

SURVIVOR BIKES FOR CURE

Joaquin Takes LIVESTRONG Challenge

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JAFFREY - As a chiropractor and firm believer in holistic healing practices, Dr. Joshua Joaquin is not typically the type to head to the doctor's office with every little health problem. But he thanks his lucky stars that he did just that three years ago, when he detected a large growth in his neck while shaving.

"I showed it to my wife, and she said I was going to the doctor immediately," he recalls. "I hate to think what might have happened if I'd waited."

At the time of detection, the cancer that had started in his thyroid had spread to his lymph nodes, but no further. Two surgeries removed the thyroid, with a softball-sized tumor and a large section of tissue from his neck which included 72 lymph nodes, leaving him in need of daily hormone supplements, but cancer-free.

It all happened very quickly for Joaquin, who had during the previous fall, just purchased a bike on eBay and started riding for fun and to get in shape. Because of his new-found interest in cycling, Joaquin found himself paying serious attention to the Tour de France for the first time. Like millions of others around the globe, Joaquin was inspired by the feats of cancer survivor Lance Armstrong.

Within weeks, he found himself relating to Armstrong's story far more than he ever would have wanted to. "Being diagnosed with a potentially life-threatening disease really changes your perspective on the things that are and aren't important in life," said Joaquin, who has been married ten years and has a nine-year-old son, and seven-year-old daughter.

Far from discouraging him, his diagnosis cemented his dedication to cycling. Despite going through the two surgeries in 2003 and radiation treatment in 2004, he always made time to ride. He logged more than 1,500 miles in 2004, and over 2,000 in 2005. He has a goal of 2,500 miles for 2006, but the rainy weather has him a little behind his anticipated pace. He remains on pace for at least 2,000 miles, however.

Joaquin typically does his riding in the Monadnock area, with occasional forays to the seacoast to mix things up. This September he'll be able to add Philadelphia to the list, as Joaquin will participate for the first time in the Lance Armstrong Foundation's LIVESTRONG Challenge, which raises money to support the fight against cancer.

Joaquin has pledged to ride 100 miles at the event, and has solicited \$1,000 worth of sponsorships so far. He will be

participating under the banner of the 29-member Cyclists Combating Cancer team, which includes riders from across the U.S. as well as the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Cyclists Combating Cancer has so far raised over \$62,000 for the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

"I feel very fortunate that I've had something to focus on as I've gone through my recovery," said Joaquin. "I think that is one of the most important things -- to continue your life and have things other than cancer to focus on. It doesn't have to be biking, although that has worked wonders for me. I don't know what I would have done without it."

In addition to keeping his mind from dwelling on the negative, Joaquin's cycling hobby has also served him well physically. He has lost weight and gained strength. "I feel great, better than I did before," he said. "The nice thing about cycling is that anyone can do it. I'm a big guy, no one's image of an athlete. But an average guy can go out and do 40, 50 or 100 miles."

The hobby is not without drawbacks, however. "I don't like the winters anymore," said Joaquin. "I ride a stationary bike inside, but it isn't the same."

While biking on his own has been great for him, Joaquin is looking forward to joining the larger cause of the Lance Armstrong Foundation.

He did a similar ride for MS a couple years ago, and anticipates doing the LIVESTRONG Challenge again in the future. "I'm proud to be a part of this, along with thousands of others. I hope we are sending the message that a diagnosis of cancer doesn't have to be the end. You can persevere, get through it and survive."

Not only has Joaquin survived, but when he looks back now, he can't help but think that "all areas of my have improved dramatically. Unless you have experienced that, it is hard to understand." In addition to the physical activity he gets through cycling, Joaquin feels that attitude has played a huge role in his return to good health. "The word cancer can be so devastating," he said. "It is just a word. We try to minimize it, to find the humor in it. People think that is strange, but it really helps."

He goes for checkups every six months, and will likely do so for the rest of his life. Those visits are intimidating, he admits, but the rest of the time he tries to focus on living rather than on his illness.

"I ride because I can," he said. "I'm very thankful for that, every day."

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