



Ashley and her parents, Beth and Rob.



Ashley's Journey

Until **November 16, 2015**, Ashley Upshall was a typical Grade 3 student at Havelock Elementary School. She had a crew of friends. She participated in school activities and sports. She had a close, loving family; they have one dog, one cat and two horses, including her very own one called “Moose”, that she took care of and rode almost every day.

Life was good for this 8-year old!

I remember my Mom waking me up in what felt like the middle of the night telling me I had to get up and get dressed to go back to The Moncton Hospital. I was really scared not knowing what was going on.

Earlier that afternoon, my Mom had taken me for blood work at the hospital and then we went shopping and out for supper. When we got home we did our normal things and then I went to bed.

When my Mom woke me up and told me we had to go back to the hospital right away, so I could be checked over by a doctor, I didn't know what to think other than to be scared. Apparently, they told my Mom that my white blood cell count was very high, and to immediately bring me back to the hospital and to pack for a long-stay.

My dad is a truck driver and was on the road, but my Mom managed to reach him and he met us at the hospital. My grandparents came with us too. I remember walking into the room and sitting there as a family. When I am nervous, I often get sick to my stomach and my tummy started to get very sore.

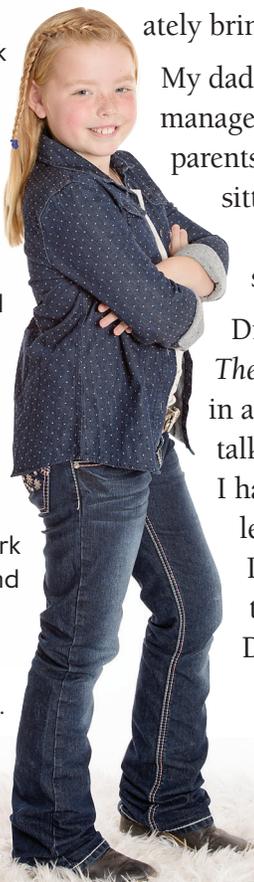
Dr. Chaibou (*Pediatrician, at The Moncton Hospital*), came in and checked me over and talked to us and told us that I had cancer. He thought it was leukemia but the next day

I would have to go to the IWK in Halifax for more testing to confirm the diagnosis. We all slept in the Pediatric Department of The Moncton Hospital that night.

Beth, Ashley's Mom— I started packing our bags, thinking what do they mean by a “long-stay?” It was strange, terrifying and numbing all at the same time.

Beth, Ashley's Mom—Four weeks before this, Ashley had been complaining of a stiff neck. We chalked it up to sleeping the wrong way or from the way she had been riding her horse, Moose. But we did take her to the after-hours clinic and they suggested we might want to get some routine blood work done. However, she started feeling better the next day so we did not think any more of it, until the week of November 9.

Ashley was starting to not eat her lunch, which was odd for her. I thought perhaps she was being bullied at school, but that weekend she stopped eating all together. I remembered that I still had the sheet from the clinic to go for blood work and decided to take her in and get it done.



Ashley, the day before her diagnosis.

Before we left the next day, Dr. Chaibou came in to explain what the next steps would be. He told me, “this is your ship to sail, Ashley, and you have to sail it. Now when you get better, I am going to ride my camel and you are going to ride your horse and we are going to have a race.” He made me smile!

They wanted to fly me in a helicopter to Halifax the next day, but because I was feeling well enough, they allowed me to drive down with my parents instead. When we got there Nurse Carmen met with us, and got me admitted. She was so nice and kind to me. There were lots of tests and lots of doctors, nurses and people in and out of my room all day. I met with all of them with my parents, as I wanted to hear what they had to say. When I got tired of listening I put on my headphones and played games on my iPad.

We were there for almost a month. During that time a lot happened. I was diagnosed with Pre B Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia, I had a port placed in my chest (*an intravenous catheter that is implanted under the skin in a patient who requires frequent administration of chemotherapy. A needle is inserted through the skin into the port to draw blood or give fluids*), and had lots of needles and medications.

I had some high fevers at times and developed some weird rashes and allergic reactions, but got through it all. When my hair started falling out I decided to donate it, so I had it all cut off on December 11. I found it hard at times to go out in public as people called me a boy and it really hurt.

We came home on December 13, after 27 days in Halifax.

It was so nice to get home. It was different though because I was not able to return to school. I was pretty much confined to my house other than doctor's appointments. I had to have a teacher come to our house to teach me, as my immune system was so low that I could not be around other people for fear I would get sick. I was not able to go to the movies, or out to eat. My friends could not come visit me if they were sick or had been around anyone who was sick. I really missed my friends and my normal life.

Intensive treatments continued on and off. Sometimes I would go into the hospital for five days in a row, then nothing for a few weeks, then just for a day, then three days the next time. Each treatment would last from about 8:30 am to 4 pm.

On March 4, 2016, we found out that my MRD (*leukaemic cells*) came back less than .01, which meant I was considered to be in remission! Oh happy dance! Mom and Dad acted like they won the lottery!

Beth, Ashley's Mom—It was a very long drive to Halifax, trying to stay positive and make it as normal for Ashley as possible even though we were frightened of what might be ahead of us. After some testing, the doctors confirmed her diagnosis, but told us if she had to have a cancer, that this would be the best one to have. We took some comfort in that.

Unfortunately, further testing discovered that Ashley has a rare chromosome that moved her from standard risk Leukemia to very high risk, which meant her treatments had to be accelerated and stronger to fight it. *This wasn't as comforting.*



Ashley and her cousin, during a treatment.

Beth, Ashley's Mom—It was so nice to finally be in the comfort of our own home, but scary at the same time. We needed to keep all of the medications straight, remember all of the schedules and keep check on Ashley's temperature. I had trusty notebook that I still use to record everything in as there was so much going on, I did not want to forget anything.

During my journey, I was admitted to The Moncton Hospital several times with fevers and sickness and received many of my chemotherapy treatments as an outpatient at The Moncton Hospital.

I am happy to say I finished my intensive treatment at the end of August last year. My life would start to return back to my NEW normal.

It was so good to get back to school. I had to wear a hat at school, but eventually got used to it. I am back to being able to ride my horse, Moose, which I missed most of all. I can have my friends over for visits, go to the movies. I dance and started playing basketball. It is so much fun to just be a kid again.

We have spent and continue to spend a lot of time at The Moncton Hospital; almost 60 visits and counting, as I was able to have a lot of my treatments administered there. I will continue maintenance treatments once a month at the hospital as well, with daily oral chemo at home until March, 2018.

The nursing staff and doctors at The Moncton Hospital have been nothing but wonderful to our family! Many are like family to me now. The Pediatric staff couldn't be kinder.

I also love the new Pediatric Ambulatory Clinic and of course my favourite treatment room has a painting of my horse "Moose" on a sliding barn door.

I am happy my hair is starting to grow back and I look forward to the day I stop chemo altogether and to the day I get to race Moose alongside Dr. Chaibou and his camel! 😊

Ashley Upshall

PS Please help kids like me continue to get excellent health care and treatment at The Moncton Hospital by making your gift today, with the enclosed pledge card and reply envelope. *Thank you!*



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Beth, Ashley's Mom—Words cannot express how thankful we are to them all as well as to the very generous donors to The Friends of The Moncton Hospital who make it possible to have a state-of-the-art hospital that allows Ashley to get her treatments in our own community.



Ashley and Moose.