

Nathaniel Jacob Tills

Hello everyone...thank you for coming to pay tribute and respect and to say good-bye to Nathaniel. My name is Darryl Tills. In case anyone doesn't know me, I'm Nathaniel's dad. I'm up here today to eulogize my son, Nathaniel Jacob Tills (Zeb), who went home to be with the Lord, Saturday, November 1, 2003...at around 5PM. He died from complications from the dreaded cancer, Leukemia. I want to take you all...through a journey of Nathaniel's short life, of 16 years, as seen through a father's eyes. Most of you, that aren't family, came into Nathaniel's life based on where he lived and where he went to school. As I go through this eulogy, I'll mention neighborhoods that we've lived in and some of the people that were in his life as they came in and out of it. I hope you won't be offended if I leave someone out. I don't mean to do that intentionally. I just pray I can get through this without breaking down. Please wait for me if I do.

113 Knox Ave. – West Seneca, New York

Nathaniel was #4 of 5 beautiful children that the Lord blessed Francine and I with. He was born May 26th, 1987. Nathaniel was the only one of our 5 children that was named Biblically. (Nathaniel / Jacob)

Nathaniel was a happy, “go-lucky” toddler. He was a child who loved to love. He was called the “lover-boy” by his Uncle Mike...and he loved showing it. Nathaniel was an easy child to care for. He wasn't one to fuss and carry on (like some of his brothers and sisters). I guess that's

what contributed to him becoming “his own man”, as he grew up. He looked at life without a worry in the world. He was very independent, and he was very laid-back. You could tell that when he spoke. He spoke much softer than my other kids.

Sometimes, Fran and I, would dress him up in some silly outfits, ...he didn't care. He just loved to be noticed. I think it was when we dressed him up in some farmers overalls one time, that his Uncle Jimmy gave him the nickname “Zeb”...Man, did that name stick...everyone called him Zeb...I was beginning to wonder if he'd forget his real name...hardly anyone called him Nathaniel or Nate, except his teachers at school or people at church...but one thing you NEVER called him, though, was Nathan. He never liked that name. I never knew why...

As a child growing up on Knox Ave., Nathaniel was always ran up to me when I came home from work, smiling...just that happy-to-see-you look in his eyes. That's one thing that many people remember about Zeb...is his smile...Many of you told me that.

While he was growing up with his cousins Shannon, Steven, and Adam (my brother Steve and Val's kids) and Joey and Justin (Fran's brother Joe and Patty's kids)...he always wanted to be around the birthday “person” to see what they got for presents. It seemed like in every birthday picture we ever took...there was Nathaniel...smiling away! He had the kind-of-smile that always made you glad he was around.

He loved to swim in the pool in our backyard. Knox Park was right off our backyard. He had a playground all to

his own...with all his friends there, all the time...swinging the swings, climbing, running...you name it. We had a pear tree in our yard, too...and a large lilac tree. He loved to climb trees. I remember a time the kids thought they'd be builders or something...or maybe they seen a Robinson Crusoe movie...and they took a hammer and started pounding nails in the branches while they were up in the tree. Wouldn't you know it...down came the hammer out of the tree...and where do you think it landed...right on Nathaniel's head...Man-o-man...blood everywhere....kids screaming..."Mommy, mommy, Nathaniel's bleeding all over the place." It was like the sky was falling! Imagine 4 screaming kids, running in the house, screaming screams of worry about their brother. Our dog, Midnight, barking up a storm. Nathaniel crying...tears and blood streaming down his face. Wow! Wow. As I look back, it just goes to show how much his brothers and sisters loved him and how close we were as a family. Anyway, Fran bandaged him up and he was back out romping...and we did take that hammer away...I remembered that story when I seen scar on his head, as he was losing his hair, from the chemotherapy.

He loved Rushford Lake. Jack, his grandfather (who we affectionately called pappy), who just passed away 2 weeks ago...purchased a strip of land...right off Rushford Lake. I can remember packing up the van for the weekend...loading up the kids...and driving there for many weekends during the summers, for some fun. Man, did we have fun! Making memories...enjoying each other...roughing it! No toilet!.....just an outhouse. A "stinky" outhouse. A VERY stinky outhouse! Pew! Funny, how you remember some things, isn't it? Anyway, Nathaniel loved to swim, go for boat rides, riding on the ski-jet and 3-wheeler, go fishing, sitting around the

campfire cooking marshmallows, sleeping in the tents or the back of the van. What a time! What a time! Thank you, Jack!

5280 Hardys Rd. – Gainesville, New York

As our family grew, we realized that we needed a bigger house. We decided to move to “the country” to try our hand at country living. Nathaniel was 9 years old, when we moved out of Knox Ave. We bought a 7 bedroom farm house...in “the sticks”. It was huge! Giant trees everywhere...land as far as the eye could see...we had an orchard on the property...it was nice. I installed a pool for the kids and we began to live as country-bumpkins. Life was different out there. Not a lot of people, like Knox Ave., but we grew even closer as a family. Every kid had their own room...Fran and I had visions of having a bed-n-breakfast as the kids grew older and left the nest.

He made lots of friends out there. Letchworth School was 2 miles away...what a great school! They loved Nathaniel there and Nathaniel loved them. He made some good friends out there...Vic, Derrick, Jenna. Good friends...

Nathaniel joined the town baseball team (Gainesville) and we’d travel from town-to-town playing baseball. It was like the Wyoming County town verses town baseball league where each town competed to be the champs of Wyoming County...like the World Series. We’d play Pike, Silver Springs, Bliss, Castile...it was cool. Nathaniel played outfield. He loved catching fly balls...and he had a pretty good arm, too.

Nathaniel liked playing baseball, but his real sports “love” was wrestling. He was a “scraper”. He was

“wirey” and strong. He won most of the time...if not all the time. The wrestling coaches really taught him a lot and they were glad he was on the team. I remember wrestling Nathaniel...Man, he was tough! He was tough. I’m not going to tell you who won...

Living in the country was a lot of work. Winters were incredibly harsh. We heated the house with a wood stove. I remember a time, we had an ice storm...it was a bad ice storm! We had 13 HUGE 80’ Maple Trees along the front of our property, and 40 other trees throughout...and that ice took down so many branches! It was incredible! I think it took us a month to clean it all up! We built fires all along the road side...DJ, Shaun, and myself worked the chain saws...Melissa, Nathaniel, and Andrea dragged all the branches to the fires...what a job...but we all worked together. We were quite the team.

I bought a snowmobile for us to ride around the property. That was a blast! It was so much fun. Zeb really loved zipping around those fields. Plowing into the snow drifts. And bikes! We lived at the top of a hill. I remember Nathaniel zipping down that hill to head for the General Store for a snack. He had to be tired coming back up that hill...but he never complained...he just did it all the time.

My mom and dad used to come out and give us a hand. They loved being with the grandchildren. It was kind of an inconvenience traveling so far, but it was great when they arrived. We had cook outs and campfires. Watching the sunsets in that BIG sky. My dad, Frank (who the kids affectionately called “papa”) really loved Zeb. I can remember Papa, sitting in the yard, with Nathaniel at his side...sitting, talking and watching those sunsets. They set fast in the country, you know. I’m sure they had many

grandfather-to-grandson conversations watching them together. Talking about whatever. Thank you, Dad.

47 Flohr Ave. – West Seneca, New York

The house in Gainesville was just becoming too much for me to handle. The business began to grow and the long drive back and forth everyday was killing my vehicle. So, we decided to move back to West Seneca. We all had a BIG bon-fire and burned just about every stick of furniture we had in the house. The kids loved it! The fire was HUGE. The furniture was pretty run down anyway and I used the promise to buy them all “new” furniture as a way of getting them to move back.

Well, we came back. DJ since moved back to Buffalo a year earlier and Shaun insisted on staying in Wyoming County because he was “in-love”. So, Melissa, Nathaniel, Andrea and I moved in with mom for a couple months till we could find a place.

We began to attend church here again. It was wonderful coming back here. I remember when I came into the sanctuary with the kids...everyone here came up to me and welcomed me back with open arms. I was smiling from ear-to-ear and I knew this is where God wanted us. I remember Nathaniel asked how come so many people know us and he didn't know them. I told him that this is where we all went to church before we moved... and they were just real glad to see us again.

Well, here we were. We found a place...4 bedroom house...on Flohr Ave. in West Seneca. It was there I received the nickname from Nathaniel, “Papa Dukes”. I

always wondered what it meant...I thought it was from a song he liked, but I found out it meant daddy. Anyway, I went and bought the furniture as I promised and began to settle in. It's funny, when you live in the country for 7 years and then come back...how different things were in comparison. Country living, when it came to raising kids was so much easier. They really didn't have too many places to go and you knew where they were. Now, I was running in 3 different directions...wondering where they were...who they were hanging with. Man, it was different. Nathaniel did make some good friends here, though. Nick, Corey, Kyle, and Ryan were always around. I know these young men built quite a friendship with my son. Thanks guys.

Anyway, Nathaniel...AND my other kids were exposed to a lot of things that weren't so prevalent out in the country. We didn't have cable TV in the country...drugs were there, but not as much ...and trouble was not something people wanted to cause, because your name would appear in the local papers...everybody knew your business when you got in trouble. In the city, that was different. And like most teenagers, Nathaniel began trying and doing things that would lead him down the wrong path in life. He began to try cigarettes and pot...that led him not to care about school all that much. Fran and I used to talk to him all the time about the importance of getting a good education...and to stay away from drugs...to pick your friends (don't let your friends pick you). It was hard. He was quite an independent boy. He had a lot of time on his hands when I was at work. Then it happened...he got in trouble with the law. It was a very difficult time for all the family. He didn't deserve what he got...sentence wise. And he didn't deserve to die either.

He was taken from me. I was powerless to stop it. The legal system really let him down. He never got the chance to face his accusers in a court of law. He was put in the Alden Juvenile Detention Facility for youthful offenders. Alden was a horrible place. He was only there for about a month. He didn't belong there. Fran and I visited him...it was a cold place with large fences and barbed wire. Our hearts sank every time we pulled up to the building. Every time we left, they stripped-searched him ...thinking that we would have smuggled something into him. We'd see them searching him through the window. It was very demeaning, both to Nathaniel and to us.

After a month, he was “placed” at a juvenile facility called Kidspace in Seneca County, New York, near the Finger Lakes for 1 year. Being “placed” tore my heart out and Fran's. But little did I know, God was beginning to work on Nathaniel's heart through all this. When he was at Alden, I found out he was reading The Bible and praying. I think he was beginning to see his need for Jesus Christ and was crying out to Him.

Kidspace – Seneca County, Romulus, New York

Nathaniel arrived at Kidspace in February of this year. He liked it much better than Alden. It was like a college campus. The people there were friendly, yet stern. His councilors required him to follow directions and abide by the rules. Once he learned what was expected of him, he began to make friends, both of the staff and the kids. Lasting friendships. The atmosphere there was structured, yet he always had things to do... There were no drugs, no smoking, no trouble to get into, unless you wanted it.

Fran and I would alternate weekend visits with Nathaniel. One of us would see him every Saturday...we'd bring his brothers and sisters along. At first, saying good-bye for the week was real hard. We'd cry when we had to leave. We knew he didn't belong there. It got easier as the months went by. We called him everyday just to tell him we loved him and to encourage him. We grew to like some of the councilors at Kidspeace and what they were doing for Nathaniel. Some of them really loved my son and love what they do for the kids. I remember saying to Nathaniel..."Take what they say to heart, son, otherwise they will see right through it." And "Remember what they talk to you about on Monday, because they will do something to test you on it on Thursday." I'm glad he listened to what things they and I said to him. I really felt like I was part of his maturing into a fine young man.

We had such fun together, when Nathaniel was at Kidspeace. At first, he wasn't allowed off-campus because he had to go through phases. So we played basketball...took walks...played foosball...pool. The only real contact he had with the outside world was that we could order-out food and have it delivered. You see, when you arrive at Kidspeace, you are considered phase 1...and you have to be phase 2 before you were allowed to leave the campus with his family. When he reached phase 2, it was a glorious Saturday. We were told to go and have fun by one of his councilors. The councilor didn't know that we only were supposed to gone 3 hours...I guess he forgot to tell us...or maybe he wasn't told himself...so we spent the whole day "away" from Kidspeace and Shaun was with us.

Anyway, Nathaniel, Shaun, and I were off. We didn't know the area too well, so we were "hunting" for things to do. A couple months earlier, my business joined a buying group for appliances and I made friends with BJ, the owner of Reisters Appliances in Auburn. So, I decided to stop in and ask him what we could do exciting in the area. I remember him telling me that he was a pilot. So when we went there, Nathaniel and Shaun thought we were just visiting one of my associates. I got BJ aside and asked him if he could arrange a flight for us....maybe in 2 weeks, when we came back to visit Nathaniel. BJ said "You want to go flying now?" My eyes lit up. I remember saying to the boys "Hey, you guys want to go fly in an airplane?" I remember Nathaniel's expression on his face and that ear-to-ear smile. He said "You've got to be kidding." Or something like that. Shaun was a little more apprehensive. He started asking BJ how long he was flying for, how many crashes he been in, and all kinds of other questions. BJ would answer... "I haven't been flying that long, I just got my pilots license a couple days ago." But he was just joking...BJ has been flying for years.

Well, we went to a small beautiful airport not far from there. BJ pulled out his plane from the hanger and Nathaniel walked up to it and touched it. It was his first time near such a craft. It was a single engine Cessna. Before long, we were off in the wild blue yonder flying over the Finger Lakes. Shaun and Nathaniel were holding hands. Shaun said that Nathaniel grabbed his hand on take-off, but I think it was the other way around. We were soaring all over the place. We all had headphones on and BJ was pointing out all the cool things below. We wanted to fly over Kidspace, so BJ took us there. I don't know how he knew where he was going (there are no

signs in the sky), but he got us there. We flew all around it and waved, but no one there knew what we were going to do...and neither did we. Anyway, we flew some more and looked at all the beauty of the Finger Lakes from a birds view. It was breath taking. We had such a great time.

As the weeks progressed, we went places and did so much together. It was such an opportunity to grow closer to my son with no distractions. We went shopping, rode go-carts, went to carnivals, play putt-putt, had ice-cream. It was grand! He also had the BIGGEST sound system at Kidspace. He loved his music and probably drove the staff crazy. Better them than me. Not really.

It was here, while at Kidspace, that Nathaniel turned his life around and over to God. I would ask him all the time about God and we had some very interesting conversations. He was good at saying his mind. Many times, I would think about what he said and come to a different conclusion about the matter. He taught me not to be so “extreme” on my thinking. He was quite the philosopher. I think I matured a lot as a parent while with him and learned to think like he thought. I remember, one time, when I bought new sneakers for myself...I said “Hey, son, how do you like my new “kicks?” He smiled and said he was proud of me that I was becoming more like him and talked some of the same talk. He always tried to get me to change my hairstyle. He said that I was “stuck in the 70’s.” He’d say “Dad, Elvis called...he wants his hair back.” What a clown.

Anyway, we had some serious talks too. A lot about God, changing his life, and looking toward the future. I told him about accepting Jesus Christ as his Savior and He

would show him the right ways to think about life. He had his Bible and told me he was reading it. I believe, as God's Word began to sink in, he was changing. As he would attend his group sessions...interact with his peers and friends...that "change" began to take hold of him. He became more helpful to the staff and really took-to-heart what he was going through and what he wanted to be in the future. He grew up and I was so proud of him. Nathaniel was always so respectful and a good witness for God to that change.

He was getting great marks in school. He was so proud of himself...and I of him. He had 90's on his report card! I am so thankful to God and to some of the close councilor/friends at Kidspeace for lots of reasons. The main one was to provide the friendship for Nathaniel to reflect and then have people like Mike, Dan, Tammy, Lee Ann, Doyle, Holly, Andy, Kara, Linwood, and Jillian and others to encourage him to strive for the best he could be.

As the months went by at Kidspeace, Nathaniel began to earn lots of respect from the councilor/friends there. They looked at him as a model peer and a role model for the other kids to be like. Some of the staff would become some of his truest friends. Some of them even knew that Nathaniel didn't belong there...he was just too good of a kid. Kids like RJ and Mike would become his best "buds". (or his "dog" as they say) They'd do all kinds of things together. They grew up together. Thank you, to Nathaniel's friends at Kidspeace, and RJ for all that you did with and for my son.

Strong Memorial Hospital – Rochester, New York

On the evening of August 28th, I got a phone call from Kara that Nathaniel was rushed into Strong Memorial Hospital. I remember just closing the store and standing outside in “disbelief and shock” that the doctors were looking at the possible diagnosis of Leukemia. To tell you the truth, I didn’t really know what Leukemia was. I thought it was a disease that “sickly” children got, because they were born with weaknesses. I had no idea that it was cancer of the blood.

Anyway, I jumped in my truck and called Fran and headed to the hospital. I would meet Fran in Batavia, because her father was just finishing up with his dialysis and we would go together. Both of us were so worried...so “in-the-dark”. How could this be? We asked each other.

We arrived at the hospital ER and there was Nathaniel...sitting there on his bed...so glad to see us. I had so many questions running through my mind. What is this Leukemia? Is it curable? Is he going to be OK? It seemed like an eternity waiting for the results. They were checking for Leukemia or mono-nucleuses. I was hoping it was mono...It came back Leukemia. I was devastated. Well, Nathaniel was checked into the hospital...into 4-1400 at Strongs. It was on the eve of the Labor Day holiday weekend and Fran and I waited for the doctor to come in and talk to us. In came Dr. Palace. He was a “doctor-looking-type” and was very intelligent. He also had a straightforward mannerism about himself, yet he was gentle and kind as he told us what Leukemia was and how they had to treat it with chemotherapy. So many more questions flooded my mind...I was so worried...so worried. I began to pray.

When the doctor left the room, I turned to Nathaniel and said “We’re gonna beat this thing, Zeb.” He just nodded. I knew he was scared.

Fran and I checked into a motel that night, not far from the Hospital. We didn’t sleep too well that night. We arrived back early in the morning on the next day. The nurses were already, busy at work on Zeb. They put in IV’s in his arms and gave him pills to take.

It was Tuesday, after Labor Day and the doctors were meeting now and discussing what kind of Leukemia he had and how they were going to treat it. There was 14 of them discussing Nathaniel. We sat there, in his room, next to his bed, and kept Nathaniel’s mind occupied as we waited for more information.

While the doctors were meeting, we met Eric Iglewski, the social worker at Strongs. He was such a kind man and immediately was impressed with Nathaniel, and Nathaniel with him. As he talked with us and Nathaniel, I knew that I’d see a lot of him in the days to come. They seemed to “hit-it-off” pretty good as friends. As the days went by, I would learn so much about this man. His kindness was so evident and his voice was so soothing every time he visited us, which was every day. I said to him one time that I never met a person, that I didn’t think, knew “not” how to yell or get angry. He was one of those kind of people. Later, I would come to find out that he had suffered a loss of a child not long ago. Little did I know of the common bond we would have.

Next, we met Margaret Hussong...Nathaniel’s nurse practioner. She would be the one to do Nathaniel’s bone

marrow biopsies and spinal taps. She was a real down-to-earth woman with lots of strength. You could tell she was the kind of person to get things done...and if it wasn't done, she was "gonna make heads roll." Nathaniel was kind of apprehensive about her bossiness, but we were sure glad she was on our team.

Then Dr. Palace came back to tell us the bad news. Nathaniel had Biphenotypic Leukemia. (ALL and AML) The worst combination. As he sat with us and told us about all the chemotherapy drugs and what their side effects were, I shuddered. I had my book out that they gave us that had all the chemotherapy drugs listed and their side effects and began circling all the ones he was going to be on for the first round. Fran and I kept a daily journal, too. Every drug was different...6 in total for the first round. My heart sank. The common one side-effect, and the least serious, was hair loss. Nathaniel said he didn't care about that...he kind of liked being bald anyway.

When all the kids, who were friends with Nathaniel at Kidspace, found out that Nathaniel had Leukemia and would lose his hair, they all shaved their heads in solidarity with their beloved friend. It was a wonderful gesture on their part and Nathaniel was so touched. They loved him very much because they looked up to him all the time. Nathaniel wanted his head shaved too, so Kara came in and cut it all off. Now, they were all one and going to fight this Leukemia together.

Well, I knew things were serious. Things were bad. As soon as I had the information, it was time to share it with my family. My mother was devastated. I can still remember her crying over the phone. My brothers were

so grief stricken. Steve cried, Mike cried. Nathaniel's brothers and sisters were so confused. I called the church right away. Pastor and Janice came up immediately. They came 3 times a week to visit him. They called the church to prayer. Nathaniel was put on our prayer chain and prayer chains of other churches. The word began to spread.

That Sunday, I made the trek into West Seneca to attend church. I sat in the back and Pastor called me up to tell the congregation. I had no idea why he had me do that...but I know now. It was one of the hardest things I ever had to do...to tell everyone about my son. I wept from this very pulpit, as I let them know. I heard the sobs from people out there. After service, people were so supportive. They told me how much they will be praying for Nathaniel. One person, shook my hand, and left a 100 bill in it. I was so moved. Thank you, Winchester Community Church for all you did.

My family gave me a leave of absence from work and my kids all mobilized at my house in Clarence and leaned on each other for support. Fran and I were then put up at the Ronald McDonald House in Rochester. What a great place, Ronald McDonald House is. The people there were so nice. We had a nice room and the food there was all free. All we had to do was clean up after ourselves. People came from different organizations and churches, cooked and donated food. Pizzerias donated pizzas. Families that formally stayed at Ronald McDonald House came and cooked. Some as far away as Michigan. We met and prayed with so many people there. So many people whose children were sick...premature babies...children with serious health problems. We ministered to all. As I ministered, I came to learn that some parents were so

mad at God for what their children were going through. I told them that God didn't do this to their child. It was the "evil" one who did this. Many parents turned to The Lord for forgiveness and realized that God is a God of love. He hurts with us...he wants us to depend on Him for everything, including taking care of our children.

At Ronald McDonald House, there was even a computer there. For people who know me, I like the internet. There is so much information there...some good, some bad...and I made a lot of friends out there in cyberspace. There is one friend in particular. Jeannie Casselinova, who really loves God and pro-life causes. We met online debating those issues. I told her about Nathaniel and the Leukemia and she went into action. She notified all our mutual friends...people I have never met...and opened up "Nathaniel's Prayer Room" in Yahoo on September 4th. Immediately, the prayers began flooding in...from all over the world. So many people prayed and put Nathaniel on their prayer chains in their churches. I was so confident that with all these people praying for my son, that he would jump right out of bed...healed. Well, God didn't heal him...at least here on Earth...but God chose to heal Nathaniel in Heaven. I printed all of them up and they were at the funeral home, if anyone saw them. Marlene, Diane and Jim, Mike and Jill, Aunt Donna and Uncle Wally, Wayne, just to name a chosen few...Thank you for all your prayers. And thank you, Ronald McDonald House for all your hospitality.

While in 4-1400, Nathaniel was having quite an effect on the staff there. He was so upbeat and cooperative. They fell in love with him there. He didn't like needles though. He always had to "syke" himself up for a needle. Sometimes it took a half an hour before the nurses could

stick it into him. I was so grateful that the nurses, who knelt there, took the time to wait till he was ready. One nurse in particular, was Annie. She was so full of energy...always bouncing around. She would be at his beck-and-call. She played chess with him...she beat him, but Nathaniel's excuse was that he was on pain medication and he let her win.

Nathaniel received lots of visits from friends...Vic, Ryan, Jenna, his cousin Kelly...to name a few. Fran and I were comforted at seeing these people. The Kidspace councilor/friends were great too. They stayed every night with him, every night...Not because they had to, but because they wanted to. They talked, played video games, and watched movies. The nurses and the doctors all loved him. Even the transport people and people who came in to clean his room had a good time with him. His sense of humor was so fun.

While he was going through his first round, we were allowed to leave the hospital and go on outings, but he had to wear a mask and avoid crowds of people. We had a great time playing putt-putt, going to restaurants, and Chucky-Cheese. Nathaniel had to be careful of his activities, because he was on chemo. Well, the chemotherapy treatments continued and he was done with his first round, after about 10 days. We watched as his white-blood-cell count became lower and lower. Fran and I were becoming concerned that he would catch something...like a cold...and he would be unable to fight it because his immune system was so compromised. We made it a point to wash our hands every time we entered his room. And so did everyone else.

Next, we met Dr. Barbara Assylm. She was the foremost expert on Leukemia at Strongs. She was wonderful. She monitored his progress very carefully and always tried to answer all our questions. She had him on every drug and anti-biotic imaginable to help my son.

Dr. Palace had mentioned that Nathaniel would probably need a bone marrow transplant, preferably from one of his brothers or sisters. So, Margaret orchestrated the kids to come in to be blood tested for a possible match...the boys first...then the girls. None of them matched. Our hearts were shattered. Nathaniel cried. Margaret was so good...she said that it would be ok..."when we got to the time when he needed a bone-marrow transplant" she said, "we could go to the register and we will find one."

Well, his second round began. This was a 5-day regimen of 4 different drugs. I looked them all up. These had side effects similar to the others...again the hair loss. But Nathaniel hadn't lost any hair yet from his first round! Dr. Palace, would was bald, used to joke with Nathaniel about doing this battle with Leukemia in his own way. I guess he was a little jealous of Nathaniel's hair. I was still very worried, through the jokes. I was waiting to see what side-effects were going to happen. Little did I know what roller-coaster ride, Fran and I would be on, in just a few days.

PICU

Then it happened. One day, I noticed something very different in his eyes. He was not right. I could see it. He had the look of "help me" in his eyes. Nathaniel tried to get up and go to the bathroom. He couldn't get up. His left side became totally immobile. He could feel our touch,

but couldn't move his arm or his leg. Fran gave him a urinal in his left hand, but he just dropped it...he couldn't hold it. He was determined to go to the bathroom, so he stood up and fell right to the floor. The nurses rushed in and got him into bed...they then rushed him down to 4-1200 (PICU) Pediatric Intensive Care Unit for immediate care. They gave him paralytic drugs and intubated him with a breathing tube down his throat. I remember his last words as they were rushing to intubate him...Fran was hovering over his head and rubbing his face and he said "Mommy No"...That was the last words I would ever heard him speak. He was now "out" from the morphine and paralytics.

When he came off the paralytics, he was able to respond, kinda, but he was very uncomfortable with the tube sticking down his throat. His right hand was still working, so I put a pen in it and held paper under it as he wrote. Some were scribbles, but it was probably me shaking as I held the paper. Fran was caressing his head. You know what he wrote? "Mom, stop rubbing my head!" We both were relieved that he was ok. However, he was so uncomfortable with his breathing tube sticking down his throat that they had to sedate him quite a bit to keep his blood pressure down. He never communicated in writing anymore...but he did squeeze our hands in days to come.

The next day, we came into his room in PICU. Dr. Caserta was there. She was the Infectious Disease Doctor. I could tell by her facial expressions that things were not good. She told us that Nathaniel had possible fungal infections and they were testing to see which one it was. It was heart wrenching when she said "I'm sorry". I felt so helpless. Dr. Assyln and Margaret came in and gave us an

explanation of what fungal infections were and what they were going to test for. They said that he had the fungus long before he arrived at the hospital... They told us that they were doing all they could with anti-fungal medicines and treatments... He was hooked up to a respirator and all these machines. He had IV's coming out of his arms and feet. It was horrible to watch. They had to suction his tube all the time from his lungs. They wanted him to cough the stuff out...and he did. He always cooperated.

The ICU doctors were doing all they could to make him comfortable...they were there every time we needed them. He had round-the-clock nursing...a nurse stationed right outside his door, only for him. The doctors and nurses in PICU were wonderful, especially Loran. She and the others were so gentle and caring with Nathaniel. I can tell you, they really love what they do. Anyway, Nathaniel was now stable.

At Ronald McDonald House, I scoured the internet looking for something to help my son. My brother Mike and Aunt Jill also looked. They sent links to the doctors at the hospital for possible medicines to fight these fungus. I posted "URGENT PRAYER" needed for Nathaniel in his prayer room. People began opening conference rooms in Yahoo to pray verbally over their computer mics to be heard on people's speakers in Prayer Vigils for Nathaniel.

People began fasting. I fasted for 19 days without any food. I told no-one, as Jesus said to do. People were becoming concerned about my well-being. I said God will sustain me...and He did. I thank Jesus for that. My prayer life will never be the same. Fran and I read Scripture every night before going to bed and then we prayed. Sometimes, I fell asleep praying.

I also called various churches that I had friends at. The Church at Clarence, where I was baptized...churches in Rochester...Mike's church, Marlene's church...some of their pastors came and prayed over my son and so did their members. I met many believers. One person in particular, was an elevator mechanic.... Mike Murphy, who worked at Strongs. Sharon, one of my employees called him and we met outside of Strongs the next day. He took me up into the elevator motor room and there we prayed and prayed. The Lord gave this man such a burden for Nathaniel and he came almost everyday to lay hands on and pray for my son. Sharon came sometimes too. I thank God for all of His obedient servants that He did send...because that's how I knew that God was with me through all this...was through them.

The next day around 4 PM, Margaret, urgently came in his room after reading some blood results and asked us if "anyone" in our families or the people we knew from "anywhere", had the same blood type as Nathaniel. Nathaniel needed white blood cells immediately! His white-blood-cells were totally suppressed and the fungus was taking over. The Red Cross in Rochester was notified and they mobilized every B+ blood giver in Rochester to come in and give white-blood-cells for Nathaniel. Many came. Fran and I called our families...everyone! And also the church. Janice called everyone she could think of and asked if anyone in the congregation had B+ blood and would be willing to donate their white blood cells. So many came forward...so many....thank you all!

However, the doctors preferred family members to donate, because of the drug they had to be injected with to increase their counts. Margaret orchestrated to have

all my kids blood-typed. Of all of my children, DJ was the only B+ blood type...Thank God we had a match!...next was the rest of the family. Steve's kids were next. Shannon, Steven, and Adam all rushed over to the hospital in Rochester. Their blood was tested. None were a match...I looked at the faces those kids when they found out they weren't a match. They felt so bad. As the rest of the family got word, cousins Sue and Kelly from my family and Uncle Mark from Fran's family all said that they were B+ blood type and all of them stepped forward to help. The procedure to donate white blood cells had some risks attached to the donors. It took 2-4 hours being hooked up to a machine to harvest them and they had to be injected with a drug the night before to elevate their white blood cell count. I got to say that they all were aware of the risks and they all still did it! DJ, because he was Nathaniel's brother was obviously the best donor. He donated 4 times within 2 weeks. Mark, Sue, and Kelly...donated once each. DJ stayed with us at Ronald McDonald House so he could be available to donate readily and the others drove to Rochester and were scheduled to donate every 4 days. I can remember what DJ said to me. He said "Dad, that's my brother and I'll do whatever I have to, to save his life." Thank you, son. You are a good man and I'm proud of you. Mark, Sue, and Kelly also said they were so glad to help and that they loved us and were thinking about and praying for Nathaniel. I was so moved by what our families did for Nathaniel and how they came together to help. I will never forget. I thank you all...for trying, and doing what you did.

Well, he got their concentrated white-blood-cells and those of many other donors from Rochester who were less concentrated. He also got red-blood-cells and platelets

too. So much went to that kid. So much....He swelled up. His legs, arms, hands and feet became very large. Stretch marks appeared on his stomach. They had to give him diuretics to bring down the fluids in his body.

Then, while during his receiving his nightly transfusions, the doctors got the word that Mark had become ill from the side-effects of the drug he was being injected with. He was scheduled to give a donation that day, so Nathaniel would get his cells that night. The doctors were not going to allow Mark to give, if he was sick, so Nathaniel was left on his own to see if his bone marrow could make them by itself. The next day's results came back...positive for white blood cells! Nathaniel was beginning to make them on his own! We were elated! We watched everyday as the counts went up and up. We became his cheerleaders. All the donors were so happy too. They "jump-started" his marrow and he was now doing it on his own! They felt so good when they got that news and we felt relieved.

Several times, Nathaniel tried to communicate, even though he was partially in a coma. I would get close to his ear and ask him to squeeze my hand with his right hand...the good one. When he did, I would rub his head and tell him, I loved him...that he was safe...to keep fighting and that I was so proud of him...how courageous he was...and to remember what we talked about concerning The Lord Jesus and his Salvation. I read to him everyday while in PICU. Our Daily Bread devotions, The Bible, and a chapter-by-chapter Christian life book called The Purpose Driven Life. I also read books that people sent to Nathaniel. The nurses from 4-1400 came and visited Nathaniel regularly at 4-1200 and they brought his HUGE stereo into his room. I set up the

headphones and played music for him. He liked Michael W. Smith and Don Francisco, so I played the CD's I had.

One night, Nathaniel began to have difficulty breathing. It sounded so loud and wet. They doctors ordered a bronchoscopy to see what was happening. This is when they look down your throat with an endoscope. The surgeon came in Nathaniel's room and performed it right there. We waited in the waiting room. The next thing we knew, Nathaniel was being rushed down to surgery. The doctors said that the fungal infections ate a hole in his throat between his windpipe and his esophagus. They had to install a stint or hollow tube in his esophagus so he could breath, to save his life. We were both devastated, but still hopeful. Nathaniel was stable again. Praise God.

During this time, we had sorrow upon sorrow. 2 weeks ago, Francine's Dad, Nathaniel's grandfather, Jack, past away. I felt so bad and so much pain for Fran. She had been so strong through all this with Nathaniel and showed such a tender mother's heart with her son...and now her dear father, who lived with her and Bruno, was gone. It was devastating to her. She wept for her dad so bitterly. She wanted to be there when he died, but it happened so suddenly and right when Nathaniel was the most critical. Bruno was so nurturing to Fran. He really ministered and helped her. He loves her very much and you could see that when he was with her...consoling her about Jack at his funeral. Thank you, Bruno...for all you are and all that you did.

Fran came back to the hospital as soon as she was able. Shaun, Nathaniel's brother, moved in with us at Ronald McDonald House, so he could be close to his brother. We

decided not to talk about Jack in front of Nathaniel in case he could hear us. So there we were again, praying for and helping our son. We held hands and prayed over Nathaniel every day and night, giving thanks, confessing our sins and asked God to heal Nathaniel.

Then we had the meeting with all the doctors. Pastor and Janice were there. The doctors spoke so solemnly. They went through all what Nathaniel was going through and all the results of the tests. They said the prognosis was very bleak and very bad. They wanted to take him off of the paralytic medication he was on so we could have some quality time together. I didn't know what to say. Fran was weeping and it felt like everyone around that table was staring at us as we cried. A couple of the doctors and nurses also cried. Pastor asked if he could pray. His prayer was so loving and so comforting to everyone in that room. We just knew The Holy Spirit was ministering to us all at that table. We were left with Pastor and Janice, as they ministered to us alone.

Well, I refused to give up hope. I prayed all the more fervently. I sent out URGENT PRAYER requests in Nathaniel's Prayer Room and e-mails and the prayers flooded in. I called people and asked them to pray.

During the last 10 days, Nathaniel seemed like he was getting better. There were no fevers, he had uneventful nights and things seemed to be improving. We were thinking he was getting better. We looked at every chest X-ray that was taken. Even the doctors said that he seemed very stable. They wanted to perform some tests on him to see about the Leukemia and if it was in remission. We agreed to have them do a bone marrow biopsy to see where we were with that. We prayed and

cursed Leukemia, in Jesus Name. Others did the same. The results came back...in remission! They also did a CT scan and the fungal masses weren't any bigger. We were so joyful...so thankful. I called everyone that night so they could share in our joy. Nathaniel's eyes were open too. Shaun even said to us that he kissed him and Nathaniel kissed him back. I was so glad that Nathaniel and Shaun had that interaction that day. For the first time, in a long time we all had a good nights sleep.

We were wondering aloud, as we drove to the hospital the next morning, if the doctors were going to say something to send us on that roller coaster again...and they did. We went into the room with the table again. The PICU doctors were all there. They were very concerned. After all was said, they said that they thought that the fungus was winning the battle and that they were powerless to stop it. My heart sank again. Fran sat there silently. We then left the room this time and left the doctors at the table. I had such an overwhelming feeling of helplessness, but I had to do something. I told Fran that I was going over to Ronald McDonald House to search the internet again for something to stop this fungus. I sat at that computer for hours, e-mailing every infectious disease website on the net...everywhere in the world. I returned to the hospital, exhausted...to pick up an exhausted Fran and bring her back so we could eat and we waited for some replies from the e-mails.

As we waited, the couple whose child was in the next room to Nathaniel came back to the house. In passing, he said that the nurses were discussing blood in his urine. Alarmed, we rushed on over to the hospital. It was about 11PM. We never had to deal with blood in his urine before. When we arrived, the nurses had things under

control and the doctors said that his kidneys were ok...that is was probably a rupture of a small blood vessel near his catheter. So, we went back to Ronald McDonald House.

The next morning, we went over to the hospital early. Little did we know, that this was going to be Nathaniel's last day on this Earth. When we arrived we seen that the blood in his urine had cleared up. We were thankful. We held hands and prayed over our son. I noticed something different, though, about his hands. They were very hot. I asked the nurses if he had a fever. They took his temp and he was normal. His heart rate was elevated too and I wanted the doctors to give him more sedation to bring it down. They doubled it...then tripled it. It still wouldn't come down. All day they tried. I just kept whispering in his ears that everything was ok and not to be scared. "Remember The Lord", I said. I put some Praise and Worship music on and put the earphones on his head. I turned it up a little, in case the morphine dulled his hearing. Michael W. Smith was playing in his ears. Then...while I was standing at the foot of his bed and Fran was at his side, while a nurse suctioned his throat and mouth, he left us. It was an experience I never ever want to re-live. All the doctors and nurses rushed in to try to save him. I rubbed his chest and held his hand as an angel took him home to be with The Lord.

We wept and wept. It was so sad. Nathaniel fought and fought, but he couldn't overcome. We held his hands as the monitors showed us he was gone. Thank God, Shaun wasn't in the room with us. He was outside the hospital and when I found him, I told him Nathaniel was gone. He fell to the ground, sobbing. We took him up to see his brother...Pastor and Janice came, with my mom. Shaun

threw himself on his brother's chest and told him he loved him and wept. It was so touching to see. Shaun really loved Nathaniel.

And by all you folks being here today, I can see you loved him too. So many tears and sobbing took place over the past couple days...and it's ok to mourn...it's ok to cry...and it's good to remember. If you really look at life in it's perspective...We come into this world with nothing...and we leave this world taking nothing. So what is the purpose of us being here? When you hold the miracle of life in your arms, as a new born babe...you realize...that all we are is created beings...and that there has to be a Creator. My hope and prayer is that life will grow from death. And that we all realize that we are created to be like Christ. It is hard to fathom what that means. We aren't like Him. We are sinners...He was sinless. How can we be sinless? We can't. But we can try. The ONLY way we can do this is to learn of Him and be like Him. If you don't know Jesus...my Jesus...Nathaniel's Jesus, please listen to what Pastor Dalbo will say to you.

Nathaniel IS in a better place than we. Right now, he is with His Lord.

Everyone here, will get a "turn" at that coffin, someday. Everyone, will taste death. Unless the Lord Jesus Christ returns and takes His Followers away before the Great Tribulation, as it is written in Scripture...we will all "walk through the valley of the shadow of death".

I want to tell you something.....God KNEW that Nathaniel was going to get Leukemia! We didn't know it, but God did. And God also KNEW that he was going to die from it! He KNEW that, too. But my loving, compassionate God "orchestrated" a chain of events that led to Nathaniel's Salvation. God would cause, through these events, to have Nathaniel seek Him...to pray to Him...and to become "Born-Again". Little did I know what God was doing...but I know now what He did. Take the journey with me, as I look back 3 ½ years ago when we moved back to West Seneca.