

## HAPPY MOTHER'S

## Supermom to a Supergirl

By Amanda Mansfield Press Reporter

It's truly amazing how your life can dramatically change on a dime. What's even more amazing is the resilience and adaptability of people, especially moms, during times of great uncertainty.

March 9 is a day that Renee LaFleur will never forget. Just two months before Mother's Day, she knew something wasn't right with her only child, Eleanor. Renee's "mama-spidey sense" was tingling, as she put it, and she acted on it. "Something just wasn't right," she

Excessive bruising over a three-week period of time prompted Renee to take eight-year-old Eleanor, proudly named after Eleanor Roosevelt, to her pediatrician. March 9 was the day the blood work came back. "The results of those tests rocked our world," Renee shared.

Eleanor's results showed low platelets, and nearly nonexistent white blood cells. That night, Renee and her husband Ricky packed up and left for St. Jude's. The experts at St. Jude's determined at the time that Eleanor was experiencing bone marrow failure, causing her to not produce any blood cells.

They were told the most likely diagnosis was aplastic anemia. And, sure enough, after several tests, aplastic anemia was and is the culprit of Eleanor's struggles.

"It was as if someone shook the snow globe of my life. I saw bits of my past, present and future floating and swirling around me."

Overtaken by anxiety, fear and grief, Renee did all she could do, as a mom. She figured it out. With the help of her husband, family and the friends she refers to as her found family, she uncovered the courage she needed to be confident in navigating her daughter's condition and the treatments she will need.

Bone marrow biopsies, platelet and red blood cell transfusions, skin biopsies, immunosuppressive thera-

py (IST), intermingled with a lot of questions in addition to some game playing and a trip to the zoo, have been some of the things keeping Eleanor busy. Eleanor is very aware of her diagnosis, and the staff at St. Jude's is very impressed with her knowledge and understanding at such a young age. I'm sure Supermom Renee, as well as Superdad Ricky, have something to do with that, though. Hiding information from their daughter just isn't the way they have ever raised her. So, it's only natural that Eleanor would be involved in her diagnosis, every step of the way. "We tell her everything that's going on, so she understands what the bone marrow does and why she had to have a port put in, things like that. We also give her choices. She's very curious and feels comfortable asking questions," Renee said of Eleanor.

As far as the prognosis, Renee says, "I know this will be a long process with treatments and monitoring for a year or more including setbacks, frustrations, disappointments and scares along the way.'

Just as Renee, Eleanor and family were beginning to fall into a rhythm, managing the situation, 15 days into their journey, Renee found herself holding her breath as she watched the number on Eleanor's thermometer rise to 99.6, after she complained of being hot. She knew she had to stay calm for Eleanor, and she did. Getting ready for bed, she checked again, 99.1. She questioned, "Is it really going down, or will it rise again in the night?" A few minutes later, she checked again, and it was still going down, so that crisis had been averted.

But it wouldn't be the last scare. Renee is constantly having to monitor Eleanor's health, including her temperature and energy levels, because should she get an infection (which has already occurred twice since diagnosis), it warrants an immediate trip to St. Jude's.

Throughout the last two months. Renee has been a warrior, almost as much of a warrior as Eleanor her-

But, Renee has some advice for moms who might find themselves in similar situations, as the waiting for a diagnosis and treatment plan - is the hardest "Surround yourself with helpers," she says. "If you are a helper, other helpers find you; the people who have offered support has been overwhelming.'

Renee underscores this with, "Family is EVERY-THING!" She says she feels the force of a hundreds family members behind her every day.

Also, Renee says, "Don't be afraid to ask questions, and if something doesn't feel right with your child, act on it. You aren't overreacting; don't second guess yourself."

Finally, Renee advises to count your blessings. Most days. Eleanor doesn't feel sick, and she's her regular lively, active self. Both Renee and Ricky have flexible careers with supportive coworkers, so this has been a plus. Eleanor's third-grade teacher and the school, as a whole, have also been very supportive.

While she tries to stay positive, Renee admits it's not easy. "I share pictures of Eleanor smiling and playing games in the hospital rooms. But this is only part of our experience. There are no photos of me holding her hand while she sleeps or Ricky walking her and the IV to the bathroom at 3 a.m. or the tears, or talking her through pain," she says.

As far as negative thoughts, "I find ways to distract myself," she says. "On the drive to St. Jude's, I listen to audio books to keep my mind occupied. I watch a reality TV show about subsistence living in Alaska as a mental escape. I also try to focus on the positive, which is hard to do in the waiting, quiet mo-

Renee, is in our eyes, a Supermom, and we want to celebrate her and all other mom out there being Supermom for their Superkids this Mother's Day.



After Eleanor's platelet transfusion, she was feeling well. So, Renee and Ricky took her to the zoo. The red pandas were her favorite.



Since Eleanor is not able to attend school, her grandma Debbie has been staying with her while Renee and Ricky work. Eleanor is learning to crochét on a rainy day.









