



### **Rashael Wakefield**

Rashael Wakefield's story is one that would be too much bear for many people. Only the very strongest of character and heart would approach her life situation with the grace and dignity that she has demonstrated.

Rashael recently was diagnosed with third degree cancer, specifically Hodgkin's Lymphoma. She spent most of last summer in the hospital going through chemo and all that accompanies it: surgeries, blood transfusions, hair loss, being poked and prodded, testing, and more surgeries, just to name a few. Not only did Rashael undergo chemotherapy, but also radiation. Due to the chemo and the amount of radiation she went through, the resulting percentage of breast cancer and thyroid problems later in life are high. Her doctors say that if cancer returns, it will come back as leukemia. So, Rashael will live the rest of her life knowing that her ordeal could begin again at any time. This is a crushing realization at any age, much less as a teenager.

Despite all the challenges, Rashael is optimistic and determined to experience her teen years as "normally" as possible. During her grueling treatment, her doctors were amazed by her sunny disposition. She was a trouper and took everything in stride. Her favorite saying was "It's all good"...a statement not usually made by young people suffering through cancer treatment. Even when test after test told bad news, she just kept plugging along. In fact, most people wouldn't even know she has cancer by looking for her – she simply puts on a wig and gets on with her

life. She attends school and participates in everything she can, and schedules her doctor appointments for after school so she doesn't miss any classes.

Rashael even managed a job last summer working for an environmental service that was willing to work with her as she felt well enough. Needless to say, she missed a lot of work, but any day she felt well enough, she would get up and go to work.

As a senior at Eagle River High School, Rashael is on track to graduate with high marks, as well as praise and admiration from her teachers, counselor and friends. She is an inspiration to them all.

Perhaps most impressive is Rashael's commitment to mentoring other young people diagnosed with serious illnesses. She has been involved in making hats with hair sewn into the brim so that pediatric cancer patients can avoid the embarrassment that comes from hair loss associated with cancer treatment. One of the most poignant moments for Rashael involved talking with a young lady who had just been diagnosed with Leukemia. Rashael took the time to clearly and compassionately describe the treatment process and candidly answer questions from the terrified young lady. They became friends and would communicate back and forth about their experiences, and they helped each other cope.

With any eye fixed firmly on the road ahead, Rashael hopes to attend college at either UAA or UAF. Her long-term goal is to enter a field that works with animals, like Fish & Game. She is also exploring the prospect of volunteering at our local zoo for the second semester of school. With her determination to succeed, despite the cards she's been dealt so far, no one doubts that Rachael's future is very promising.