



Zach Rice

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Dear Participants,

My name is Zach Rice. I am 10 years old, and have had a really rough year! In December of 2011, I was rushed to the hospital after weeks of a traveling joint pain that no one could figure out. It finally settled into my hip, and I was in so much pain that I couldn't even move, and an ambulance had to take me to Morristown Memorial Hospital. It turned out to be a really rare septic hip infection. I had emergency surgery, and wound up ringing in the new year with my best friend and my parents at the hospital. I was pretty sick, and came home with a PICC line in my arm, so instead of going to school, my awesome teachers came to me for 6 weeks!

Things seemed to be getting better, and I had a pretty fun summer. I even got back to goalie training camp, and was really excited to get back to playing hockey with my team again after my season was cut short with the infection! Unfortunately, a few practices into the new season, my mom noticed I started limping. It didn't hurt or anything, but she thought it was strange, and made me go to the doctor. I'm not sure that I understand all of it, but as it turns out, I have something called Avascular Necrosis, which means that my hip bone is dying. So where on a normal person the femoral head that fits into the hip socket is round, mine is flattening out because it's collapsing with every step I take. Apparently, all of it is related to that really strange septic hip infection I had.

So, on October 9th, I went back into the hospital (this time Columbia Presbyterian in New York City) to have an external fixator put on my hip. It's like this really big metal bar that sits outside my body, but is connected to me through 7 metal pins that go through my muscles and into my bones. I'm told that this thing is pretty rare, too ... I think it's because it's on a joint, and I have to be able to move a little with it. Prior to this surgery, the only thing they could do for a kid like me was to have me sit in a wheel chair for 6 months while my body figures out how to heal itself. The doctors tell me they can't reverse the damage that's already been done, but this "distraction" will keep the damage from getting worse. It basically pulls my hip apart, and allows the bar to take all my weight when I move, so that there's no weight on the hip while my bone is still soft. It also separates the hip to promote blood flow, which will help me heal. At the end of it, I'm hoping I'll be able to play sports again, but we're just not sure. I know eventually, I'm going to need a hip replacement but I'm not going to worry about that yet.



Since October, the pain has been A LOT worse than I thought it was going to be. It's really hard to move around, and in the beginning, it took me 45 minutes just to get out of bed. I was in this really huge wheelchair (it needed to be big to fit me and the distraction, which sticks out like 6 inches from my body), but I graduated from that to a walker, and eventually to crutches. I can even walk unassisted around the house now sometimes, but it hurts alot! Because it's still really hard to get around, and it hurts so much if someone accidentally bumps into the device, I still haven't been able to go back to school yet. If anyone hit into it, I'd be in a world of hurt! So my teachers are coming to my house again this year, but Dr. Vitale thinks my fixator might come off in March, and then I have to stay home for another few weeks while my bones heal from the holes we put in them! When that's happening, I won't be able to move at all again ... but it's only for a few weeks!! I'm hoping to return to the 5th grade sometime in April after spring break!

In the meantime, I've had LOTS of time to think. Every now and then, I wonder why something this terrible would happen to me. My parents aren't sure, but they keep saying that there's a reason for everything. Maybe the reason is so that I can help other kids! See, when I was in Morristown, I couldn't leave my bed, so I couldn't go to the kid's lounge to check out the gaming systems. But my Dad brought my PS3 from home, and I think it made EVERYONES' hospital stay more pleasant (I was distracted, which was better for me, and I screamed MUCH less from pain when my mind was occupied, which was really great for the doctors, nurses and other patients)!! And that gave me an idea ... I thought it would be nice for other kids who stay at the Goryeb Children's Center at Morristown Memorial Hospital to have access to all of the latest gaming systems, so my mom is helping me start up a charity event called the "Action for Distraction 5K." The Morristown Memorial Health Fund is helping us get it off the ground, and I'm even up for a Disney Grant to make it all happen!

So you're not a runner? It's ok! We're trying to make it fun for everyone, so we don't care if you skip your way through the finish line! To make it even more fun, we've even convinced the Games2U truck to come with their mobile arcade for the party after the race! We want it to be fun, so all ages can run, and we're even putting together a program where the local elementary school students log 23.1 miles of exercise over the next 12 weeks, and then do the 5K with us to complete a full marathon and get a medal!

It'll be a lot of fun, and it's for a great cause! By then, I should have my fixator off. I'm not sure that I'll be up to walking a whole 5K, but I'm going to be there volunteering my time and cheering people on. This time next year, though, I hope to be healed enough to run with everyone!!!

Can't wait to see you there,

Zach Rice