Haydee & Orlando Vasquez

Parents of Kristie, who died at age 16 from leukemia, and siblings Kimberly and Danny

TITLE: It wasn't good but we felt that God was going to help us deal with everything.

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/it-wasnt-good-but-we-felt-t hat-god-was-going-to-help-us-deal-with-everything/

Description: Parents of a 16-year old diagnosed with aggressive leukemia talk about the immediate strength and constant peace they got from their deep deep faith in God, including during the difficult periods of decision-making with doctors. "We put God right in front. God was guiding us. We put ourselves in God's hands."

Transcript:

Haydee: So we would listen to what the doctors had to say and they would pretty much tell us -- give us their opinion as to what we can choose to do with Christie. We could either, a) do one thing, or b) do another. Christie was always present. She -- everything and anything they had to say about Christie, we would always include her, we would always include Kimberly and we would always include Danny. The five of us were always informed of what was happening. We're not doctors and so it was very difficult for us to make decisions like what to do with our daughter, what treatment to use, whether or not this treatment was going to work for her or not. In the end we trusted that the doctors knew what they were doing and what they were talking about, and in most of these meetings that we had with the doctors we would always tell them that any decision that we make, any procedures that they feel that is necessary for Christie, we would put in God's hands, and let God lead them, so that they would be able proceed.

Orlando: Yeah, one of the most difficult times for me was in the beginning when they were putting two different treatments on the table, they said, "This is the treatment that we have been doing and we're going to have a new treatment that is going to start in a week from now." They would explain to us both of them and we have to decide, we decide one treatment. And it was so hard for us to decide something that we don't even know, is that going to work. Then when they finished, we were on the sixth floor of the children's hospital, I went all the way down to the lobby, and I was crying, and cry, and cry, because I said, "God, I don't if we choose the right treatment for her. We don't understand all this medicine or the stuff that they're going to do." But we say that, "God, we trust you. We know that you have a plan with Christie and it's going to be your decision God."

2 TITLE: When you have God on your side, you see everything different.

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/when-you-have-god-on-your-side-you-see-everything-different/

Description: Parent's of a daughter with rare, aggressive leukemia talk about how their deep faith in God and prayer helped them through their daughter's illness journey and death.

Transcript:

Orlando: You know, when you have God on your side you see everything different, you feel more strong and with peace to deal with the situation. But we always were careful, because everybody had different situations and we cannot tell them, "Why are you like that?" No, we understand, you know. We know that it's hard, it's not easy when you have one of your family member at the hospital, especially kids. And I think that we were trying to give them more of a sample of the way that we were feeling, and that sometime helped them, even the nurse, sometime they feel like that we're giving them strength to keep going, because -- even Christie, she was always positive, she was always with her thumbs up, and that -- we were -- I think that the way we were acting, it was even helping Christie to be strong with the treatment and everything that she had to go through.

Haydee: And every time we were there, there was always prayer. We would always pray, not only for our situation, but for the other families that were in there whether it would be on the sixth floor, on the ICU floor, we were always praying as a family, for everybody.

Orlando: I felt once that I was feeling to yell and scream to God, and at the same moment I say, "Who am I to do that?" Because I know that God, from the beginning, had a plan with Christie. He was bringing families, American people, Spanish people, people from other countries, families getting together to pray. And I said, "God, I know that you have a plan with Christie and I don't want to go -- not even an inch out of that plan, because I know that you have plans with her." And I even was thinking that God, he could say, "Okay, I'm going to give you your Christie, but she could be maybe in a bed, suffering, you guys could be a slave all the time, because I can give you your Christie, but that's the way that she could be. But now, this is the moment that she is ready to go with me." And we get to the point that we say, "God, we're going to put Christie in your hand, and whatever you decide to do with her, we're going to be okay." And that's why during the time that she was in ICU in really, really, really critical condition, we say, "God, she is in your hands and you're the one who is going to decide what to do with her."

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/can-you-pray-for-my-family-and-can-you-pray-for-the-nurses/

Description: Parents of a daughter with leukemia describe how her deep faith helped her through her life, from diagnosis through over a year of hospitalization and then through her end-of-life. Prayer was a huge piece of her practice.

Transcript:

Haydee: Christie was always involved in the church because we were very active in the church and therefore Christie had such a big faith. And she was the President of the Junior Catholic Daughters of America, she would go to the youth group, and not once did she say, "God, why me?" If anything, she was very positive, even -- like when my husband said, even when she received the message that she was going to -- she was diagnosed with leukemia, and she was always, always, always positive, praying, not a day went by without having her say a prayer for everybody. And even one situation, we had a -- Michelle came to our room one day and she started praying for Christie. And Christie -- every time she comes into our room, she always asks, "Christie, is there something that you would like to pray?" And as a matter of fact that day Christie wasn't doing very well, she was in a lot of pain, and Michelle had asked her, "Is there something that you would like to pray for?" And she said, "Yes. Can you please pray for my family? And can you please pray for the nurses?" And Michelle said to her, "Christie, you are in so much pain today and you are not asking for us to pray for you, but we will pray for you."

Orlando: Yeah. And I remember that day the nurse, she was -- she held our hands and she is starting to pray with us. And I said, "Glory to God. This moment is for the nurse." And she was really touched that day. And that was the way that always Christie was during her situation, thinking of others.

4 TITLE: We said, "We want to be part of the Solution."

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/we-said-we-want-to-be-part-of-the-solution/

Description: Parents of a 16 year-old being treated for a rare form of leukemia share that they immediately accepted their daughter's illness and that they were immediately ready to work with the medical team. They also worked with the palliative care team and a psychologist. The father adds that "With God we weren't angry. We were ready to be part of the Solution."

Transcript:

Haydee: So, the people that helped us to talk to the kids and ourselves, there was a social worker over at children's hospital who sat down with my husband and he started talking to him about you know what may happen and how do you feel about this and my husband right away said to the social worker, "You know what, we are at a point where we have accepted this condition and we are ready to work with this and we are ready to work with our new chapter in our life -- with this new chapter in our life." And -- oh yeah, there were a lot of doctors and -- for example, the PACT. There is a program, the PACT program at children's hospital. And they would come in and they would talk to us. There was a psychologist, Nancy, also would come in and talk to us. And Katy -- there was a student there and I think -- I believe she was interning at the time that Christy was at children's hospital. And she would visit pretty much every day with Christy and talk to Christy and ask her how she was feeling, you know what she was thinking, what is she going through right now. And they made such a beautiful relationship, they looked as if they were, you know best friends. And -- so yeah, there were a lot of people who came to our room and sat down and talked to us and asked us how we felt and how we were dealing and coping with not only each other but also with our children.

Orlando: Something that I would like to add to that is that in the beginning there was a -- one social worker that went there, the Spanish guy, I don't remember his name. And he started talking to us about the situation, that this -- and I say, "Hold it there. We got right on the front of this stuff and we want to be part of the solution, we don't want to be another problem. So we are willing to help and to be here and to be positive and to help. We want to be part of the solution. How can we do this?" You know, so, he said, "Ah, thank you." Because he said in the beginning he has to deal with a family that feels very sad and it's hard for them to accommodate to the new situation. And we said, "No, no, no, don't worry, we are strong here".

Haydee: We're past that, we're at a point where we want to be part of the solution, we want to help Christy cope and go through all of this, so that at one point in time we could bring her back home.

TITLE: It was very difficult to disagree with the doctors because we're not doctors.

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/it-was-very-difficult-to-disagree-with-the-doctors-because-were-not-doctors/

Description: The mother of a 16 year-old being treated for aggressive leukemia acknowledges the commonly experienced reality that parents rely on doctors to be the medical experts, which makes it hard to consider other options. "We agreed and prayed for the best."

Transcript:

Haydee: It was very difficult to disagree with the doctors, because we were not doctors. And therefore, we didn't know what was right or wrong or what procedure to choose or what was better for her, other than what they had suggested. You know a lot of time when you are at the hospital you rely on what the doctor tells you. You rely on the fact that you know this is something that they offer the -- what they think is the best for your daughter. And so we would say, "Okay, well let's do it then and hope for the best, you know, and pray that everything goes well".

6 TITLE: They never complained about being with her at the hospital late at night.

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/they-never-complained-about-being-with-her-at-the-hospital-late-at-night/

Description: A father describes an aspect of 'their new normal life' - bringing his two other healthy children to be at the hospital many nights with their sick sister. "Because we were all on the same page, they were able to put 100% to the situation."

Transcript:

7

Orlando: When you are in that situation and you may have the experience, you have a new normal life that is completely different than your previous normal life. So, you get used to being home, missing her, she is not here. Even yesterday, last night I was telling my wife that every end of the day, I was so, so proud of how many things I could do, because I -- most of the time I stay at of hospital with her, waking up at 4:30 in the morning, go to my full time job, getting out from there, come home, take the kids to the hospital, go to my part time job, go back to the hospital, sometimes take the kids the home and go back to the hospital, stay there with her up to 10-11, watching TV, playing with her, sleep a little while. And by the end of the day I said, "I don't know how I can do so many things in one day." And I was telling Haydee, that was God extending the day so we could do all this stuff that we need to do and have done in one day. Sometimes the kids stay there until 10 o'clock at night and they have to come home and do their homeworks and they never complain, never complain to be there late and be with her. So, I think that because we were all on the page, it was easy to manage the situation, because we were okay, they were okay and the communication that we had with them always was up to date. They know every single thing that happened to her. So, that's why they were putting their 100 percent to be there and help us to not screw up our day.

TITLE: Sometimes we let others stay with Christy so we could be alone with our other children.

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/sometimes-we-let-others-stay-with-kristie-so-we-could-be-alone-with-our-other-children/

Description: Parents of a 16 year-old being treated for aggressive leukemia talk about how they didn't want to ignore their two other children while their daughter was in the hospital (for over a year). They let others stay with Krisite sometimes so that they could stay at home with their other children. That time also allowed them to speak openly with their other children about Kristie's illness 'without making her sad.'

Transcript:

Orlando: The other thing is that the people from church, they were supporting us 100 percent.

Haydee: Yes.

Orlando: And in the beginning, when we got there, there was a man from the church and he said to me, "Orlando I going to tell this, what I passed through, so it could help you now with this situation." He said that when he was a kid -- he was in high school or something like that. He said that his brother got sick and her mother said, "He is sick, I have to take care of him. You guys help yourself and try to do your life, because I need to concentrate with this kid, he is sick." And he said that when he was in school, he was playing sports and he got home after school and all this time, nobody was there. And he said that -- he was 55 years old when he was talking about this. He was crying, and he said, "Until this day, I am hurt because my mother, he put us on the side, and she took care of the -- my brother that he was sick." And he said, "Don't put the other kids on the side." And that helps us to balance.

Haydee: Tremendously, it helped us --

Orlando: Our marriage, the kids, Christy. And we are blessed that her mother was here. So sometimes she stays at the hospital so we can go as a family to the theatre and watch a movie. And sometime my sister or other friends stay with Christy or stay with the kids. So it helped us tremendously to balance everything during that whole process.

Haydee: Even my co-worker. She was so sweet. She said, "Haydee, if there is a day that you will allow me to go to the hospital and just be with Christy for one day." And that way you know, we could have our time. And she did. She went to the hospital and was with Christy all day. So that's one of the ways that we actually coped. You had asked earlier how we cope. And you know, being away from Christy, one of the good things was that we definitely tried to make time for Kimberly and Danny, so that the four of us

could talk about it without having Christy in front of us, because we didn't want her to hear things that may cause her to feel sad. So, that was definitely one of the ways that we would do it.

8 TITLE: You are my rock.

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/you-are-my-rock/

Description: Mother of a 16 year-old who died from leukemia talks about how she and her husband were each other's rock. "We supported each other from day one."

Transcript:

Haydee: I have to say that through this journey -- that's what we call it, through this journey and through this chapter in our life, we, my husband and I, found support within each other. We would say to each other ,"You are my rock. And the only way that you and I will be able to get through this in a positive way is by supporting each other." And that's exactly what we did. We supported each other from day one and I thank God that we were able to get through this in a positive way and that no negativity and no pessimism ever got through, ever got in between us because unfortunately we have heard of stories where the couple would go through this and either the wife or the husband just gives up and says, "I am sorry, I can't go through this anymore." And then you are left alone dealing with this, whether it's with one, two, three, four, five children. So, "You are my rock".

Orlando: You too.

9 TITLE: *It was beautiful.*

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/it-was-beautiful/

Description: A father describes the last few days of his 16-year-old daughter's life as she prepared 'to pass through to the other life and go with God. He describes how full of peace he felt at the moment she died. I said "Thank you God."

Transcript:

Orlando: My experience with Christy was that in the final hours or final days -- with the experience we have at church and with grief and with God, she was looking at this world, but she couldn't understand what's going on, she was listening to everything in the room, but she couldn't understand what's going on, because she was passing through the other life. And she even tried to raise her arms and she couldn't. And she was in the process of leaving this world and going with God. And everybody felt it in the room that she was going through that stage in her life. And it was sad to see her

like that, it was beautiful to see her passing through that stage and we all could see her going through that transition. It was beautiful. It was beautiful.

Haydee: Everyone would look at her and they'd say, "Oh she looks like an angel, Christy the angel."

Orlando: It was beautiful. It was beautiful to see her pass into the other life. It was beautiful.

Orlando: The day that she passed away, it was Thanksgiving Day. And at about 10:30 at night the doctor was checking her to just make sure that everything was on. And when he confirmed that she was dead, I told Haydee, my wife. I said, "Haydee, I feel so full of peace, I don't even feel a pinch of sadness, because this was God's plan to take her. And we put her in God's hands and he decided to take her, because he knew that she was prepared and it was her time to go with him. And I was feeling so peaceful and with strength that I say, "Thank you God, thank you God" because that was your plan.

10 TITLE: *After people see how we handled death, they see death differently.*

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/after-people-see-how-we-h andled-death-they-see-death-differently/

Description: A couple whose daughter has died talk about their family's experience has shown others that they can do it too and that it can be beautiful: the peace that we have, the strength, life continuing.

Transcript:

Orlando: One of the things that I hear from people is that after our situation and the way everything was -- we dealt with everything, they see death in a different way. They were looking at death with sadness and -- misery. And after they see us, how we handled it, they see the death differently. They -- even after Christy, some family members passed away from church and they were so strong and they said, "I remember that Orlando and Haydee --." And that was giving them strength. Even here in the United States, people say, "Wow I see this differently now, to be strong, to be there, to help, to be part of the solution that -- to help, to make things goes better. And even these days, people -- the experience that they see and the way they see us and plus, the peace that we have, the strength, life continue, we have other kids. So it is -- it's helping them to see life differently.

Haydee: One other thing that I will never forget was during the week when people were lining up to give us their -- to pay tribute. One of things that I remember when they were paying tribute is this woman came up to me and she said, "Wow, I am here to console you, yet you have consoled me. And I

thank you for that." And as she was going through every single member down the line, she was telling us how great she felt at the end of this line, because she came in very, very sad and left with happiness, from our daughter's wake.

11 TITLE: *Kristy inspired people to look at life differently.*

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/kristie-inspired-people-to-look-at-life-differently/

Description: Parents of a 16 year-old who died from leukemia talk about the impact of her life on others, including people's commitment to prayer and being positive.

Transcript:

Haydee: One of the lasting legacies that I could see is that she was able to bring so many families together, so many people back and wanting to pray together, to go to church more. And we thank Christy for being part of that. People coming up to us and telling us, "I was looking at Christy's picture today and I had to pray, I just had to pray more. And I know that Christy would be very proud of me to know that -- that that's what she wanted me to do and that's what I did."

Interviewer: Orlando do you have -- would you want to add anything to that?

Orlando: The kids that she always take care of at church, little kids, they always remember Christy. And I think that she was a very good model for them to grow up. And sometimes, they want to be like Christy, smiling, happy. And she was a good example for those kids and even teenagers from church, that she inspires them to be -- the like positive -- to see the positive thing in -- on life, even when you have a hard situation, hard moment at school, and family and at the house. She inspires them to look at life differently.

12 TITLE: *Keeping good memories and remembering her in positive ways.*

https://courageousparentsnetwork.org/videos/keeping-good-memories-and-remembering-her-in-positive-ways/

Description: A couple whose daughter has died share how they find and keep her presence in their lives and manage their grief. The father shares how she came to him in his dream.

Transcript:

Haydee: The way I would describe grief is -- well one of the things that helps me is the fact that we keep Christy in our home. When you enter this

home, Christy -- she may be not physically here, but we see her every single day. And so, we don't miss her that way. But whenever sadness enters my mind, I try to stop it right away and start thinking of beautiful memories that we had together, things that we did as family. And so, because I feel that when Christy sees that Mom is sad, she doesn't want Mom to be sad. And so I don't want to be sad, because I don't want to make her sad. And so -- I guess keeping good memories and remembering her in positive ways, helps.

Orlando: Yeah, one other thing that I experienced with her is that she doesn't want to be a reason for me to get sad, she doesn't want to see me sad. She always wants to be -- me to smile and be happy. And my last experience with her -- it was last week. I was sleeping and I saw her. It was like a mall, and it was Valentine's Day, and she was wearing white -- something white. And she said, "Dad, I know that you want to give me a hug. Give me your hug -- give me a hug." And when I hugged her, I felt her body, and I started crying. I was sleeping, crying, and Haydee said, "What happened?" I said, "I just hugged Christy, and I felt her body. And she is here with us." I was feeling her right in the room. And I was crying not because I was sad, I was crying because I can -- I felt her body, hugging her. And I was like, that was so beautiful, that experience. And I was feeling my tear coming down to my arm, and coming down and down. I said, "Wow, what a beautiful moment I have with her." That was last week.