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Thon participant remembered for kind heart, strength of character

By **Caitlin Burnham** 
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Nancy Siegel said her favorite memory of her daughter was simply being in her presence, "watching her grow, hugging her, holding her, sharing all of her happy times with her friends and her family and just being around her."

Jillian Siegel, Nancy's daughter and a Penn State student, died Tuesday morning after suffering from Acute Myeloid Leukemia and Shwachman-Diamond Syndrome, Nancy said Wednesday.

Jillian, who was a junior majoring in elementary education, became ill during finals week last spring and left school after being diagnosed with leukemia this September.

She went through three rounds of chemotherapy at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore but was able to return home, where she died, said Philip Siegel, Jillian's father.

"She was a very kind-hearted, generous loving soul who found her niche at Penn State," Nancy said. "It took her a long time to find it, but she found it there."

Jillian was involved in Alpha Xi Delta sorority and the Interfraternity Council/Panhellenic Council Dance Marathon, but she didn't have enough time to become involved in everything she wanted to, Nancy said.

"Alpha Xi Delta -- that, she completely adored. She immersed herself in Thon. That became a very big passion for her. It all went so fast, she was only there two short years. She started getting involved with Homecoming but she got sick too quick," Nancy said.

Philip said she had a "terrific strength of character" and refused to back down, even when she was ill.

Ilana Kamens (senior-public relations) knew Jillian "probably forever." She said their dads were friends and she remembers playing in Jillian's room and shopping for Halloween costumes as kids.

"She was somebody who cared about others. She was a really good friend, sister, daughter," Kamens said. "She was happy. She didn't let little things bother her. She was a really good person."

Hometown friend Noelle Baldassano met Jillian in high school. They played sports and attended prom together.

She had been planning to visit Jillian in a few weeks.

"She would brighten up anyone's day," she said.

"She always had a smile on her face. Even after being diagnosed with leukemia, she was smiling. She always saw the brighter side of things," she said.

A memorial service is being held today in Maple Glen, Phillip said. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to Thon.

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