

Doctors Treat Fracture But Miss Cancer

Young Man Shows Courage After Misdiagnosis

Willie Marshall, Jr. was a sophomore at Immokalee High School, near Ft. Myers, Fla., and was the running back on the varsity football team. On the evening of Sept. 23, 1994, Willie's life changed forever when he took a pitch from the quarterback, dropped the ball, and turned to pick it up. When he pivoted, he felt a tremendous pain in his left leg. Willie was not hit by any other players.

Willie was taken by ambulance to the hospital. Paramedics determined that Willie's injury was not traumatic. X-rays were taken and interpreted by Radiologist A and an orthopedist as a left spiral oblique femur fracture. Although both physicians were aware of the lack of blunt trauma, neither investigated potential underlying causes of the fracture. The next day, the orthopedist performed surgery to place a rod in Willie's left femur. Another radiologist, Radiologist B, was present during the procedure. Once again, the physicians noticed nothing in the area of the fracture which might have raised their suspicions.

After the operation, the orthopedist reviewed the original x-rays and noticed a mass at the fracture site. He conferred with Radiologist A, who then performed a CT scan on Sept. 29, 1994. This time the doctors identified a mass at the fracture site, but diagnosed it as a benign condition.

Willie continued treatment with the orthopedist for normal post-operation follow-ups. His left leg, however, became increasingly painful. Finally, after two months, the orthopedist recognized that Willie had a significant problem with his left leg and referred him to a specialist for an MRI. The MRI confirmed that Willie had cancer in the area of the fracture. However, because the surgeon performed an open surgical procedure and placed the rod through Willie's femur, the cancer had been distributed from Willie's hip down to his knee.

Willie was immediately referred to a pediatric oncological specialist at All Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg, as well as an oncologic orthopedic surgeon at Tampa General Hospital. In spite of heroic efforts to save Willie's leg, the oncologists were ultimately unsuccessful. The placement of the rod had spread Willie's cancer so extensively and quickly that the only way to save Willie's life was to perform a hemipelvectomy surgery. This is a very rare procedure in which the doctor removes not only the patient's leg, but half of his pelvis. ***continued on page seven***



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In addition to enduring such a painful and profound procedure, Willie then had to undergo a very long course of chemotherapy. During his treatments, Willie unselfishly volunteered for experimental courses of chemotherapy. He hoped that it would someday benefit other pediatric cancer patients, like the ones he had met and befriended in his cancer ward.

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The Marshall family originally consulted attorney Jeff Chambers of St. Petersburg, who then referred the case to attorneys Chris Searcy and Bill Norton. Mr. Searcy and Mr. Norton settled the case for the available insurance limits of \$1.275 million.

Willie's perseverance and love of life has made him a very well regarded and respected young man. He served as a mentor to many younger cancer patients and became involved in the Children's Miracle Network. Willie now speaks regularly for the Children's Miracle Network, All Children's Hospital, and other related organizations. The 22-year-old is attending college at the University of South Florida and is pursuing a degree in education. ■