

## **Headline: After some dark days, Army women's basketball lifts up Andrea Wojciechowski**

**By Michael J. Lewis**

A little more than three years ago, 11-year-old Andrea Wojciechowski was told she had a mass of leukemic cells on her chest leading up her neck surrounding her mediastinum and encasing both her carotid arteries caused by acute lymphoblastic leukemia (A.L.L.), and that she needed to have major surgery.

The doctors told Andrea's mom, Liz, that there was a "90 percent chance" Andrea wouldn't live through the operation.

"I had already lost a child, so to hear that about Andrea was just something I didn't think could happen," Liz says. "Andrea was in a lot of pain, so she definitely needed the surgery, but she had a dream the night before (the operation) that she had died in the operating room. So of course, it was very scary."

Doctors almost lost Andrea twice during the surgery, but she beat the odds and pulled through. After painful chemo and treatment, it took a long time for the Wallkill, N.Y. native to feel better.

"I didn't even know the medicine was going through me, because for a while I started feeling worse as I got better," Andrea says now. "Parts of my body would feel paralyzed ... the chemo caused a lot of different things to happen." The chemotherapy caused leukoencephalitis (which is swelling of the brain), and paralyzed Andrea for 3 days. Liz said that Andrea had to learn to walk again—from a wheel chair to a walker to unsteady steps nearly a month after the swelling subsided.

As bad as the physical pain was, the emotional pain might've been worse for Andrea. As she started to get better and return to school, she found a large group of her friends suddenly didn't want to be her pals anymore. Kids said things behind her back that got back to her, and a few truly nasty comments, about her appearance during chemo, were said to her face.

"People would just stop calling and drift away, people I thought were my real friends," Andrea says. "My friend Madison was the one true friend who stayed with me through everything."

Liz says she had no idea how much emotional pain her daughter suffered from her friends until this past March 12, when in an incredibly emotional speech at the annual Friends of Jaclyn Gala, Andrea opened her heart and told hundreds of strangers what she'd been through.

"We were all so proud of her to open up in front of all those people," Liz says. "It was just not something she had ever spoken about. She was amazing and brave that night."

Happily for Andrea, those phony "friends" who abandoned her have been replaced by a wonderful group of older girls: The women's basketball team at Army.

The West Point squad adopted Andrea in Jan., 2015, and the fit has been perfect. The team plays about 30 minutes from the Wojciechowski's home, allowing Andrea to get to know her new pals at practices and games.

Players like Brigette Ocran, Kelsey Minato, Jean Parker and the Morris twins (Destinee and Daizjah) have shot around with Andrea during practice, let her watch them “get hyped” before games in the locker room, and given her a support system she needed. They also hang out in non-basketball activities, taking Andrea apple-picking and out for meals.

“It’s such a positive relationship that gives Andrea something to look forward to,” Liz says. “She’s the one with control over it, and it makes her feel wanted, good, happy and confident. She’s much better than before.”

For Andrea, her health has improved as well as her psyche, and she credits the Black Knights team for that.

“They’re always asking how I’m doing and if my cancer cells have come back,” Andrea says, adding she’s currently cancer-free. “I feel really blessed to have everything in my life that I have now; the team has been so wonderful to me.”

Asked about why she decided to open up at the FOJ Gala about her emotional scars from her friends drifting away, Andrea said it was “scary” but necessary.

“I like helping other people, and I knew how it felt to be hurt, and I want to be there for people,” she says. “I wouldn’t want anyone else to be hurt like I was. And after I was done (with the speech), one kid in the audience came up and told me her friends had been like that with her, and it was so nice to hear what I had said.

“That made me feel really, really good.”





She was paralyzed for 3 days due to the chemo causing leukoencephalitis (which is swelling of the brain), she had a mass of leukemic cells on her chest leading up her neck surrounding her mediastinum and encasing both her carotid arteries, and she wasn't conscious during her surgery because she was under anesthesia lol. They almost lost her twice because her stats dropped twice during surgery. wink emoticon

so the part where he says: Andrea actually lost consciousness twice during the surgery, but beat the odds and pulled through.

anything you want changed i will definitely changed!

Oh great thank you. Yes. Then the part with the leukemic cells on the neck and the part with her feeling paralyzed, she was paralyzed, she had to learn to walk again frown emoticon

She was in a wheel chair, then used a walker, then walked Yayyy lol