



Michelle Rueben – My Cancer Journey

Brisbane based Michelle, has strived to get a good education, despite undergoing cancer treatment throughout her school years.

At the age of just eight, Michelle began experiencing extreme back and neck pain – something unusual for a young, healthy girl.

After a few visits to her doctor and with no medication able to provide relief, Michelle was referred to a surgeon. It was then that it became evident that Michelle had lost some feeling in her left side, and something was not quite right. Following further tests, Michelle was diagnosed with Pilocytic Astrocytoma, a rare childhood tumor located where her spine met her head.

She recalls the bright colours, happy environment and kindness of staff of the Brisbane Royal Children's Hospital, yet when she became too old for the service, found it difficult to transition into a different ward. "I can remember being placed in rooms with elderly patients. I had nobody to share my experience with and it felt like nobody understood me. I was just another patient. I couldn't talk to the other people there, I couldn't relate. Going from a bright, happy and positive environment to a place that seemed so clinical and harsh was really hard" she said.

"I remember being treated for my rehabilitation and being placed with older patients who had experienced strokes. Naturally being so young I felt really scared of what was going on around me" said Michelle.

Some high school kids struggle with the demands of homework and getting their first boyfriend or girlfriend, but Michelle had much bigger challenges as she continued her treatment throughout high school. "The hardest thing was people questioning why I was having so much time off, or why I walked with a limp." Michelle explains. "I just wanted to fit in and be like any other girl my age. Thankfully my parents were always there for me get me through."

Michelle eventually fell under the care of the specialist Youth Cancer Services Queensland, a dedicated service for adolescents and young adults with cancer. "This was a turning point for me, I felt like I was in the best place for me as a young person" said Michelle.

Despite the disruption and challenge of having teenage cancer, Michelle completed her studies and went on to University to study a Bachelor of Arts, specialising in Social Science and History. She continues to receive treatment and studies part time in order to manage her condition, and is hoping to have successfully completed her degree this year... after the release of her results!

Many people are in awe of what Michelle has gone on to achieve, despite experiencing cancer in such an important part of her life. Her message to this is simple.

"Make goals, go out and achieve them and do all that you can" she says.

