

Story 1 - 2010 5k Participant

... I was able to participate in your 5 K in Oct. It was extremely emotional for me as I drove in the parking lot to see the mass of people participating in your event. The cause is so personal and I just wept in my car for a while before I pulled myself together and was a part of something that I will remember forever.

You are all amazing and such an inspiration!

Thank you for your efforts and I applaud your success for a cause, which needs to find answers!

Story 2 - Why Do I Run?

As a young girl, I always imagined 16 as the *perfect* age. It's the year teenagers earn their driver's licenses, attend prom and visit colleges. In my young eyes, a sixteen-year-old's life was filled with promise. As I began my junior year of high school, however, I learned my "sweet sixteen" would be a far different experience than I had anticipated.

On August 29, 2003, my world flipped around when I learned my school physical had lead to a diagnosis: Advanced Melanoma. Before that day, I couldn't define "melanoma." I thought skin cancer affected middle-aged men and elderly women who never wore sunscreen. Yes, I was blonde and fair-skinned, but I felt healthy. I was *sixteen*.

In a matter of moments that morning, my thoughts no longer surrounded my chemistry lab or weekend homework. Instead, I faced the reality that I may not see my high school graduation, let alone earn a college degree. My vocabulary soon filled with terms like "diagnostic surgery," "long-term treatment plan," and "pediatric success rate." Rather than learning Pre-Calculus in school, I was enrolled in a real-life statistics class which covered the likelihood of how far my cancer had spread, the chances I would beat it, and how remarkably young I was to encounter this illness.

It's easy to consider all that cancer takes away from its patients. Instead of dating or going to the movies with my friends during high school, my hair was falling out. I couldn't keep my eyes open past 8:30 pm on a Friday night. However, this picture of cancer is incomplete.

Through cancer I gained more than I lost. I learned about the power of family, the support of a church and the grace of God. My parents, Christian community and faith in Jesus, coupled with an incredible team of skilled doctors, brought me through the most challenging journey of my life. I would not be the 23-year-old I am today without knowing the lessons I learned at 16.

Even now at 23, my cancer experience still shapes me as I continue to grow from it. It is by God's grace that I can be called a cancer survivor; I have been blessed with each day I've been given since 2003. Cancer is an experience I would *never* wish another to endure, but it's also given me more than I

expected on that August morning. Unfortunately, though, not everyone can claim this truth. This Run's For Jack, and the money it raises for the fight against melanoma, is one step we can take to bring the gift of survivor-ship to all. The gift of life is why I run.

This year will be my sixth run for Jack. Each year I am inspired by the commitment of the Glen Ellyn community to fight this illness and by a family, the Marstons, who continue to find light after a dark loss. This race honors a man whom I never knew, but with whom I shared a disease and an oncologist. I am a direct beneficiary from the research *TRFJ* supports. I run for Jack, because it's one more step we all can take away from cancer.