

Casey, a lesson in courage.
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Every once in a while, we maintenance folks, while dealing in our own daily doses of reality are reminded that our world is buffered from other people's 'real' worlds.

In the upper Midwestern USA, in a papermaker's family reality takes the shape of cancer. Cancer is not a new fact to papermakers. We all have friends, relatives and lovers who have had to deal with this most cruel destroyer of dreams and aspirations.

Casey is no different, nor unique from other papermakers' family. Casey is fifteen. Casey is tall. Casey wants to play basketball, competitive basketball.

Casey's idol is Michael Jordan. Name a kid in America, hooked on basketball, who doesn't dream of being the next Michael Jordan. Casey, though, has bone cancer, detected recently. Curing this disease will require leg surgery to remove a piece of diseased bone. That missing piece will be replaced by another piece, either from somewhere else in the body or donated from a cadaver. The results of surgery are unpredictable.

In the meantime, Casey is undergoing chemotherapy. Some chemotherapy is mild. This chemo is not. Casey is experiencing hair loss, no appetite, fever, nausea, proneness to every germ and virus that comes along, days upon days of prolonged, unrelenting agony and misery.

Casey, though, has accepted uncontrollable reality. Basketball is out of the question with surgery removing the essence of a stable basketball career.

Optimism, however, reigns supreme. Maybe, volleyball can be pursued, "*...less wear and tear on the legs and my height remains an advantage*". Maybe further growth will heighten the body even more, making it a formidable 'spiking' threat.

Maybe Michael Jordan will be proud and conscious of the act of an inspired, self-motivated rebuilding of a devastated body of a prematurely tall, fifteen year old whose only dream has been to play competitive basketball.

Dreams remain. Yet, as optimistic as teens can be, Casey fully acknowledges and accepts the alternatives that an unwanted illness can bring...all the alternatives.

Casey, you see, is a young lady who had dreams only of playing competitive basketball. Casey accepts other options, with mature dignity, at a very earlier stage in life. Casey, in my opinion, is a living, breathing example of COURAGE, someone from whom the rest of us could take a lesson.

(Author's note: This incident occurred in the mid 90's. Casey endured and succeeded in beating her bout with cancer. She became a poster child for the 'Make a Wish' foundation. She is now a mother and as such has moved into a new level of maturity and concern. She never did play competitive sports, she did not fulfill her youthful dream, but you know what, she adjusted to the realities of life just fine.)