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Marlee Kratzer

—continued from page 1

for a while,” Tyler noted. “By all accounts, Marlee was herself. We had no indication that she was sick. She was not fatigued, had an appetite, and was fully functioning, and fully healthy. That Sunday night (before her checkup), she was playing with some friends of hers, and was the most energetic of all of them. There were no indications to us that something was wrong, other than a few abnormal looking bruises... They started the treatments that Saturday, and told us our lives were going to go on pause.”

He said both of their employers have been exceptionally accommodating, thoughtfully adjusting work schedules so that one or both of them can be with Marlee. She was diagnosed at just 19-months-old, and turned 21-months-old on June 27th. She has completed her first cycle of chemotherapy and is in remission. However, doctors have recommended she undergo four additional cycles to reduce the risk of the cancer returning, and she is currently in her second cycle.

“She’s stronger than Arikah and I could have ever been,” he expressed. “Because she is so young, she doesn’t understand this. We’re at the hospital for 4-5 weeks at a time, and to her that’s just normal now. We can’t explain to her why she’s hooked up to these machines, why she’s receiving medicine, and why she’s not feeling well. She can’t comprehend that. We can’t tell her why she can’t go play outside. She’s outside 24 hours a day - rain, snow, or sunshine if you would let her. Removing her from her norm was a hard transition but she has adapted well. She is amazing. It’s been tough on us, and it’s changed our lives up, but for her — she’s been a rockstar. The doctors told us they may never be able to explain how or why she got this.

We’re taking it one day, one treatment, one cycle at a time. The biggest thing for us is our faith. We grew up in Christian families, going to church, and having our lives devoted to Christ. We’re raising Marlee in that way as well. This time in our lives has been truly a big test, but we know and we’ve come to the conclusion that God has a plan for us... For some reason He decided to have Marlee go through this, whether it’s to show Arikah and I something, to allow us to spend more time together as a family... We don’t know why, but somehow, some way, there’s a plan. Whatever it is; He’s got the plan.”

Tyler said their relationship with God and their faith in Him has been primary in coping with this, and getting through it each day. The outpouring of support from the community has also made a profound difference, and has helped to ease the emotional toll and financial pressures.

“The support of our community has been beyond what we could have ever imagined,” he said gratefully. “It took Arikah and I a couple of weeks to text everybody back that reached out when we got this diagnosis. We’ve heard from people that we haven’t talked to in years. It’s almost overwhelming the amount of support we’ve gotten, not only financially from the community, but kind words, thoughts, prayers, cards... People have truly been incredible. Our gratitude could never be expressed enough, and we haven’t been able to say thank you to everybody. After people reaching out and getting all of these fundraisers and community events organized, we were sitting in the hospital and Arikah looked at me and said, ‘We’re never leaving this community. This place is our home, and it will forever be our home.’ I looked at her and said, ‘I wholeheartedly agree.’ These people are our people, and this community truly is incredible the way they’ve reached out and helped us through this. The people

that we rent our house from have been phenomenal with working with us. Both my parents and Arikah’s parents are visiting regularly up here at the hospital. Making that hour and a half drive from Hawesville to Louisville isn’t always easy or fun, but they have been pausing their lives as well back home to come and be here to support us in any way they can.”

Arikah & Tyler are both 2017 graduates of Hancock County High School. She is the daughter of Jay & Julie Newton, and he is the son of Keith & Michelle Kratzer.

For Marlee’s first cycle of treatments, they were at Norton’s for 37 days total. She went through her first round of chemotherapy, and with this specific type of leukemia and treatment, the doctors wanted to make sure her body recovered before discharging her.

“It took her about 22-23 days to fully recover from getting that first treatment,” Tyler said. “When she recovered, they ran some more tests, and sent us home. We had a follow-up treatment, and based on those results, they saw no new leukemia cells in her body. That was a complete shock to Arikah and I. We immediately prayed and we thanked God for His healing of Marlee. She’s got to finish up her second round of chemo treatment this week, and then she’ll be in the recovery period here at the hospital. They’ll monitor her levels, and once she hits a certain threshold, they’ll discharge her for at least a week, and let her recover at home. Then we’ll bring her back in, and get re-admitted for cycle three.”

After the success of cycle one, he said Marlee was thrilled to come back home for the first time after being in the hospital for so long. She got a chance to play with her cousins and see family and friends that she missed before returning to the hospital.

“We pulled in the driveway and we didn’t even make it inside. As soon as her car door opened, she took off running outside. Her two favorite things to do at home are to ride the 4-wheeler and to swing. It was just good to be home and kind of re-introduce ourselves back in our lives for just that short time. It gives Marlee that sense of home, but also gives the people back home a sense of Marlee, and lets them reconnect. None of them missed a beat when they were playing. She was back to her old self. Looking at Marlee now, the way she’s handling the second round, you would never guess that she’s receiving chemo. She’s just a pure joy and a pure light,” Tyler said.

They were re-admitted into Norton’s on

June 22nd. He said Marlee is energetic and loves to play and walk the hallways at the hospital, visiting with the nurses, and getting a break from her hospital room. During the first cycle, she was in isolation for over 24 days and couldn’t leave the room because she had a virus, and they were monitoring everything very closely.

“She was stuck in there and that was tough to keep a 19-month-old contained in a 12x12 room. The moment she got over that virus,” he said, “we took off in the hallways. Luckily, this second go-round we haven’t been put in isolation or anything. Being home was good. If we could just get to the next time being home, and then the next time... We spend our days walking the hallways or playing with toys when she’s not receiving treatments. They said once we come home from the second one, we’ll spend at least a week home, maybe a little bit longer. This last time home was ten days. They said that’s about average — a week to two weeks home, and then come back and start the third one. It all just depends on how well her body recovers from the treatment while we’re here at the hospital.”

When they were at home between treatments, they said it was wonderful to be able to attend church those two Sundays at Hawesville Baptist Church.

“Just walking into church, into a public setting with people we know, and to just know that our presence means so much to them that they’re willing to take their time to think about us or pray for us, just shows the love that they have for us,” Tyler said. “Arikah and I both were overcome with emotion, and we got teary-eyed. This is our community, our family, and our home. Without their support, their prayers, and without God’s guidance, we wouldn’t be able to get through any of this. It wasn’t only in our church, but in our whole community, and even the community in Owensboro. We’ve had people reach out from Owensboro that we don’t even know. We’ve had people reach out from different states. People we’ve never talked to or seen before have reached out and sent us cards.”

The massive amount of support has been very comforting to them, and they are feeling so blessed and thankful because of it.

“People have gone out of their way,” he said. “We weren’t going to ask for any of that. We’re beyond grateful, and we can’t express that gratitude enough. The HCHS Track team did the ‘Lap for Marlee’ in May right after she was diagnosed. Our church

family and other churches around the community took up love offerings for us. People at Arikah’s work did a vacation raffle, and a chicken salad sale. Claire Zogleman, a little girl from our church who makes bracelets and sells them at the Farmers Market, she did a bracelet sale fundraiser. Nick & Natalie McCaslin, Arikah’s cousins, did the huge rib cook. My uncle, Kevin Kratzer, put on a bass fishing tournament this past weekend. He and his daughter, Brittany Kratzer Owens, organized the tournament with a raffle, and Nick also cooked at that; They had a great turnout at Rocky Point. Union Baptist Church, where Arikah attended before we got married and where her family still attends, they sold some meals and raised money. The Redemption Place Church in Lewisport had a bake sale for us. A lady I used to work with in Daviess County is organizing a blood drive in Owensboro and in Hancock County next week. The youth baseball program in Hancock County has reached out, and they did some raffles for us. The girls’ basketball team in Hancock County did fundraising

Make Vaccinations Part of Your Back-to-School Checklist

As families begin preparing for the new school year, the Green River District Health Department encourages parents and caregivers to ensure that children are up to date on recommended vaccinations. Routine immunizations are a proven way to help protect individuals and reduce the spread of certain preventable diseases.

All vaccines approved for use in the United States must meet high safety and quality standards:

- Vaccines undergo extensive clinical trials to ensure safety and effectiveness prior to approval.
- Millions of children across the country are safely vaccinated each year.
- Strict requirements govern how vaccines are stored, handled, and monitored for outcomes.
- Federal oversight and continuous evaluation maintain the highest level of vaccine safety.

Vaccines help the body build natural immunity before exposure to potentially harmful illnesses. On-time vaccination during childhood is a safe and important step in supporting long-term health. Making sure children are protected before they enter school helps keep classrooms healthy and learning uninterrupted.

Adults are also encouraged to check their own vaccination status. Staying up to date on immunizations remains important for reducing the risk of disease, especially for those who care for young children, older adults, or individuals with weakened immune systems.

Vaccination decisions are personal, and we encourage families to speak with their healthcare provider about what is recommended for each stage of life. To check your or your child’s immunization status, visit the Kentucky Immunization Registry portal at <https://kyirpublicportal.ky.gov/> or contact your healthcare provider.

For more information, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/> and <https://healthdepartment.org/>

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