When the **Patients** Become the **Doctors**

**IN A FEW WORDS, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELVES?**

**I'M AN ETHICAL, CARING PERSON. MY MOM ALWAYS SAYS I'M THE PEACEKEEPER IN THE HOUSE.**

**LATINA -- I AM HALF COLOMBIAN, HALF CUBAN... CANCER SURVIVOR... PROUD TO BE A RHODE ISLANDER.**

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**Xenia Catalina Fernandez**

Age 26, of Pawtucket, R.I.; class of 2018; plans to go into pediatrics

**Diagnosis Date:**

Feb. 11, 2004, age 13, acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL)

**Treatment Summary:**

About 2-1/2 years total. First month induction, then consolidation, then maintenance; finished May 2006.

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**Matthew Kocher**

Age 22, of Oakdale, Pa.; class of 2019; plans to go into pediatrics

**Diagnosis Date:**

March 1, 2005, age 11, acute myeloid leukemia (AML)

**Treatment Summary:**

Three heavy rounds of chemo, then a bone marrow transplant; began in March and finished August 2005.

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**Xenia and Matthew shared memories of things that helped them get through treatment -- including support from family, hours of TV, playing video games with friends in the hospital...**

**I still have them, they're in a bin under my bed.**

**Matthew's family knew he liked getting mail -- in the hospital, he received 25 cards a day from family, friends, and complete strangers from all around the world.**

**“My mom was pretty much my rock,” Xenia says. At one point, Xenia was craving ravioli morning, noon, and night for almost an entire month. So her mom kept the freezer stocked with it.**

**I didn’t eat ravioli for three years, I was so tired of it!**

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**ATTENDING**

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**EM DEMARCO**

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“ONE OF THE DARKEST POINTS... I TOLD THE DOCTORS ALL I WANTED TO DO WAS SEE MY BEST FRIEND. AND THEY'RE LIKE, 'BRING HIM IN!' I SAID, 'BUT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND -- IT'S A FOUR-LEGGED ANIMAL!'”

ONE TIME -- I BELIEVE HE WAS THE HEAD OF THE ONCOLOGY DEPARTMENT -- THE RESIDENTS ALL KNEW I WAS GOING TO PULL A PRANK.

YOU PRANKED THE ATTENDING? THAT IS EPIC!

I LAY IN BED AND WENT, “OH, I’VE GOT THIS PAIN IN MY BELLY!”

“I HAD A FART MACHINE UNDER ME -- [THE ATTENDING] Pressed DOWN ON MY STOMACH.”

“I WANTED THE BUTTON, SO HE PRESSED IT AND IT WENT OFF.”

“MY DAD HAD THE BUTTON, SO HE PRESSED IT AND IT WENT OFF.”

“[THE ATTENDING] JERKED BACK... ALL THE RESIDENTS WERE BUSTING UP LAUGHING!”

“IT JOLTED ME AWAKE. ... I WAS ABOUT 16. I JUST DECIDED, I NEED TO GO INTO MEDICINE.”

A FEW DAYS LATER, THEY UNHOMED MATTHEW FROM EVERYTHING, AND HE WENT TO THE HOSPITAL GARAGE TO SEE HIS DOG FOR ABOUT 15 MINUTES.

“TEN DAYS LATER, I WAS HOME. IT WAS A TURNING POINT FOR ME.”

AS PATIENTS, WHAT SURPRISED YOU?

“I HAD NO CLUE WHAT I WAS GETTING INTO... [THE CLINIC] WAS SUPER COLORFUL... IT WAS NICE BECAUSE, YEAH, YOU'RE SICK, BUT YOU'RE STILL A KID, AND THEY STILL WANT YOU TO HAVE FUN!”

“I WANTED TO ACTUALLY BE THERE AT THE BED, SEEING THE PATIENTS, TELLING THEM IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY.”

XENIA SAYS SHE HAD TO UNDERSTAND HER TREATMENT BECAUSE ENGLISH WASN'T HER MOM'S FIRST LANGUAGE. HER DOCTORS TOLD HER SHE SHOULD CONSIDER A MEDICAL CAREER, SHE SAYS, BUT THAT WASN'T ON HER MIND UNTIL LATER.

XENIA, DURING TREATMENT. ONE OF HER DOCTORS CALLED HER BROOKLYN, BECAUSE SHE OFTEN WORE THIS SHIRT TO CLINIC.

“EVERY TIME I WALKED IN... I WOULD SEE THE RECEPTIONIST [AND SAY], 'I'M HERE!'”

“JOE, IT SOUNDS LIKE HUMOR WAS A COPING MECHANISM?”

YES!

IN HIGH SCHOOL, HE SHADOWED A RESEARCHER AT HILLMAN CANCER CENTER, BUT MATTHEW DECIDED WORKING AT A RESEARCH BENCH WASN'T FOR HIM.

“YES! "

ANY FINAL THOUGHTS YOU WANT TO SHARE WITH READERS?

“I WANTED TO ACTUALLY BE THERE AT THE BED, SEEING THE PATIENTS, TELLING THEM IT’S GOING TO BE OKAY.”

WE GET THE DIAGNOSIS, WE GET TREATED, AND -- IF WE END UP BEING IN THE LUCKY GROUP -- WE SURVIVE, BUT IT’S NOT LIKE THAT’S THE END... WE HAVE TO KEEP A LOOKOUT FOR OUR HEALTH.

THE END OF TREATMENT IS NOT REALLY THE END. IT’S MORE LIKE THE BEGINNING OF SURVIVORSHIP.

ZACHARY WAS PRETTY MUCH MY CLINIC LITTLE BROTHER. HE WAS 8 OR 9 WHEN WE MET. WE WERE REALLY GOOD FRIENDS. WE WENT THROUGH TREATMENT AROUND THE SAME TIME.

THEN MY MOM GETS THE CALL... ZACHARY PASSED AWAY.

ANY FINAL THOUGHTS YOU WANT TO SHARE WITH READERS?

“I HAD NO CLUE WHAT I WAS GETTING INTO... [THE CLINIC] WAS SUPER COLORFUL... IT WAS NICE BECAUSE, YEAH, YOU'RE SICK, BUT YOU'RE STILL A KID, AND THEY STILL WANT YOU TO HAVE FUN!”

“I HAD NO CLUE WHAT I WAS GETTING INTO... [THE CLINIC] WAS SUPER COLORFUL... IT WAS NICE BECAUSE, YEAH, YOU'RE SICK, BUT YOU'RE STILL A KID, AND THEY STILL WANT YOU TO HAVE FUN!”