

Zachary Graham Adolescent Pertussis Patient

A junior at Sunapee Middle High School in Sunapee, New Hampshire, 16-year old Zachary Graham excels in both academics and sports. He is Vice President of his class, plays on three varsity sports teams and participates in the school's annual Model Congress, sponsored by Harvard University.



When Zachary began coughing just before last year's Thanksgiving holiday, his parents assumed it was a winter cold. Unaware of the seriousness of his condition, Zachary still traveled to the Olympic Training Center at Lake Placid for skiing training sessions. However, within a few days, his symptoms were much worse, having severe coughing episodes, often followed by vomiting, difficulty sleeping and breathing.

Because his symptoms mirrored those of a common cold, it took weeks to get a final diagnosis of whooping cough (commonly known as pertussis). Betty May, Zachary's mom, remembers the scariest moment was one morning watching Zachary coughing holding onto the sink for balance, unable to breathe or speak. She was about to call 911 when the coughing subsided.

It was during a visit with a pulmonary specialist that Zachary was finally diagnosed. The specialist was not surprised that Zachary had contracted the disease even though Zachary had been vaccinated against whooping cough as an infant. Zachary's mom was taken aback to learn that immunity from the vaccination wanes five to ten years after the final shot, leaving many teenagers vulnerable.

Describing himself as "one of those kids that actually looks forward to school each year," Zachary said the whooping cough affected his school work and his overall academic performance. Contracting such a contagious disease is frustrating and isolating for an active teenager. Zachary wound up missing most of the ski season and had trouble preparing for midterm examinations.



Betty May finally understands what friends meant when they said that whooping cough lasts a very long time. Zachary's complete recovery took awhile, as he experienced lingering symptoms of whooping cough five months after the initial diagnosis.

As the Graham family gears up for the new school year and sports season, they are thankful that Zachary will be able to participate in his junior year activities.