

The moments we live for are the ones we take for granted. The clumsiness of our first kiss, the anticipation of college, anxieties brought on by our first business-card-worthy job, and our endless quest to find a meaningful place in this world. These are just a few “burdens” we face that define our lives and elevate our souls. Any childhood cancer survivor can attest that these realities of life are not afforded to us all.

I was nearly twelve when I was diagnosed with ALL in 1988. What could possibly be more frightening than an already sagacious teenage girl? Add cancer, chemo and radiation to the mix and the result is your everyday teenage monster with leukemia: I was your average crabby, bald-headed, emotionally delicate, chipmunk-cheeked, ball-of-fire. It did not take long for me to realize that alongside, I had a entourage of peers with missing hair, limbs, eyes, puffed out cheeks, with traces of acne for some- I look back now and realize how awkwardly beautiful we were then.

It is human nature to forget, or should I rather say, to move forward with our lives. Sometimes we need to be reminded where we have been, what we have been given from our past and also recall those special people that are etched deep within our soul- because they gave us the ultimate gift of their love. All of us here, are who we are today because of ghosts from our past. When we remember, we make an active choice to let them live on.

For me, many of those special people have come from Children’s Hospital. Some have been immortalized at a forever age of 12. Like Jessica Rosario- my very first friend at Children’s and also my very first experience with loss. Jessica taught me that having cancer and all it’s entailments, could be fun. We turned clinic hallways into wheelchair racetracks. Flying down the corridor with IV pole in hand, giggling while getting reprimanded by our nurses serves as such a fond memory of mine. There is my best friend Nancy Jimenez who will never grow beyond the age of 14. Boy-crazy and just itching for her first kiss, she helped keep conversation and mind on the real issues: Shopping and Boys. Beautiful in every way, Nancy taught me that admiration and love visits not only those aggressively seeking it. Laura and her silent grace, Jacob and his love for music, Amy and her eclectic Sanrio collection, Kiki and her affinity to all things “Sponge-Bob”- this list sadly goes on.

But, there is another list that continues to grow within our Hospital. This list begins with our beloved doctors and nurses, it includes our child life specialists, our social support groups like Teen Impact, volunteers and an ever growing list of cancer survivors like Harold, Tavo, Joseph, Adriana, Torrance, Eidy, Jose, and Roxanne- who, despite the inevitability for loss, continue each day to champion the next generation of young and hopeful survivors.

This is what Children's Hospital has bred throughout the years. A group of young adults full of Life, Compassion, Ambition, Hope and a Sense of Responsibility- a group anxious to contribute to a community in desperate need of these very human qualities. We have become a full-fledged family of survivors, who for a lifetime- however long each may be, will share childhood cancer as a common bond and with full force, continue to impact our community at large.

For isn't much expected from those whom much is given?