





# #Sierra strong

To an outsider, the room seems empty and quiet when, in fact, it is filled with tangible tension, anxiety, and fear. The doctor walks into a room, holding his clipboard, and utters a phrase no parent wants to hear.

"Your daughter has cancer."

There's a split second of silence before tears start welling in their eyes, and they immediately break down. Only the slightest bit of hope sits in a small corner of the room. However, for *Sierra Carrasco* (17), this hope lives within her as she struggles with Burkitt Lymphoma.

"The hope that someday it's going to get better (gives me strength everyday)," Carrasco said. "There's days where I feel like I know that I'm going to be a doctor, and I'm gonna get to help people. It just gives me hope for the future."

Sierra was diagnosed right before Christmas vacation, the week of semester exams. Burkitt Lymphoma is a cancer of the lymphatic system and is one of the fastest growing lymphomas. Evidence of the disease was found under her underarm and was already at stage three.

The doctors didn't think it would be cancer," Carrasco said. "They figured it was cat scratch fever. After I found out, though, I was more angry because it was like 'I'm gonna lose my hair and I'm gonna be sick all the time.' I just felt like a burden in some way."

The doctors administered the first round of chemotherapy immediately after the cancer was detected. Since then, she has undergone five rounds of treatments and seven spinal taps.

"Sierra is very strong and her outlook is that she manages to smile through the pain," Sierra's father, Eli Carrasco, said. "She

doesn't complain and it makes it easier on us to see her smile through it."

This "trial and tribulation" has taught Eli Carrasco so much more about himself, his daughter, and even their faith that they had ever known before. He feels as though this is one of God's "major tests".

"If it wasn't for me depending on Christ and the strength that he gives me and Sierra, I don't know how anybody would make it through this kind of trial," Eli said. "I've never known a strong person that hasn't gone through some kind of trial."

The entire experience overall has taught Sierra how to overcome any obstacle that has or ever will cross her path. She continues to learn more and more about herself inside and out with each new day.

"Now I realize that I took a lot of things for granted like going to school or going outside on sunny days," Carrasco said.

"I regret a lot of things now. Although, I reached out to a lot of people."

Sierra has been in contact with others facing her struggle with cancer through Facebook pages and other social media sites that host online groups.

"Even though you feel alone in this, there are other people out there and it just takes talking to somebody," Carrasco said. "A lot of people with cancer tend to hide things because they feel like no one understands, but it just takes talking and communicating."

There is one very important lesson to Sierra that she has learned through all of this.

"There's always a brighter side to it, even though it may seem like it's all darkness," Carrasco said. "Anything that gives you hope or gives you happiness, cling on to that."

*Story By:* Katie Henderson

*Photo By:* Courtesy Photo



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