

Cancer Survivor Employs His Experiences to Help Others

When Andy DeYoe walked into class at Loyola University Chicago School of Law one evening this past summer, he had no idea it would make such an impact on the student sitting behind him. He wore a shirt advertising the organization he worked for. It read www.imermanangels.org, a nonprofit organization that pairs cancer survivors with cancer fighters. The student sitting behind him had been diagnosed with cancer only a few weeks earlier.

Just how did DeYoe end up working for such an organization? The story starts in July 2004, when DeYoe was a teaching assistant in the special education program of a middle school in a Chicago suburb.

"I always wanted to go to law school, but after graduating from the University of Michigan I thought I'd take a year off to do something else and get some experience," says DeYoe. "I thought teaching was a nice transition to law school." DeYoe intended to teach for a year but liked it so much that he signed on for a second year.

But his plans changed the summer after that first year, when he went to his doctor for a routine exam. "My doctor found a lump on my neck that didn't seem normal," says DeYoe. "He passed me on to a specialist who did a biopsy the next day. Two days later I found out it was cancer."

DeYoe was diagnosed with thyroid cancer, a fairly common cancer that happens to be uncommon in young men. DeYoe had surgery to remove his thyroid gland that fall, followed by radiation treatment. He finished his second year of teaching and



Andy DeYoe

began applying for law school in the fall of his third year as a teaching assistant. DeYoe started law school the next fall.

"Originally coming in to law school, I wanted to do education law," says DeYoe. "I wanted to represent families with children who need specialized services in public education." But his personal experience with cancer has shifted that focus. "Now I'm leaning toward health care law and public interest law," says DeYoe. "There is a lot nonprofits can do, but we can also impact government, cancer research, and general health care policy."

Imerman Angels gives DeYoe the chance to be involved in nonprofits and health care policy in a hands-on way while in law school. As associate director

of outreach, DeYoe works to raise awareness of the organization in the medical community so medical professionals can make cancer patients aware of the organization.

In the past year, Imerman Angels has made nearly 1,000 pairings of cancer survivors and cancer fighters. "We're kind of like the Match.com of cancer," says DeYoe. "We match recently diagnosed cancer patients with someone who is like them in age, sex, type of cancer, and stage of cancer."

Now that DeYoe is on the winning side of cancer, he's putting his hard-earned knowledge to good use. "There is joy on the other end of cancer," says DeYoe. "I can say, 'I beat this,' and I can give others the hope they need."

DeYoe is spreading that message both through his job and as a law student. The student sitting behind him in class that summer evening was Kim Klein, a second-year, part-time student who is a mother of three.

"I am just absolutely amazed that, of all the seats in that classroom, Andy was sitting in front of me," says Klein. After that in-class meeting, DeYoe put Klein in touch with the organization's founder, who matched her with a cancer survivor who, like Klein,

is a working mother, is near the same age, and who had the same type of cancer about a year ago.

"I am so lucky that I have an amazing support group," says Klein. "But as fabulous as that all is, unless you're living it, you don't understand it. Cancer is like a club you don't really want to be in. The other club members know more about you in the first five seconds of meeting you than people you've known all your life because they know what you're thinking and feeling."

"Someone who has just been diagnosed doesn't know what to do yet," says DeYoe. "A survivor is someone who has had the same fears and can tell a cancer fighter what the treatment process is like."

Through his personal experience and legal education, DeYoe is helping others down the road he traveled just a few months ago. •

Kristi Lemoine

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