

The little boy with the Major League heart

When you love someone, they inspire and move you. That's what Stacey Sutter learned when her young stepson, Cal, was diagnosed with leukemia. And why she and her husband will never stop sharing the kindness Cal always believed in . . .

Her whole body trembling, Stacey Sutter rushed down the hospital corridor to the room where her 12-year-old stepson had been admitted after being diagnosed with aggressive leukemia.

What do you say to a child who's about to begin fighting for his life? Stacey wondered.

But, seeing the worry in her eyes, sweet Cal—Cal, who loved baseball more than anything; Cal, who Stacey loved like her own—said, "Don't worry. I am *not* going to die. I'm going to get well and be a professional ballplayer someday, you'll see."

Let that be true, Stacey thought. Because how would we go on without you?

Little did she realize, Cal would show them the way . . .

A few years earlier, it was in Chuck E. Cheese of all places that the Chicago-area single mom of two bumped into Tom, a divorced dad of three. They began dating and, in time, found themselves blending what naturally felt like one big, happy family.

"Let's make a movie, everybody!" Tom's oldest, 11-year-old Cal, would shout, and all the kids would ham it up, Cal behind the camera.

But it was on the baseball diamond that Cal—named for Major League "Iron Man" Cal Ripken, Jr., who holds the record for most consecutive games ever played—truly shone. An MVP for his team, the Angels, Cal even made the All-Stars in his league!

But soon after, Stacey's cellphone rang. She hardly recognized Tom's voice, it was so choked with fear as he said that his ex-wife had called with terrible news: "Cal might have cancer!"

The bravest boy

Cal had been sick, with strep throat and swollen glands—and now blood work revealed he had acute myelogenous leukemia. He must be so scared! Stacey worried. Yet when she arrived at the hospital, Cal comforted her.

Cal's first rounds of chemo only put him into remission for a month, and he hardly got out of the hospital. With four kids and a new baby on the way, things at home were chaos, but Stacey urged Tom, "Go be with Cal."

There, Cal and his dad watched White Sox games. When Cal was feeling up to it, they'd practice his pitch with a Nerf ball. But even when he was too weak to get out of bed, "Cal never stops asking how the other kids on the ward are feeling," Tom reported.

He has such a big heart! Stacey marveled.

Soon after, on the very day Stacey gave birth to her and Tom's new daughter, Lexie, Cal underwent a stem cell transplant.

Please let Cal be given life today, too! Stacey wept.

In weeks to come, Cal faced the bone-crushing pain and weariness like an Iron Man himself. Still, tests

showed the transplant wasn't the miracle they needed.

Does anyone know anyone who can help Cal? Tom e-mailed a desperate plea, and Stacey breathed a sigh of relief when a reply led to what seemed like hope: an experimental double umbilical cord stem cell transplant. But 30 days later, Cal's cancer was back. Again.

"I'd like to go home," Cal said. No fear. No tears. Thirteen days later, he was gone.

Forever their angel

Stacey's heart felt shattered. But I have to go on, she knew. For Tom. For our family.

Somehow, she got their family back into the swing of homework, play dates and sports practices. And in the following months, as Tom confided, "I want to do something to honor Cal's memory," they created Cal's All-Star Angel Foundation (CalsAngels.org), an organization to provide financial assistance and grant wishes for children with cancer.



"Helping other kids [like Will, inset] fills our hearts with warmth and joy—just like Cal!" says Stacey with Tom and their family.



Did you know?
At MyWellWisher.com, you can type in your name, then toss a (virtual) coin in the fountain, make a wish and hope it comes true!

For the 14 months that Cal had fought his battle, Tom's bosses never once docked him for missing work. But other parents weren't so lucky. So he had an idea: "Let's raise money to help families like ours," he suggested.

Soon after, with the help of family and friends, they held a benefit that raised \$70,000—enough to write rent checks and buy groceries and prescriptions for those struggling through their children's treatments!

Yet what touched Stacey and Tom most was putting smiles on the young patients' faces. Like 16-year-old Will, to whom Tom delivered a laptop so that he could play games and keep up with friends as he underwent chemo. Like Abigail, two, to whom Stacey brought a play kitchen so that she could bake pretend cookies like little girls should. And 10-year-old Taylor, who wished for a Build-a-Bear party.

"Thanks to Cal," her mom cried, "Taylor was able to have a day as a normal kid!"

And with every good deed—every baseball game ticket, every PlayStation, every bill paid—Stacey could tell: It's helping. Helping families who have too much on their plates breathe easier. Helping children forget about their pain for a while. And helping their own hearts heal, too. In three years, Cal's All-Star Angels has raised \$350,000 and made wishes come true for 80 children with leukemia or lymphoma! Their latest project? Building a playroom at the hospital where Cal was treated.

"Cal was a kid who really cared about others," Tom says. "So I know what we're doing would've made him smile."

"I'm thankful every day that Cal was part of my life," Stacey adds, smiling herself. "Cal was the glue that held our family together. Now I marvel that he's not just *our* All-Star but an angel for so many others!"

—Andrea Florczak

How you can fight leukemia

You don't have to be a doctor or scientist or even make a cash donation to make a difference! You can help save lives by:

1 Getting fit!

All across the country, you'll find "Make Cures Happen" walks, marathons, soccer and softball games that let you have fun, get in shape and raise funds! For a list of events, go to Leukemia-Lymphoma.org.

2 Searching the Web!

Make GoodSearch.com your homepage and choose "Leukemia & Lymphoma Society" as your favorite charity. Every time you do a search, money will be donated to the cause!

3 Showing your support!

Orange is the official color of leukemia awareness. Find orange-colored items, including "Say It, Fight It, Cure It" wristbands (sold in bulk for less than \$1 each) to wear and share at ChooseHope.com!

