heartbroken to find limp, pale, and slightly blue-tinged Charlie.

They immediately took him to their local emergency room. Upon admittance, he was found to have a very low hemoglobin level of 4.1. A normal hemoglobin level is above 10.0. Charlie was given two units of blood, and diagnosed with a rare form of non-cancerous anemia called Transient Erythroblastopenia of childhood, or TEC. After Charlie’s hemoglobin returned to a normal level, he was dismissed and instructed to return if he experienced any further issues. A few weeks later, Charlie was once again appearing pale and tired. His parents took him back to his pediatrician and found that his hemoglobin had dropped. Charlie received another blood transfusion to help raise his hemoglobin.

On March 21st, 2016, Charlie was referred to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. After a few tests, Charlie was diagnosed with Leukemia, a cancer of the blood. Charlie was immediately set up for chemotherapy treatments in an attempt to rid his body of cancer. After treating Charlie for 10 months with chemotherapy alone, his team of doctors realized the only way to achieve a cancer free diagnosis would be to move forth with a bone marrow transplant. Both of Charlie’s younger siblings, Alan, 6, and Ava, 4, were tested with a blood draw to see if they could be a match for their brother. Amazingly, both Alan and Ava were matches and the doctors decided that, of the two siblings, Alan would be the best candidate for Charlie’s transplant.

On February 3rd of 2017, Charlie was admitted to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) at St. Marys Hospital. Here, the goal was to completely wipe out Charlie’s immune system by undergoing two days of high-dose chemotherapy along with six full-body radiation sessions. On February 9th, Charlie’s younger brother was brought to the operating room, placed under sedation and had some of his bone marrow removed from his hip. Then, they transferred Alan’s healthy marrow to Charlie through a special IV, similar to receiving a blood transfusion. At the time of writing this biography, Charlie is in the transplant unit of the PICU. He has very limited visitation for about three weeks as he waits for the transplanted bone marrow to create his “new” immune system. If this process is successful, Charlie would be considered “cured” of this disease. However, due to how difficult the leukemia was to treat with chemotherapy alone, there is the potential for it to return. At this point, all Charlie’s family, friends and care team can do is pray for the best as they wait out this process.

Due to his chemotherapy, Charlie has spent multiple holidays and his 7th birthday in the hospital. During these long stays in the hospital, Charlie has had the opportunity to befriend his entire care team. He captures the hearts and attention of everyone he comes in contact with. When Charlie flashes that bright, wide smile, you can’t help but smile along with him. One of the most difficult stays in the hospital was in December of 2016. Charlie and his Mom spent over a month in a secluded hospital room due to Charlie receiving a high-dose chemotherapy treatment. This high-dose treatment reduced Charlie’s immune system for such a prolonged period of time that it was not safe for him to come out of the specially-filtered hospital room. It was not the ideal way to celebrate the Christmas season. Thankfully, the amazing attitudes and affection that the care team showed Charlie and his family during this time made the stay bearable, and sometimes, even fun. And believe it or not, Santa Claus was able to find Charlie at the hospital to ensure he had a merry Christmas!

Charlie loves to play video games to pass his time while he is in the hospital, and since he’s had plenty of time to practice, he’s running out of worthy competition. Charlie also enjoys playing board games with his brother and sister. He is a fan of NASCAR drivers Jimmie Johnson and Dale Earnhardt Jr. and as a former resident of the great state of Texas, he is a Cowboys and Texans fan. He has also become a Green Bay fan thanks to his uncle’s undying passion for the Packers. Charlie is interested in science, reading books and figuring out how things work.

Charlie’s competitive streak and his passion to tackle any obstacle in front of him make him a natural fit with his Hero for the Cabin Fever Fighter Round, Andrew Yori - Rochester’s very own American Ninja Warrior! Andrew is an inspiration to many around the world due to his ability to glean every ounce of his athletic gifts to achieve greatness and his drive to beat the odds. He is a driven, motivated athlete that has worked tirelessly in his journey to become the best in his sport. Charlie has displayed the same drive to defeat cancer and has become an inspiration to many others who are facing difficult circumstances. Charlie has become a Cancer Ninja Warrior, willing sacrifice many things while keeping a positive attitude as he accomplishes his mission of beating this terrible disease.