



With the Help of an Angel



How one person's struggle became a helping hand for all.

by Andrew DeYoe



Nearly six years ago, Jonny Imerman was diagnosed with testicular cancer. At 26 years old, Imerman's world was shattered. He was scared, nervous and in shock. Fortunately for Imerman, he had his friends and family to help him through the arduous treatment process.

While undergoing chemotherapy, Imerman looked at others in the oncology clinic and realized that he was different. Each day, Imerman's room was filled with family members and close friends, giving him support and keeping him from losing hope. However, in many of the other rooms, hope already seemed lost. As Imerman walked down the hall with his chemotherapy IV-pole on the way to the bathroom, he saw people fighting cancer alone. They were lying in bed, motionless, watching television or staring into space. Their only personal contact was a nurse checking in for a minute or two on the hour. Imerman

knew this was not right, and it upset him. He made a silent promise that if he were given life after cancer, he would help these people.

How could he help? Imerman walked into the other rooms, one at a time, and introduced himself: "Hey, what's up, I'm Jonny. What's your name? I have testicular cancer. What type of cancer do you have?"

Many fellow patients were older than Imerman, and a few were younger. Although they were exhausted just like him, everyone was friendly and welcomed his conversation. They shared stories, emotions and opinions about many things in life. They all had their own type of the same disease. Some fought for themselves, others for their children, and others for a spouse or loved one. But no matter the motivation, everyone was fighting for life.

Wandering from room to room, Imerman wondered how he could help everyone fighting cancer, regard-

less of age, cancer type, sex or life experience. He asked: "What if every cancer fighter could talk to a cancer survivor, who not only had beaten the same type of cancer, but who also was the same age and gender as the fighter?" The cancer survivor would be an angel—walking, living proof that the fighter could win, too. From that realization, Imerman Angels was born.

Imerman Angels is a not-for-profit organization that connects a person fighting cancer today (cancer fighter) with someone who has beaten the same type of cancer (cancer survivor). The one-on-one relationship provides the cancer fighter with the opportunity to talk or meet with someone who is especially familiar with the situation.

It also allows the survivor to personally help a fighter as he or she battles the disease.

For example, in April 2007, a woman named Kim contacted Imerman Angels. Currently fighting breast cancer, Kim is

40 years old and has three children. Her diagnosis was a complete shock, and although she had her family's support, Kim felt isolated and scared. After hearing about Imerman Angels through a friend, Kim contacted the organization and was excited to have the opportunity to talk to another young mother who had successfully fought breast cancer a few years earlier. During her first phone call to Imerman Angels, Kim said she was looking forward to when she could jump the fence from fighter to survivor so that she could help another woman through the fight. And so the support network continues to grow.

Today, Chicago-based Imerman Angels pairs cancer fighters with survivors all across the United States and abroad. In addition to pairing cancer fighters and survivors, Imerman Angels connects caregivers, such as family and friends of cancer survivors, with other caregivers whose loved ones are still experiencing the fight. Currently there are more than 460 survivors in the Imerman Angels network and

“What if every cancer fighter could talk to a cancer survivor, who not only had beaten the same type of cancer, but who also was the same age and gender as the fighter?”

more than 200 cancer fighters. Of those fighters and survivors, a significant percentage—nearly 10 percent—is located in the greater New York City metropolitan area, including Connecticut and New Jersey.

Fighting cancer is a personal struggle, but it requires understanding and support. Imerman Angels can help those fighting cancer and gives those who have fought cancer the opportunity to give back some of the support to someone who needs it now.

If you know anyone touched by cancer, please encourage him or her to contact Imerman Angels for free services and support by visiting www.imermanangels.org.

Andrew DeYoe is a 26-year-old law student at Loyola University Chicago. He was diagnosed with thyroid cancer at 23, and it is currently in remission. DeYoe, a graduate of the University of Michigan, has been involved with Imerman Angels for more than a year and serves as the associate director of outreach for the organizations.