



CASE IN POINT:

SHANNA'S INSPIRATION

When Shanna Decker was only 7 years old, she was confronted with the scariest thing in her life: bone cancer.

In March 1998, Shanna's parents, Jack and Sherrie, took her to the family doctor after she had been walking with a limp for about three weeks. They thought she had pulled a muscle, but Shanna thought it was much more. After taking X-rays, the doctor found a large abnormality in her left leg above her knee. He immediately referred her to Mayo Clinic in Rochester for additional testing.

After an exhausting day of testing at Mayo Clinic, Shanna and her family met with her doctor to receive the results. Shanna had osteogenic sarcoma, a type of bone cancer. "We thought she was going to die," Sherrie says. But the doctor reassured the family that Shanna's prognosis was good. With this bone cancer, she would have to be hospitalized for about one year to receive chemotherapy treatments. This, Shanna remembers, was the beginning of the most challenging event in her life.

After diagnosis, she was admitted to Mayo Eugenio Litta Children's Hospital, part of Saint Marys Hospital, to begin chemotherapy. It caused her to lose her hair, become nauseous and lose weight. At first, she was depressed and hid under her covers and wouldn't talk to the other children. But Shanna adjusted to this new life.

SURGERY AND THERAPY

After Shanna completed three months of chemotherapy, doctors gave her and her family three options for surgically removing the tumor in her leg. The first was a full leg amputation, which would be removing her leg at the upper thigh. The second option was a stiff leg procedure, in which a rod would be inserted into her leg, causing a loss of motion in the entire leg. The final option was rotationplasty. Doctors would amputate her leg just above the knee and turn her ankle backward to replace the knee and then fit her with a prosthetic leg.

After much thought, the family chose rotationplasty. When fitted with a prosthetic leg, the result resembles a below-the-knee amputation. This choice offered Shanna the most benefits so she could continue living an active lifestyle. After her amputation, she underwent intense physical therapy to regain her strength.

In December 1998, Shanna completed her cancer treatments, and the following summer, was fitted with her first prosthetic leg.

A NEW LIFE

Shanna's transition back into third grade was easier than she had expected. Mayo Clinic nurses and a social worker went to her school to explain to Shanna's classmates what to expect when she returned. Once back, she was treated no differently than before her amputation.

Now a happy, healthy 14-year-old, Shanna considers herself a "well-adjusted" young lady. She has learned to excel in life with only one leg. She's able to bike, ice skate, play softball, run, swim and do almost everything her friends can do.

Shanna's mother says, "Our priorities have shifted from the fast-paced material life to the world that's really important to us – our faith, helping others and not taking even one day for granted."

Shanna still keeps in close contact with the children who were in the hospital with her. She is also a mentor for other children who have been diagnosed with cancer. "I am grateful to have been treated at Mayo Clinic, but in addition to all the staff has done for me is what God has provided for my family," Shanna says. "He is truly the ultimate physician!"