

GTA Spring Season 2012 Honoured Hero - Nicola

George Bernard Shaw defined drama as "the conflict between man's will and his environment." I've taken on two great conflicts in my lifetime, one by choice and one by circumstance.

In 1995 I was a 23 year-old stubborn and willful young adult. I had many plans for my future: go back to and finish university, see the world, become a runner and meet the man of my dreams, to name a few. It goes without saying that battling leukemia was not on the list. So when the doctor told me that I had Acute Myelogenous Leukemia and I needed to begin chemotherapy the following week, I was stunned.

I had been sick for a number of weeks before the diagnosis and growing progressively weaker. When I was finally admitted to the hospital my red blood cell count was so low that I needed immediate transfusions. And, so that began my treatment course. In the year that followed I had four rounds of chemotherapy, a bone marrow transplant, several blood and platelet transfusions, and various other drug treatments to fight the side effects of the chemotherapy.

In that year, I almost died from infection and twice I was admitted to an isolation ward. I received all of my blood transfusions, medicine and some of my food through a tube called a hickman catheter. My IV pole (which, incidentally I called Peter) was my dearest friend who was always with me. I battled infections, rashes, and really bad hospital food.

I fought against cancer with a combination of willfulness, humour and stubborn naiveté. I made sure I had enough information to make my medical decisions but asked that doctors withhold giving me statistics on the possible outcomes – because for my case, the statistics were never in my favour. I continued to plan for my future. I had a resolve and no matter how exhausted I was, it was that determination that carried me through. Dying was never an option.

Years later that determination served me well once again. The second challenge I took on by choice and it's the same choice many of you are going to embark on: running a marathon. One thing I learned for sure, success in running is as much about mental endurance as it is physical ability; not dissimilar from fighting diseases.

I started running six years ago. Runners make it look so easy and I had always wanted to be a runner so I was surprised at how emotionally exhausting it could be. But start I did and I began where all runners do: at the beginning. I ran one kilometer, two kilometers, then three and four. Eventually I had worked my body and mind up to five, ten and so on. I completed my first full marathon in 2011 in Rome thanks to the TNT coaches and staff.

I'm proud and humbled to be your Honoured Hero. The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society does great work towards finding a cure for blood cancers and you're now part of their accomplishments. As you take your first steps towards your goals in Madrid, Vancouver or Hamilton remember the following: you can do this!

When you've hit that wall and feel like you can't go on and need that *raison d'être* I urge to think about this: Fighting cancer is like running 100 back-to-back marathons. Let that thought carry you through your final kilometers because together, working with Team in Training we can all make a difference!

