Triumph Over Pain

Cy Ranch senior Justin Knippers shares his story of overcoming brain surgery and chronic pain to live a full and rich life

Written by Justin Knippers
Photographed at Texas Children’s Hospital

In spite of suffering from chronic pain, high fevers, and short-term memory loss, Justin Knippers keeps a positive outlook on life and reaches out to others through donating blankets to patients of Texas Children’s Hospital.
Throughout my entire life I’ve been told that I will never be able to do the same things that other people can do, that I was going to be constantly held back by my disease. But I decided early on that I wasn’t going to let that happen. I pushed myself, that no matter what I had, no matter what kind of physical or mental disease that would get in my way, I would be like everyone else and try to succeed as if nothing was wrong with me. Unfortunately, it doesn’t always work out like that, at least not every day.

**Undiagnosed Illness**
I wake up every morning forgetting something that I did before. I suffer from short-term memory loss due to a brain arachnoid cyst I was born with and was removed when I was 8 years old. I don’t always remember people’s names; just ask my friends, I still sometimes forget theirs occasionally.

I experience physical pains equivalent to those of a 90-year-old man even though I’m only 18. Occasionally I suffer from fevers reaching as high as 105 and 107 degrees, causing me to become immobile. I have had many rushed trips to the emergency room for extensive testing to make the pain subside. After 18 years and seeing top physicians at Texas Children’s and National Institute Hospital (NIH) in Washington, my combination of ailments still goes undiagnosed.

**Living with Pain**
Pain is nothing new for me. My mom says one of my first words was “beeping” while pointing to my head; we found out later it was migraines. As a baby I would stop walking at times for no apparent reason. Doctors later determined that it was because of my joint and muscle pain, but of course I didn’t know how to communicate that, so I would just stop moving to avoid the pain.

At age 2, doctors reviewed my lab work and suspected leukemia, only to find out that wasn’t the case. I have never had a day without pain so I don’t know how that feels. At the age of 9, one of my doctors said, “There is nothing we can do; you will have to learn to live and function this way.”

At the time I had missed weeks of school due to my fevers and pain, but I told my mom I wanted to attend so we compromised and I went for half days until I could go back to full days. That episode lasted three years.

**Blankets of Love**
I know that many others are worse off than me, and my prayers go out to them every night. That is one of the many reasons why I chose my particular Eagle Scout project benefiting patients of Texas Children’s Hospital. With the help of local seamstresses, I had blankets made and gave them to those that didn’t have someone to hold them, and also to know that someone is always praying for and thinking of them. I received a similar blanket after my brain surgery and it is something I still cherish.

I am blessed because I made it home from the hospital and I am able to tell others to never give up. Never let something that’s holding you down keep you there, but be successful and happy no matter what.

**Pressing Forward**
In school I was told I was not a good candidate for K-level (advanced placement) classes due to all my learning obstacles, but when I started middle school I was determined to excel. Now I am a senior at Cy Ranch High School and as a freshman I was awarded Most Outstanding English Student, Most Outstanding Math Student, and became Senior Patrol leader of my Boy Scout troop. I also have been awarded Most Patriotic Student, Chief Flight Commander of AFJROTC, Eagle Scout, Gold Star employee at Best Buy, and many others. These things don't come easy; I have to work twice as hard and twice as long as other students.

Some days when I’m at the hospital unable to move and with no one around but the nurses and doctors poking and prodding at me, being told over and over again that you just can’t do it, and you’re always going be like this, I could have given up hope. But it always hits me, all the people in my life, the ones that have supported me in all these difficulties and challenges.

They believed in me even when I couldn’t believe in myself, they are the ones that helped me pick myself up and push me, especially when I couldn’t do it on my own, they are the reason I am still here today. I am truly blessed to have the ability to do Boy Scouts and do projects for other people, and to be in positions of leadership even with my disabilities. To be able to get out of my bed, go out, and have a fun and enjoyable life.

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** Cy-Fair Magazine would like to thank Justin Knippers for sharing his story of determination and resilience. If you have an inspirational story to share with us, email editor@cyfairmagazine.com.

---

Despite challenges, Knippers has acquired many accolades including earning his Eagle Scout Rank.