

BY JODI CHARNAS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANGIE BAAN

In October of 2001, at age 26, Jon Imerman was diagnosed with testicular cancer. "It was just one of those things that came totally out of the blue," says Imerman, a 29-year-old commercial property manager for Princeton Management.

Imerman, who graduated from the University of Michigan with a psychology degree, and received his MBA from Wayne State, hadn't been to a doctor in three years when unusual pain caused him to rush to the hospital. Initially, Imerman was misdiagnosed with epididymitis, an inflammation or infection of the epididymis, a convoluted duct that lies on the posterior surface of the testicle.

Two weeks later, after seeing a specialist when his pain persisted, he was diagnosed with testicular cancer and went into surgery the next morning. One week after surgery, he started chemotherapy.

"I never lost it," says Imerman, a Birmingham resident. "I thought, 'I have a problem, and these are the steps I need to fix it.' And I have an unbelievably supportive family. My mom was there for every minute and every chemo, and my best friends were always there to keep me stable."

Shortly after completing his chemotherapy treatment, Imerman received a call from 23-year-old Christina Dallas, a sister of a friend, who had just been diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. The two began talking every night, as he was able to answer questions and give support that only a cancer survivor could provide. He even held her hand through her first chemotherapy treatment.

This relationship inspired Imerman, in December 2003, to start his organization called Imerman Angels. His mom, Jane Ruzumna, is partially responsible for the name. "I really wanted to be able to give back to the people who were going through the same thing that I had gone through, but didn't have the same support that I had. I remember looking around me in the hospital and most people were alone through seven or eight hours of chemo."

Imerman Angels is a cancer support group that connects an individual who is currently fighting cancer with a cancer survivor, someone who has fought and beaten cancer in the past. The main purpose of this group is to set up one-on-one relationships to give a patient the chance to ask personal questions and receive support and encouragement from someone who is uniquely familiar with the situation. "There's a unique bond between two people who have both gone through something like cancer," says Imerman. The organization tries to make the closest match based on gender, age, treatment plan, etc.

Currently the organization involves 17 cancer survivors and five people who are fighting cancer. Says Imerman, "This is something I believe in and love. I feel like this is my responsibility — a gift I can give to others who are fighting cancer."

How can you help? Email Jon at jonimerman@hotmail.com to put Imerman Angels in touch with cancer survivors looking to support those fighting cancer and cancer fighters looking for the support of a survivor.