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Prudent awakenings

RedEye asked a few Chicagoans to share what they consider to be their “starting over” moments. [A.E.R.]

‘A beautiful, peaceful feeling’



Michigan native Jon Imerman was in Detroit working for an Internet company and taking classes for his MBA when he was diagnosed with testicular cancer at age 26.

It turned out to be the best thing that’s happened to him, he said.

While he underwent five months of chemotherapy and several surgeries, Imerman in 2003 started a side project called Imerman Angels, a non-profit that matches people fighting cancer with cancer survivors of the same age, gender and cancer type for one-on-one support.

After his cancer went into remission more than three years ago, he made two major life decisions. The first was to leave his familiar Michigan surroundings.

“I woke up one morning, drove [to Chicago], looked at an apartment building, signed a lease, drove back and broke the news to my family and friends,” Imerman said.

The second was to leave the consulting firm he ran and dedicate himself to Imerman Angels. He remembers that the decision clicked last June “somewhere around Kalamazoo” as he drove from Detroit to Chicago after visiting a mentor who reminded him to follow his passion.

Today, Imerman, 31, runs the Angels program out of his Gold Coast studio, and counts 380 survivors and 120 cancer fighters in his database.

“[Cancer] revealed my passion” for helping people, said Imerman, who didn’t take a paycheck for eight months after dedicating himself to his non-profit. “For the first time, it’s 100 percent channeled, and it’s a beautiful, peaceful feeling inside to feel that.”