

A Dying Son's Final Goodbye Inspires Millions to Fight the Good Fight

In 2009, at the age of 14, Zach Sobiech was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer. His mother, Laura, says at his initial diagnosis she took a deep breath and felt a quiet but powerful peace begin to fill her soul.

In those moments, Laura says she knew she was being presented with a choice, "A choice between faith in a loving God who knew all things and was in control, or a choice to fall into despair and anger that this horrible and terrifying thing was happening to us."

She knew God was present and He was asking them to trust Him. "OK, I thought, we'll do this. We will trust in You," recalls Laura.

After three years of battling cancer, they received the news from the doctor that things did not look good for Zach. The treatments were no longer having an effect on him. Zach gained some measure of peace in the belief that God had a plan that was bigger than him. He knew his suffering had purpose, even if he didn't see the reason.

When Laura found out Zach was terminal she prayed, "OK, Lord, you can have him. But if he must die, I want it to be for something big. I want someone's life to be changed forever."

At that moment, Laura says her soul was freed. God knew that what she wanted most of all was His will to be done. And if that meant watching her son suffer and die as He watched His own son suffer and die, then so be it.

Faced with only months to live, Laura suggested Zach write

letters to family and friends as a way to say goodbye. He chose to write songs instead. Zach started taking guitar lessons at the age of 11. His guitar teacher encouraged him to express his emotions about what he was going through by writing songs. One of the songs he wrote was called "Clouds."

Laura remembers finding the words to "Clouds" on a crumpled up piece of paper on Zach's bedroom floor. She was deeply moved by the lyrics and told Zach, "This is really good." He played a raw version of "Clouds" he had recorded on his phone.

As Zach's song played, Laura couldn't help but think, "This boy, who had been through more pain than he could ever deserve and who had to wrestle out his own private battles with God, had taken it all and turned it into something special."

Laura knew they needed to get this song recorded because she wanted to hold on to this song forever. Zach set up a time with his guitar teacher, who had some recording equipment, to do a recording. Laura shared the recording with friends and family who all loved the song.

In November 2012, Laura received a call from a local radio station. They wanted to interview her and Zach to help raise money for the Children's Cancer Research Fund and Gillett Children's Hospital. They also asked if Zach would be up for playing and singing a song.

Zach jumped at the opportunity. The song Zach originally chose was too upbeat. As a second option, Laura sent them "Clouds." The producers loved it. Two days later, Laura got a call from Dan Seeman, the general manager of Hubbard Radio Broadcasting, the station where they had previously done the interview. He was so touched by message of hope in Zach's song he offered to get Zach into a professional studio with professional musicians to record "Clouds." A few days later the recording took place and Dan even offered to have it videotaped.

"It was one of those magical days that don't happen very

often, when people are brought together for something bigger than themselves, by something bigger than themselves,” recalls Laura.

In December 2012, the radio station began their radiothon to help raise funds for the Children’s Cancer Research Foundation. They played the prerecorded interview with Laura and Zach from a few months earlier along with the song “Clouds.”

The local newspaper ran a front-page story that focused on Zach’s battle with cancer and the writing of “Clouds. The newspaper website also posted the “Clouds” video. The phones rang as people called in to donate what they could. Laura received emails and messages on Facebook and their CaringBridge site from people all over the Twin Cities.

The outpouring was overwhelming and unexpected. Zach even did a few live performances with his band, A Firm Handshake, with whom he wrote and recorded a few other songs on a CD titled *Blueberries*.

CNN soon contacted the family about doing a story on Zach and the song “Clouds.” When Seeman heard about the CD *Blueberries*, he got others involved to help professionally produce the CD.

Laura met Scott Herold with Rock the Cause, a nonprofit organization that works with music artists to set up charitable digital music distribution. He helped to get Zach’s music on iTunes and on sale in one hundred forty-six countries around the world. Following the success of his viral hit, “Clouds,” Broadcast Music Inc. BMI was so moved and inspired by Zach’s story and song they signed him as one of their artists and invited him to come visit their office in NYC.

Laura shares, “As we did our best to live in the moment and focus on the joy that was present, Zach’s story began to make its way around the globe and people were listening.”

Zach lost his battle with cancer on May 20. When he passed away his fans pushed “Clouds” up to No. 1 on iTunes, Spotify and the Billboard charts. The week of June 8, “Clouds” debuted on *Billboard* magazine’s Hot 100 list at No. 26 and No. 1 on Rock Digital Songs, making it the first song in music history to ever reach such status with only the backing of a nonprofit and exposure from digital media.

Zach and his family teamed up with the Children’s Cancer Research Fund to launch the Zach Sobiech Osteosarcoma Fund to raise awareness and money for kids suffering from osteosarcoma. The partnership with Children’s Cancer Research Fund allows 100 percent of donations made to Zach’s Fund to go directly towards research.

Zach’s fund has raised over \$740,000 to help fund research in finding a cure for this disease.