**JACK CASSIDY – 2017 Cabin Fever Fighter**

*“I think a hero is an ordinary individual who finds strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles…”* as quoted by Christopher Reeve; a fitting way to introduce Jack Cassidy.  Jack was your typical busy, energetic 2 year-old boy who enjoyed learning new things each and every day.  But in December 2015, Jack would transform into Super Jack, a name given in honor of his favorite superhero, Superman.  It was at this time that Super Jack would need to, as Christopher Reeve said, *“…find strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles…”*  This is Jack’s story:

One week before Thanksgiving in November, 2015, Jack was at daycare when he accidentally fell into a toy box.   Even though Jack had incurred many similar tumbles in the past, this fall would turn out to be a blessing-in-disguise for the Cassidy family.  The left side of Jack’s jaw took the brunt of the impact.  But, like most 2 year olds, it barely fazed him.  Moments later, Jack was back to playing, as if nothing had happened.  The following day, Jack’s face was noticeably swollen and very tender along the jawline.  Jack’s mother, Amanda, promptly scheduled a visit to their family physician.  After discussion with the care team, they were told to wait and see if the swelling and soreness would improve on its own the following week.  That week passed with no improvement.  Jack was then seen by a maxillofacial specialist.  The doctor simply ran his hand along the jawbone and gave Jack a diagnosis of a broken jaw.  Rest and ibuprofen was his treatment plan.

A few days later, in early December of 2015, Jack’s sister fell down and accidently bumped him on the jaw while the two were playing.  Unsurprisingly, Jack belted out in agony.  He remained in horrible pain, shed constant tears and was obviously not acting like himself.  Amanda called their doctor seeking a prescription for stronger pain medications.  Instead, she was instructed to take him to the Emergency Department at Mayo Clinic.  A CT scan was performed which showed that Jack’s jaw was not broken, but instead, revealed a mass **in and on** the jawbone along the left side of Jack’s face.  Jack’s father, Neil, recalls the moment Jack’s emergency doctor came in the room with two other gentlemen in suits.  His heart sank as he realized that life as they knew it was about to change.

Jack was admitted to the hospital that night and was scheduled for a biopsy the following day.   They learned it was a tumor, and four days later, they were informed that it was cancer.  It was diagnosed as a very rare form of cancer called Langerhans Cell Histiocytosis (LCH).  Jack’s form of LCH was described as being unifocal.  Although unifocal LCH has a good prognosis, a rigorous treatment plan was developed.  Jack would need to undergo a year of chemotherapy and prednisone cycles.  Because of the rarity of this disease, the cancer’s proximity to his brain, along with the high risk of reoccurrence because of Jack’s age, an aggressive approach was needed with the possibility of changes expected.  Jack would need to adapt to his new way of life quickly.  He would need to be strong in order *to persevere and endure in spite of* these impending *overwhelming obstacles* that lay ahead.  Jack Cassidy would need to transform into Super Jack.

The next step for Super Jack was to have a port placed in his chest, which he playfully referred to as “His Button.”  With this, he began his chemotherapy treatment, which Super Jack lightheartedly described as “His Button getting a big drink.”  After six weeks of chemotherapy and prednisone treatments, tests revealed that the soft tissue on top of the bone had decreased, but sadly the tumor had grown inside the bone.  Therefore, Super Jack had to undergo a treatment where a needle was directly placed into the jawbone in order to administer steroids to the cancerous area.

Following six additional weeks of chemotherapy, the Cassidy’s were blessed to hear that Super Jack’s cancer status was “near-to-complete resolution!”  However, the worry and painstaking treatments were not over.  Super Jack would need to endure nine more grueling months of chemotherapy, prednisone, body scans, x-rays and trips to the Emergency Department to treat neutrophenic fevers.  Thankfully, in December of 2016, Super Jack completed his chemotherapy treatments and His Button was removed.  The family was given the long anticipated news that the cancer cells were gone!  Three year-old Super Jack had done it!  He had persevered and endured!

This wonderful news also brought about a much more lighthearted milestone. Neil stopped shaving his facial hair when Jack was diagnosed with cancer and vowed not to shave until Jack was done with his treatment as a symbolic gesture.  After just over one year of not shaving, the loss of his beard announced to those that know the Cassidy family that Super Jack had courageously battled and defeated cancer!  Although the family is grateful to be at this stage, Super Jack’s journey is not entirely over.  He will continue to receive testing every 3 months for the next year, twice the following year, and one per year, thereafter, for the rest of his life.

For the past 15 months, the Cassidy family has learned to adapt to a “new normal” way of life.  Neil, head coach of the St. Mary’s University Women’s Soccer Team, and Amanda, teacher at Bamber Valley Elementary School in Rochester, were amazed at how their family and friends would rally to support them through this emotional time in their lives.  Addison, Jack’s 10 year-old sister who is a 4th grader and also a very talented soccer player, would play the role of cheerleader and would rally the family during the toughest of times.  They learned that Jack’s other sister, 6 year-old Molly, who is a kind-hearted Kindergartner, as well as Jack’s best friend, was thankfully too young to understand the magnitude of the situation.  This innocence proved to be one of the biggest blessings in the Cassidy’s journey, as it showed the importance of living in the moment.  It reminded them to cherish every day, even if it will never be the same as it was before Thanksgiving of 2015.  This new life may be a little scarier, but it is a little sweeter, too.  Most importantly, Neil and Amanda learned their son is Fighter.  Even after his transformation to Super Jack, he’s the same little boy who dances to Bruno Mars and would eat peanut butter & jelly sandwiches and chocolate ice cream for every meal.  His favorite movie is Monsters, Inc. which just recently was removed from their On-Demand library.   Upon learning of this dilemma, as you can imagine, Super Jack’s passion for the movie showed!  Jack also enjoys playing with race cars, playing basketball and fixing most things around the house, except for light sockets, right Jack?!?!  As we know, Jack also loves Superman.  It makes perfect sense that Super Jack should team with Superman, the superhero whom Christopher Reeve is most famously recognized for.  Superman is here to support Jack today during the Cabin Fever Fighter Round as Jack’s Hero.  Superman is known to most of the world as Clark Kent, but to his Cabin Fever family, he’s known as Nick Floberg.

In a quote, Superman once said, *“You’re much stronger than you think you are…TRUST ME.”*Super Jack Cassidy has proven this to be true!