

Colton's Story

Astonishing! That is the only word that comes close to describing Colton and his recent triumphs. He is thirteen and in eighth grade. His bipolar diagnosis came in second grade age at 7. He has been hospitalized multiple times for repeated infections, dehydration and respiratory problems. In third grade, when his bipolar disorder was at it's worst; he was hospitalized with mononucleosis and missed 10 weeks of school. Colton has been described as compliant, well behaved and a joy to have in class and has received numerous conduct awards. What teachers often fail to realize is that underlying depression and anxiety prevented him from passing tests, participating in social events and competitive activities-- except for baseball. In baseball, he shines. Even though he is the shortest one in eighth grade, the other team backs up when he comes to bat and he can pitch a no hitter because as he says, "it"s just me and the ball out there."

Last year Colton played trumpet in band. What a disaster! He was too anxious to play in class, even to tune his instrument, and he definitely couldn't practice because someone might hear. The band director was rigid and unrelenting. Amazingly, Colton took it upon himself to go to the counselor's office and change his schedule and joined the cross-country team. As with most teenagers, I couldn't get him to walk to the mailbox; I certainly didn't think he would ever run 2 miles.

Colton qualified for the first district meet. I was so proud, but I had to contain my excitement, as I often do. At the meet there were buses from schools 50 miles away. The smell of popcorn and cotton candy added to the excitement. As the runners made the first pass our family stood at the back of the crowd and inconspicuously waved. When the runners came out of the woods for the second time, everyone was cheering and dads were encouraging their sons to beat their best times. I waited, but Colton never came. As I stood at the edge of the woods the coaches began picking up equipment. I waited. Finally, they picked up the traffic barricades and still I waited. When the other teams left for their buses, I hurried to the finish line; maybe I had missed him. Team members told me that Colton had fallen and hurt his knee. Immediately, coaches and trainers raced into the woods, but no Colton. Eventually, after everyone was gone, he limped out of the dressing room with scrapes and bruises on his leg. I was in tears; my son had just competed outside of his comfort zone.

Colton didn't qualify for the next two meets, but he never missed practice and even ran on weekends and in the rain. Finally, he qualified for an away meet. He got to ride the bus and wear one of the team's new uniforms. I trembled at the sound of the starting gun. Colton made the first pass and was at the back of the pack, but he was keeping up. Parents in the stands compared their kids times and how many medals they had received this year. Soon the runners started crossing the finish line. Again, Colton never came. The next race was about to begin and he still had not come out of the woods. Finally, he emerged dehydrated and exhausted and collapsed onto the track like a rag doll.

Colton didn't qualify for any other meets. But at the end of the year, his coach asked if he wanted run in the last meet, the district championship. She told the team that his determination and hard work had qualified him. He was so proud! And in his manic moments, he was the world's best runner. I wanted to be happy, but I was scared to death. His dad and I went to the meet and waited silently in the cold for the race to begin—and to end. The runners came and went once and then again. We could see Colton coming up for the last lap. As his feet hit the black top of the track, my tears started to flow He was going to make it. Everyone was standing up cheering and the runners lined the track as he crossed the finish line. I suddenly realized that I had held my breath for the entire race. Now we were both in tears. In the midst of the celebration, no one saw that there was another runner. But Colton did. He turned around, ran back down the track to his friend, and together they crossed the finish line-95th and 96th in the district meet.

Colton didn't win any medals this year. He didn't even have a best time to beat. But he won! He won the most of all. My child, my bipolar, asthmatic child, never gave up; he never quit not even when all odds were against him. He had learned courage--courage to never give up and courage to be a friend.