

CHASE AWAY CANCER

A POWERFUL
TRUE STORY OF FINDING
LIGHT IN A DARK DIAGNOSIS

ELLIE POOLE EWOLDT

I felt so inspired when I met Chase Ewoldt and his wonderful family—and reading his mom’s powerful account of their story brings back the very same feelings. For in the midst of a fierce storm named cancer, they have continually managed to find their way to a place of trust, hope, and worship. Ellie writes in a raw yet reverent tone—not avoiding the crazily tough moments they have had to face as a family, but each time recounting them with a deep and heartening sense of faith. Chase is a very brave boy, and this is a very courageous book. I know it will encourage and inspire so many others who find themselves navigating the storms of this life.

MATT REDMAN

Songwriter, UK

To see a child suffer is grievous, but when it is your own child, the pain is unbearable. And yet this true story of a young mother and her son Chase, who was diagnosed with cancer, shows all of us that there can be a sliver of sunshine even in the darkest night.

DR. ERWIN W. LUTZER

Pastor Emeritus, Moody Church, Chicago

Written with honest emotion and depth, this book gives every parent reason to count their blessings, and every family with a child fighting cancer inspiration to make each day count.

KATHLEEN RUDDY

CEO, St. Baldrick’s Foundation, Conquer Childhood Cancer

I love books that are deeply encouraging and yet brutally honest. I love writers who don’t insist prayer is a magic wand and yet believe God is amazingly all-powerful. *Chase Away Cancer* is one of those books, and Ellie Poole Ewoldt is one of those

writers. This story made me fall in love with her little Chase and deeper in love with our very big God. I think you will too.

LYNN EIB

Author of *When God & Cancer Meet*

The Lord gives us all a journey. It takes an anointed one to traverse the “cancer journey.” Chase and his family join the ranks of Spider-Man and Batman as superheroes in their epic battle against this enemy. Only one that has walked in these shoes can truly guide another along this road. Ellie does an amazing job of always pointing to the Lord as the guidepost that leads them in their conquest. Since cancer is an enemy that touches all of us in some way, I would encourage everyone to read this book to gain an insight of a life well lived in the battle against this foe.

REGGIE ANDERSON

Author of *Appointments with Heaven*

Chase Away Cancer is for anyone who is looking for hope, courage, or strength while battling through some of life’s great challenges. It offers encouragement to others, and it focuses on living moment by moment—relying on God’s grace to get through some of life’s hardships. Ellie takes the reader into her world with her realistic accounts and transparency, walking the reader through the trenches of her family’s battle, with Jesus as her primary source of strength. This book helps the reader remember that one is never alone through life’s journey, and it empowers the reader to keep fighting and believing, even when circumstances are not what is wanted or expected. *Chase Away Cancer* helps the reader see the “beauty in brokenness.” This book is a must-read for all, no matter the season of life.

GAVIN FLOYD & DR. LEANNA FLOYD

MLB pitcher; Doctor of Clinical Psychology

MOMENTS BY MOMENT

"I'M
SO
BRAVE,
I'M SO
BRAVE..."

WE
CAN
EITHER
CHOOSE
the SHADOW
OR CHOOSE
Joy.



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A POWERFUL TRUE STORY OF FINDING LIGHT
IN A DARK DIAGNOSIS

ELLIE POOLE EWOLDT



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Chase Away Cancer: A Powerful True Story of Finding Light in a Dark Diagnosis

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The stories in this book are about real people and real events, but some names have been omitted for the privacy of the individuals involved. Dialogue has been recreated to the author's best recollection.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ewoldt, Ellie Poole, author.

Title: Chase away cancer : a powerful true story of finding light in a dark diagnosis / Ellie Poole Ewoldt.

Description: Carol Stream, IL : Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. |

Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015050121 | ISBN 9781496411693 (sc)

Subjects: LCSH: Ewoldt, Chase. | Cancer—Religious aspects—Christianity. |

Cancer—Patients. | Hope—Religious aspects—Christianity.

Classification: LCC BV4910.33 .E93 2016 | DDC 248.8/6196994—dc23 LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015050121>

Printed in the United States of America

22 21 20 19 18 17 16
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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LEARNING TO LET GO

It was a perfect June evening for a family walk. Going as far as several sets of little legs could go, we'd made it down the sidewalk that bordered the busy street along our condo complex to the corner and back, and now it was time to start thinking about cleaning grubby palms and feet and getting little ones tucked into bed.

The setting sun played with us, flooding our backs with warm, end-of-the-day light as our family turned into a drive that led to our building. I was last in the line of six, pushing seven-month-old Karsten in his stroller as he watched the cars excitedly and banged his fists on the tray in front of him. Six-year-old Darcy and three-year-old Aidan held hands as they stayed near my husband, Bob, chattering about who had counted the most cars, and Bob, at the front, held on to two-year-old Chase's hand. We made quite the procession.

I could hear the voices of neighbors as a slight breeze rustled the trees, birds called to one another, and someplace far off, a dog barked. At the other end of the drive, Bob and I noticed a delivery truck making several stops, and we moved everyone to the side of the small lane and into the grass to stay out of its way. But neither Bob nor I realized that Chase had broken out of his hold and was

no longer standing next to us. The heavy truck lumbered down the pavement, slowly picking up speed as it drove toward us, directly into the blinding glare of the setting sun. And standing in its path, just barely taller than the truck's front bumper, was a small boy . . . *our* small boy.

Tiny, barrel-chested Chase stood in the middle of the drive with his feet planted wide in his scuffed shoes and stared down the truck. He had no plans on moving.

This isn't happening . . .

Bob and I both screamed in a desperate plea for action. "Chase! Come here *now!*" I had been in enough showdowns with him that I knew just by looking at the back of his unturned, unmoving head, that he had heard us but chose not to respond and was most likely scowling.

Bob lunged forward, his long legs propelling him into a running dive, and scooped up Chase just seconds before the truck passed us and exited the drive. The driver never slowed or turned to look at us; perhaps he never even saw the small boy in front of him, but it didn't matter—Chase was safe.

As we stood in the grass, everyone took a deep breath, and we absorbed what had felt like a near miss. Darcy and Aidan appeared as horrified as Bob and I were, and Darcy found her voice before we could collect our thoughts. "Chase! You could have been badly hurt!"

Aidan stepped up next, chiming in. "Yeah, Chase!"

Chase ignored them, his face still twisted into a scowl, as he spun around to face Bob and exclaimed, "Dad! You picked me up! You can't do that! I was fine!"

I marveled at the confidence of the small boy in front of us. *He genuinely believes he has the power to stop moving vehicles with his presence alone.* With his few, feisty words, he made it clear that he had no need for rescue.

Chase's self-assurance and determination surfaced early in life. Whether he was challenging his older brother, Aidan, while they played with trains at the living room table, or comfortably stuffing his hands into his pockets, rocking on his heels as he talked to adults as if he were one of them, he was a strong, old soul from the start. In everything he did, this boy was full tilt. His siblings sensed this in him, and for better or usually worse, they almost always fell into line behind him. For Chase, no activity held any middle ground; it wasn't any fun if it wasn't a challenge.

Just like that, I started spotting gray hairs mixed into my usually redheaded frizz. There were almost weekly occurrences that ended with a gasped prayer and the full heartbeat-in-my-eardrums knowledge that if his foot had slipped, if I hadn't walked into the room at that exact moment, if he'd jumped, gotten that drawer open, that window open, I would have been grabbing my purse and heading to the emergency room—not, as those moments often ended, holding him in a bear hug and talking about making better choices.

One night, just a few short weeks after his attempted standoff with the delivery truck, I stood over his crib and watched him sleeping. It was late, and the moon was high and full, shining in through the window coverings, making his face luminous. I stroked the short hair off his forehead, and as I watched him, I felt a strange stirring in my heart. *"Are you prepared to let him go?"*

Images of daredevil stunts on a motorcycle or being parachuted into an overseas assignment crossed my mind as I pictured a tall, sandy-haired man with his father's brown eyes and infectious smile. The thought of my baby risking his life as an adult hurt my heart, but as all mothers of little children do, I comforted myself that the days of letting go were eons away. I didn't need to answer that question just yet. I found myself mentally thanking God for the reminder and moved on. Kissing Chase's cool forehead, I tucked the blanket in around his shoulders and tiptoed out of the room.

I would forget that late-night moment for several weeks. It was summer and wonderful, and the days were spent across town at Grandma's house, running in the yard and playing in the pool and sprinkler.

Once that idyllic June, Chase slipped and fell out of the pool, scratching his side pretty badly. After tending to him, I didn't give the moment much thought; after all, he was such an active boy. Shortly after this, on July 4, he fell again. This time he was standing next to the hot grill and burned his hand. He was curious, fascinated by the open fire, and had gotten too close. But with a little ice, he was okay. He tripped and fell several times in the house, too, but those incidents all seemed to be okay because he was always running and I was always telling him to slow down. Later he contracted what appeared to be the stomach flu twice in one month, vomiting early in the morning and then wanting to sleep for the rest of the day. The flu was short-lived and strange, but I thought maybe having four children introduced more germs into the house, and he was the unfortunate recipient.

Occasionally, I could feel a knot growing in my stomach but I told myself it was all going to be okay. I'm a first-class, worst-case-scenario worrier, and so I began to wonder about allergies and sensitivities as my brain pieced together these seemingly random incidences with Chase, things the other children were somehow not affected by. But I could not and did not see these things as pieces of a whole yet. I could not see them for what they were—an unprecedented, breathtaking nightmare of truck-sized proportions that was gathering on the horizon, preparing to tear us apart. We were standing in the middle of the road, staring it down, and we didn't even realize it yet.

Let go . . .

THE JOY IN CHANGING PLANS

I had a feeling something was going to happen that Saturday morning. I sat quietly on the edge of the bed, my swollen ankles and feet barely visible over my distended, very pregnant stomach. My arms and legs ached far more than they had been recently, and it felt as if every nerve were coming alive, as if my body was preparing for something. December 12, 2009: Chase's due date. My firstborn, Darcy, had been nine days late, followed by Aidan, who was eight days early, but as I felt these subtle changes, I wondered, *Will Chase actually come on the predicted day?*

It had all gone by so quickly. Nine months earlier, when Aidan was barely a three-month-old in my arms, I began to notice that certain colors made me feel queasy. Like my mother before me, the women in our family find certain colors nausea-inducing when we are pregnant. As I stood in my tiny kitchen and stared at the food label on the can in front of me, the chartreuse border made me want to run to the bathroom and give up my lunch.

This is crazy, I thought. I can't be. I laughed it off quickly. It's more than likely my body is still recovering from Aidan's birth.

That night, after the kids were asleep, I sat on the edge of our bed as my husband, Bob, hung up his tie in the closet. "How was your day today, love?" he asked.

"It was okay, but I had a really weird experience. I was looking at this can with a green label, and it made me feel physically ill."

Bob stopped what he was doing and looked over at me. "The smell made you feel sick?"

I shook my head. "No, the color did."

I saw that Bob was confused. "Do you remember me saying that happened when I was first pregnant with Aid and Darcy too?"

Bob had been listening as he was hanging up his clothes, but as soon as I said "pregnant," his head snapped up.

"Do you think it's possible?" I asked. "What will we do?" I left the questions hanging in midair, almost afraid to say aloud what I suspected, lest it prove true.

He sighed, running his hands through his hair as he often did when he was tired. "I have no idea, but there's one way to find out." Bob has always been good at stating next steps when I get emotionally existential.

"Okay, I'll take a test. Are we ready for this?"

He sighed again. "It doesn't matter. If this is really happening, we will figure it out." I took heart in the certainty of his tone. He crossed the room to sit next to me on the bed and took my hand in both of his. "For now, don't worry about things we don't know about yet. We'll take one thing at a time."

Shortly later, we stared at double pink lines on the white plastic stick. We slowly caught our breath and exhaled a prayer for wisdom and strength. Two pregnancies in less than two years, and the children would probably only be about a year apart. This definitely wasn't part of the plan.

I felt the new life inside me early in my pregnancy, weeks earlier than either of my other two. This baby never seemed to stop moving, and it may have been my imagination, but he or she seemed to respond to my moods and feelings, kicking me when I was hungry, thrashing when I felt anger, and of course, dancing wildly whenever I felt joy or tried to sleep. This was a child with such high energy that at times, I grew worried for what life would look like after delivery. If the baby was this active before birth, how would I possibly handle such energy after it was born?

By the end of the summer, we learned it was another boy. Baby Aidan would have a younger brother, and I, the girl who grew up in a household of sisters, would now mother a family in which Darcy and I were fast becoming outnumbered. My father, the sole male in a household of sisters, felt that life had finally righted a great injustice to him, and he was irrationally thrilled over the addition of another grandson.

God help me.

With little else under our control, we turned to something we could decide: the baby's name. I picked his middle names from the maiden names of his grandmothers, and Bob voted early and often for the first name *Chase* because it mirrored our prayer that this son would run hard after God.

I felt more than a little annoyed when Aidan's first birthday came and went without me going into labor. There was a silly part of me that really wanted the bragging rights to two sons born less than a year apart. But no, Chase was his own person who did things his way, in his own time.

And so it was in the early hours on that second Saturday of December, as my feet dangled off the bed and I felt my spine curl around a wisp of the pain that was yet to come, I wondered how much longer I'd wait before holding this special surprise boy in my arms.

Bob went to work as he always did on Saturday mornings, and my mother picked up three-year-old Darcy for some one-on-one time. Aid and I settled in for whatever the day might bring.

When the pain increased in the early afternoon, I put Aidan in his crib because I could no longer hold him. He began crying pitifully, so I poured some Cheerios into a bowl for him, hoping that would quiet him. He cried harder. He didn't want food; he wanted me to hold him. As I hunched over the crib, I cried with him, feeling helpless and alone. I couldn't help him understand what was happening or how our lives were about to change. All I could do was apologize and try to hug him as he stood at the rail of his crib.

"I'm so sorry, buddy, I'm so, so sorry. I love you so much, and I'd hold you if I could." Stroking his white-blond head, I continued, "It's going to be okay. You'll be okay. I'm so, so sorry."

Distractedly picking up my phone to call Bob, I remembered that he didn't get cell service in his office at the church, and so I limped to the computer between contractions to send him a chat message on my Google e-mail account.

"Bobby, I think it's time. My contractions are getting worse, and they're already every seven minutes apart."

He responded, "I'm just finishing up some stuff here, and I don't want to be there too early—can you just call me back when the contractions are closer together?"

We laugh about it now, but believe me, I wasn't laughing much at the time. I sent him another message—this time in all capital letters—asking him to please consider coming home, and sensing my "tone," he came quickly.

My mom was still several minutes away with Darcy, but she called my sister Meg, who just happened to be stopping for gas at the station right down the street from our house, for temporary backup. Meg arrived to watch Aidan so that we could leave for the hospital. Sometimes God has the perfect timing, even in the craziest

moments. As Bob and I got on the road, rushing toward the hospital, we passed my mom and Darcy. We both waved, and I blew her kisses. She and Aidan wouldn't be allowed in the hospital due to a flu season guideline, so we'd be separated for at least two days.

Once we arrived at the hospital, everything happened quickly. The familiar pain intensified. *Hadn't I just gone through labor with Aidan seconds ago?* Within a few short hours, the wonderfully agonizing relief finally came as the labor ended and my tiny new son slipped into the world.

The doctor caught him in both hands, exclaiming, "It's a *boy!* Did you know it was a boy?" And then he nearly shouted, "And he's holding his head up on his own! This kid is strong! Look at this!"

Grabbing a towel to place him in, the doctor laid Chase, still purple and blue, on my chest, and I wrapped my arms around him as the oxygen raced into his body, fueling his initial screams against the harsh and cold.

He was beautiful. "Oh, my darling boy. Momma is here now."

I gently rocked him. "I'm here, I'm here, I'm here . . . don't cry. It's going to be okay, my darling boy," I whispered in a songlike cadence as I held him close.

"He's perfect, Bob, isn't he?"

Bob smiled at me, his eyes full of pride as we shared those first joyful moments. I wiggled my now-visible toes under the covers. "And I can see my feet again!" Bob laughed. After two years of nearly continuous pregnancy, this season was finally over, and a whole new one was beginning. Sometimes the moments that break the carefully constructed mold of your life plan turn out to be the greatest ones. Although we hadn't considered this for ourselves, it was clearly God's plan for our lives. And I believe he knew that Chase Stratton Elliot Ewoldt needed to be part of this world for very special reasons.