



## HEROES OF HOPE

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I was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia (AML) on January 24th, 2001. It was exactly one week after the birth of our third son, Nash. In fact, it was while I was visiting my wife and son in the hospital, that the pediatric nurse questioned my wife on whether or not I was feeling ok. Evidently I had a gray tint to my skin and just looked tired. They all convinced me to visit my doctor and after running a blood test, I was told I had cancer.

I remember coming home late from a basketball game and my wife telling me that our doctor called and wanted me to call him. I felt something was not right, because he emphasized that the call could not wait until the next day. Initially the doctor only told me that there was an "abnormality" with my blood test and that a specialist would be calling first thing the following morning. I pressed him to tell me what was going on and he said he felt I had Leukemia and that an oncologist would be talking to me. To say that we were shocked to hear that I had cancer is an understatement. Here we were with a newborn infant and now we faced the challenge of battling cancer. Of course we cried a lot that night but I think from the very beginning, we never talked about not making it. We waited to tell the rest of our family until after we talked with the oncologist and everyone dealt with the news in their own way. We had no time to think about the future, because I was immediately admitted for treatment. I took a room three floors above the pediatric ward, where my wife and son were just days earlier. I was scared but was prepared to fight as hard as I could.



At the time of my diagnosis, I was really unaware of American Cancer Society programs and services and never utilized any of the services they provided. I intentionally did not jump on the internet and search out statistics on my disease or survival rates. I was only concerned with surviving and being my own statistic. I was surrounded by a network of family and friends who not only took care of me, but also my family. I am sure some of my family did some research, but no one ever shared information with me. Knowing what I know now about the American Cancer Society and all of the wonderful programs and services they have to offer, I wish I would have taken advantage of some of them. I make it a point now to advise everyone that I can about these programs when they are faced with this life challenge.

I learned that Gleevec was an effective treatment for leukemia, but I quickly learned that it was for chronic leukemia and not acute like mine. I know that improvements in chemotherapy and more importantly the improvements in identifying infections and antibiotic treatments helped me tremendously during my "white count downtimes". I am not sure if any of these advances were a direct result of ACS research, but I have to assume they were, in some fashion.

Everyday that I continue to be in remission gives me hope that I am winning the fight. My family's support and love gives me hope that this disease is not going to defeat us. My faith in God provides hope that I do not have to fight the fight alone.

Walking around the track in the middle of the night looking at the names of all those who have fought the battle like I have, provides hope.

I volunteer for the American Cancer Society (ACS) because I want to be involved in an organization that is dedicated to fighting a disease that has touched me directly, and has taken so many of my family and friends away from me. Whenever I am working with the ACS or with Relay For Life, I know that I am surrounded by people who know exactly what I have gone through and they are committed to finding a cure. It happened this year during our Relay For Life. As I prepared to walk around the track for the Survivor's Lap, my sister asked me if I could carry her friend's young 4 year old daughter who was battling cancer. This little girl was so excited to learn that she was going to walk in a "special parade" and she was all smiles as we started walking. My sister told me that this fight was not going to end the way that we all wanted it to and that it was likely that she would not survive until next year. I was moved to tears as I carried this little girl around that track, knowing that I would probably not get the opportunity to do it next year. It is my dream that we get a miracle and I can meet her on the track next year and walk with her. If not, I will walk in her honor.

I would ask them to fight as hard as they can...that despite the shock and anger of having to hear these dreaded three words, anything and everything is possible if they will just fight the fight.

I attended an informational meeting about Relay and decided to become a team captain and form a team of family and friends. It was so easy to get everyone committed and excited about this new activity. No one on our team had any experience with Relay. I often make the following analogy when trying to describe the Relay to someone for the first time. You cannot describe the Grand Canyon in words, but you cannot experience the Grand Canyon until you are standing in front of it. When I walked that first Survivor Lap, I cried the entire time. I could not believe that I was surrounded by so many people who had gone through all of the things that I had during my treatment. After the Relay was over, I could not wait to get started on the next year's Relay. I have felt that way ever since and always will.

My focus and passion has been on Relay and serving as the Event Chair for the past 6 years. Now that I have successfully passed the leadership torch on to our new Event Chair, I can begin my work in the advocacy arm of the American Cancer Society.

My inspiration comes from all of my family members and friends who have lost the fight. I have made a commitment to continue their fight for them, in their honor.