

## December 2005

### Christi Thomas: Little Girl With SENIORity

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Christi Thomas is not a senior, but she has SENIORity! The eight-year-old daughter of Shayne and Angela has accomplished an incredible lifetime during the last three years. She has a six-year-old sister, Shayla who has received a “Super Sib” trophy for being such a supportive sister.

On September 11, 2002, Christi was diagnosed with neuroblastoma (stage IV-the worst). This is a rare cancer that strikes the nervous system and affects about 600 children in the United States each year. The Thomas family and friends were shocked because Christi had been an active, outgoing girl. For four months she endured four rounds of intense chemotherapy. Her tumor shrunk, but the cancer remained in her bone marrow.

Since that time she has spent eight months living at the Ronald McDonald House in New York, has had several surgeries, and several months living in the Ronald McDonald House in Philadelphia. While there she participated in numerous clinical trials under the care of The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia. She has remained stable since July, but the cancer still remains in her ribs and bone marrow.



But Christi’s story is not about her rare form of cancer. No, her story is about the way Christi and her family have taken her illness, and in spite of their uncertainty reached out to others.

The first year the nurses called her “Christi Claus” because she was passing out candy canes to the sick children at Children’s Hospital, Columbus, Ohio. That act of

compassion fit right in with the Old Fort Bank's way of reaching out to the Thomas family with the "Christi Can".

Shayne said it was hard at first to accept the help, but he was told by bank employees that they had to let them do it for them.

"It is humbling to accept help, but it is good to be humbled," admitted Shayne.

That was the first of several ways for the community to open their hearts and start praying for Christi and her family.

Angela's mother and step-father feel that prayer provides comfort and peace.

"It seems like a "double whammy". You feel so bad for your grandchild and you feel bad for what your child and her family have to go through. My faith in God and his all-knowing love for all of us is what gives me the strength to continue," said Carolyn Joliff, or Grandma Nonee.

Paw Paw Joe (Joliff) added that the prayers of thousands of people give them the strength they need.

"The bottom line is that it is our faith in a faithful God that keeps us going. Even when we don't like or understand the reports, we know God is still in control," Joe said.

To understand more of what Christi and her family have survived you should go to her web site at [www.ChristiThomas.com](http://www.ChristiThomas.com) for the details provided by their family friend, Eric.

"I couldn't imagine the whole journey without the Internet. People who would be concerned could check the Internet and not feel like they were bothering us with phone calls," said Shayne.

Shayne said his 80 year-old grandmother, Dixie Bell Gear decided to get connected, because she wanted to stay in the loop of what was happening with Christi.

He said many medical decisions are made through e-mails; they recently received e-mail messages from oncologists in Los Angeles and Chicago. The Internet is where they found their doctor at New York City's Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center.

On November 6th Shayne gave back to the renowned hospital by running in the New York Marathon and raising donations of \$4,000.

Christi continues to give back by having Blood drives in her honor. Even though she is still often scared when she is continually poked and prodded she feels this is something she can help do. Shayne says it is amazing how many first time blood donors have come forward because of knowing or hearing about Christi, even from other states.

“She helped my mom give blood for the first time,” added Angela.

“I hold the people’s hand so they are not so scared. I read to the donors and give them buttons,” said Christi who often has her nose in a book.

When Christi returned home from New York, one of the first places she wanted to go was to the Tiffin-Seneca Public Library. That was not usual because Christi’s love of reading awarded her a perfect score for the state reading assessment test for third grade when Christi was only seven-years-old.

Science and math are the fourth graders favorite subjects at Seneca East School. Christi enjoys ballet and jazz at Dance Unlimited. She started lessons at four, but had to sit out the year she was in New York. She plays the piano and has started horse riding lessons with Chessie.

A typical eight year-old in so many ways, but Christi and her family will also be seen supporting Alex’s Lemonade Stand, started by Christi’s Philadelphia friend, Alex Scott.

“I love pouring the lemonade,” Christi admitted.

Old Fort Bank has been the site for several of these events, as well as two times at Heidelberg, once at Ohio State University, at the Heritage Festival and at the Community Hospice Duck Race. Christi has helped raise over \$10,000.

She has been Mistress of Ceremonies for the annual Christi Thomas Poker Run Fundraiser which has benefited Make a Wish Foundation and supported Just for Kids. The Thomas family had a wonderful trip to Japan through the Make a Wish Foundation.

Shayne’s mother, Joan Gear proudly wears a sweatshirt printed on the back about the event. Joan, a Tiffin rural letter carrier, also cared for Shayla during the New York time.

“The poker run has become an annual tradition, and will be the first Saturday of June next year. It is a major fund raiser. We have been able to donate to other local children’s charities,” said Joan.

Christi has another grandmother who has been involved in the Thomas family’s life since 1998.

“Donna (Pryor) and I used to work together at National City Bank. We called to see if she could help with childcare. She is like a real grandma to our girls. She started watching Christi and then Shayla,” said Shayne.

“She is a very special girl. Both girls’ pictures are on the wall with our other grandchildren. I was only going to watch Christi for a week or two, but now they are like two more of our kids. Their parents are the best too,” said Donna.

Shayne and Angela admitted they are so blessed with all the support of family, friends, employers, co-workers and neighbors. They see people in the children's hospitals who do not have that encouragement.

“During times like this you have to take care of yourself by eating properly and exercising. You can't make good decisions if you don't take care of yourself. Bad things happen when we you are living, don't let it pile up on you,” said Shayne.

Angela admitted, “Christi taught us life lessons we didn't want to know.”

Christi, who always wants to help the sick children, has taught so many people about love, compassion and making the most of each day. Way to go, Christi! You do have SENIORity!