

## The Forge

*“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.” Helen Keller.* Gazing around me, white walls and the multitudes of tubes installed in them seem to contradict the colorful murals positioned throughout the rest of the hospital. Although I don’t know it now, I will be trapped for a year within this prison of bald inmates at Children’s Hospital, a transitional period from which I will emerge with an entirely different perspective on life than the average eleven-year old.

Looking back, the hospital stay is a blurred memory, seven years old, and fading like many of those from my earlier childhood. Following my diagnosis with cancer, I underwent a rigorous nine month chemotherapy treatment and an eventual amputation of my right foot. For losing these particular memories, I have no regrets. However, thanks to this grueling trial, I was tempered far faster than simple growing permits. The qualities and respect for life it instilled within me have remained as strong scaffolds, forged in the hottest of flames. And after nine months, I somehow found myself at the end of this odyssey with my life ahead of me. Of course, at the time, long-term survival was tentative. It was only after five years, and much soul searching, had passed that it became apparent that my success was no fluke; I had been given a new lease to live.

Since then, I have grown as a student to life, viewing each day as a reward for passing my tests with flying colors. Finishing growing up, I developed a fascination in science and technology, spurred by my reliance in these areas for my mobility with a prosthetic. Indeed, any type of problem analysis and solution captured my interest. As a young child, I decided that helping people would be my purpose in life. Far from the usual fireman or policeman, I looked forward to becoming a ‘space doctor’. Now, my interests have changed but the intention behind them remains. A particular interest area lies in bioengineering, and the creation of artificial parts for the body that mimic natural motion and function. Of course, an added bonus to this field would be that I could design and improve my own legs, and use any self-discoveries to the advantage of my patients. Already, I have correlated with my prosthetist to design a leg that gets rid of all the problems I have faced while maintaining the comfort and versatility of the device.

My growth as a human began in fast forward at a young age. Ever since, I have put the vigor and ambition that the hospital made me realize I had into all that captures my interest. It has modified my lifestyle to make it challenging, true, but the life lessons I came away with were, and are, well worth the struggles. At no other time in my life have I felt so alive.