

Integrative News

Weathering the Storm: Living with and Overcoming Cancer

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Survivors of childhood cancer often find their illness and cancer treatment alter their lives in powerful ways. Two of our survivors wanted to share their unique stories with you.

My name is Duane Lewis and on August 29th, 2003, my life was changed forever. That was the day I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Being diagnosed with cancer first seemed like a death sentence, as I had lost an aunt and uncle to the disease, but eventually my diagnosis turned out to be a blessing in disguise.

Just days before my seventeenth birthday, I began chemotherapy at SUNY Downstate Hospital. Chemotherapy is an assault on the body. It introduces toxic drugs with the hope of cure. There were times when the sickness and pain seemed to get the better of me. I withdrew from the world. I wouldn't go outdoors. I stopped communicating with friends. Sometimes I wished I could just disappear and die. It seemed like no one understood. I would frequently question myself as to how much I could take or if I should just give up, but the overwhelming support of my family gave me the will to go on.

In February 2004, I was told my cancer relapsed. After a series of additional treatments my doctors decided to transfer me to Columbia University Medical Center for a bone marrow transplant. During my stay, I became friends with many fellow patients, some of whom have passed away. The young adults who comprise The Cancer Dancers, ITPCC's wellness and mentoring group, were integral in helping me transition back into regular life. Soon I had many new friends and began to enjoy life once again. It felt so good to have people understand on our level and have shared similar experiences. No more was I afraid or embarrassed of having cancer. Today, I have been cancer free for nearly three years. I have new friends. I

have restarted school and now I am in my second year as biochemistry major with hopes to become a doctor. For me there is no better way to give back than to give others what was given to me.

My name is Josue Martinez. I am a survivor of a brain tumor at the age of 21. In Puerto Rico when I was about 12 yrs old my vision was decaying and my mood started changing. I started receiving psychiatric treatment to deal with having an anorexic sister and parents divorce. We had to move to NJ, where I was still being seen by psychiatrists. I soon began college but my vision continued to worsen. After two years at NJIT and a GPA of 4.0, I got a NASA internship. I worked as hard as I could, but I saw I was thirstier than ever and had no motivation to listen to music or draw as I did before. After my internship, I went home to NJ, and one day, I fell unconscious on the bath tub and woke up with the back of my head open. It was like I was the main actor in a scary movie. I had to crawl down the stairs and call my mom. She didn't believe it because I was always playing with her. We went to the local ER, and after 4 MRIs, they told me what I was suspecting. I had a life-threatening disease. My doctor came to my hospital room to tell me I had two cancer tumors in my head. This doctor had no mercy. He said: "Hi, I'm here to tell you have two cancer tumors in your brain." I started crying, and he told me not to worry. I said: "You mean not to cry or worry about two tumors in my head?" "Yes," he replied, without even shaking my hand. When my mom came to see me in the hospital, I told her what was happening. She was stronger than me and showed no tears. Frustrated with our care, we transferred to Columbia University Medical Center for treatment.

I went through six months of high dose radiation. I was bedridden, in a wheel chair and fell into a deep depression. As dark as I got, I always held onto the glass half full and willed myself to get better. I had no friends, except the staff at Columbia University. When I finished my treatment, I was exhausted; I could not walk and had gained 80 lbs due to the



Integrative Therapies Program for Children with Cancer
Columbia University

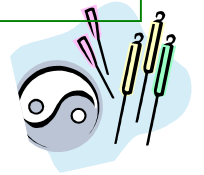
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Highlight: Running the 2008 NYC Marathon in support of ITPCC

The Integrative Therapies Program for Children with Cancer (ITPCC) is celebrating its tenth year of service, and in honor of this great achievement, Team Continuum, a non profit charity that raises money through worldwide marathon participation, awarded ITPCC 20 running spots to for the 2008 ING NYC Marathon. Within one week of announcing the openings, all spots were secured by our supporters, staff, and families. Each marathoner is fundraising for the event, and for every dollar raised, a matching dollar will be donated by one of our program's longtime benefactors. All proceeds raised will support the clinical services of ITPCC.

With a dollar for dollar match, ITPCC can raise over \$40,000! We welcome all who are interested in supporting the marathoners. To make a donation, go to www.teamcontinuum.net and donate to a particular athlete. A list of our athletes can be found on our website: www.integrativetherapies.columbia.edu.

Weathering the Storm (continued)

prolonged steroid use. I tried hard to keep my spirits up and was introduced to The Integrative Therapies Program at the clinic. From that point on my life had begun. I started intense exercise therapy and rehab and was put on a strict diet. My Exercise Therapist got me strong enough to walk again and gave me the confidence to meet new friends. A whole new group of survivors were introduced to me. We are now one big family, called The Cancer Dancers. I have finally met my goal weight and I am back in the game of living. I help Christine, who runs the wellness program, recruit and mentor other kids that are fighting for their lives. My life has a higher meaning and a deeper purpose because of my experiences. I will begin Hunter College in the fall with three of my new cancer survivor friends from the hospital. We now refer to us as "The Dream Team" and with the help of the ITPCC program are here to inspire other kids going through treatment.

Both Duane and Josue have utilized multiple clinical services from ITPCC during and following cancer treatment, including acupuncture, massage, aromatherapy, reiki, herbal and nutritional guidance, and yoga and pilates. Currently, Duane receives acupuncture twice a week to improve his appetite and fatigue and Josue receives personal training three times a week to maintain his weight loss.