

Christy - A young survivor



The playground at the Reunion Primary School in south west St Lucia was abuzz with activity. It was the end of the school term and it was party time!

In the distance a group of five year olds, sporting face paint, ran towards the bounce-about. One little girl who was running ahead of the others was Christy.

"Christy come here" her teacher shouted.

With a frown on her face she made her way towards us - disappointed that she was taken away from her classmates.



No one would have guessed that Christy is blind. With confidence that belied even a sighted child her age, she made her way towards me.

"Something's wrong"

"Christy was a year and two months when my boyfriend saw that her eyes used to glow at nights." said her mother Desrie JnBaptiste

The anxious parents wasted no time in getting their little girl to a doctor at a local hospital. They were told to immediately go to Cuba to consult with Doctors there.

It was in Cuba that they received the devastating news.



*"It took us three days to get there, because she didn't have a passport. They told us that she was blind in one eye and they told me that they would have to take out the other eye because the cancer was spreading .They removed both eyes and she had therapy and they gave her false eyes,"*her mother added.

Retinoblastoma

Christy's diagnosis was Retinoblastoma - a rare type of eye cancer which mainly affects children under 5 years of age. Retinoblastoma is the most common eye cancer in children. It is generally discovered in babies between the ages of 6 and 24 months, although it can be found at earlier or later ages.

"I was devastated but the doctors said I would get used to it and I had to, if Christy knew that I was worried, she would worry too. Today everything is okay, my little girl has gotten used to the situation," said Desrie.

Christy has the distinction of being the first child who is blind to be integrated into the Reunion Primary School.

"I was very skeptical, I didn't know how to deal with a blind child. But the Department of Special Education encouraged me. They said Christy should be in main stream school. So I accepted her, it was stressful at first in that we were concerned for her-how would she find her way around and all that. But when she came she was like a normal child, she adjusted to the environment, was very independent and today she can find her way. The students are very very supportive," said Principal Anthia Lafeuillee.

"We treat her as a normal child, she is coping so well , we are trying our best. We have no regrets, I just wish we had resources," she said.

Sharon Pierce is Christy's classroom Teacher, she has learned to adjust to her student's special needs.

"To be honest I was very frightened at first. I didn't know what to expect. I never did any training in how to deal with children who were disabled. But when Christy came in it was a totally different situation. She is very very independent, she has very good memory, she is very vocal.

Sometimes when it comes to the writing, since I don't have the knowledge how to teach her braille. there are challenges. But apart from that she has been doing very very well. The children take her around, will help her with things she cannot do on her own," said her teacher.



**Christy with her Teacher,
Sharon Pierce**



With support from the Caribbean Council for the Blind (CCB) and the St Lucia Blind Welfare Association (SLWBA), Christy's future looks bright. With the help of her family and teachers this little girl will continue to make strides and pave the way for others not only in St Lucia but the wider Caribbean.

Some signs of Retinoblastoma

- **A white spot in the pupil in ordinary illumination**
- **One eye being a different color than the other**
- **Misaligned or crossed eyes**
- **Red, painful eyes**
- **Poor vision**