

A letter from Jonny Imerman

I am a testicular cancer survivor. I was born in Saginaw, Michigan, in 1975. When I was just a baby, my parents divorced, and we moved to a suburb of Detroit called Bloomfield Hills. I attended Cranbrook Kingswood School from kindergarten through high school. After graduation, I moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Michigan. After college, I returned to the Detroit area. I worked during the day while earning an MBA from Wayne State University at night.

Suddenly, one Thursday morning in October 2001, my busy world came to a standstill. At 26 years old, I was diagnosed with testicular cancer. I couldn't believe it, so I went to another doctor for a second opinion. He confirmed that I had cancer. The testicle was the epicenter of the disease. I went right into surgery. My left testicle was removed.

Although the surgery went well, my visits to the doctor did not stop there. It soon became clear that the cancer had spread ("metastasized") from the testicle. The disease was making its way up my body. The form of testicular cancer I had was a "non-seminoma." That means it was a mixture of many different types of cancer cells, as opposed to a "seminoma" tumor, which consists of only one type of cancer cell. Non-seminomas are much more aggressive and spread much faster than their counterpart.

I knew what was next—chemotherapy—but I did not understand what that meant. What is chemotherapy? What color is it? How will it make me feel? I called my brother. I started sobbing. I could barely talk. My world was shattered. But, I was not going to give up.

My oncologist told me that the treatments might make me sterile. So, I went to a cryogenics laboratory to bank sperm. After that, it was time to start chemotherapy. My chemotherapy recipe was known as BEP: Bleomycin, Etoposide (aka: VP-16), and CisPlatin. My regimen included three cycles of chemotherapy. Each cycle lasted three weeks. One cycle included:

Week 1: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday—8 hours of chemotherapy each day

Week 2: Wednesday—2 hours of chemotherapy

Week 3: Wednesday—2 hours of chemotherapy

The treatment weakened my body and wiped out most of my white blood cells. In fact, I was in such bad shape, the doctors were forced to delay my chemotherapy while my body recovered between cycles. In addition, the chemotherapy caused many side effects: throat sores, mouth sores,

skin rashes, dry skin, cystic acne, extreme fatigue, hair loss, numbness in my fingers and toes, and partial hearing loss. But the most damaging side effect was a blood clot that developed in my left arm. The clot formed around my port, a medical implant that was an access point for my chemotherapy. The doctors had to remove my port, pull out most of the blood clot, and then pump me with blood thinners to break up the rest. With all the side effects and delays, the chemotherapy lasted for five months.

At last, after all the treatment, I thought my fight was over. I slowly returned to the gym, started going out socially, and got back into life. Although I was happy to be alive, every day was a challenge. I did not have as much energy. I looked different. I struggled to find my post-cancer identity. Just as I was getting comfortable with myself, I learned the fight was not over.

Nearly one year after chemotherapy, a routine CT scan showed four tumors along my spine. Rather than risk cutting the spine, the surgeon went in through the stomach. He made an 11-inch incision, placed my organs to the side, and took out each tumor. The surgery lasted for four hours. It was successful.

Finally, I was freed from the disease and began my road to recovery.

I made a vow to myself while I was on chemotherapy. I looked at others in the oncology clinic and realized that I was different. Each day, my room was filled with family members and close friends. With so much support, I did not have a chance to lose hope. However, in many of the other rooms, hope already seemed lost. As I walked down the hall with my chemotherapy IV-pole on the way to the bathroom, I saw other people fighting cancer alone. They were lying in bed, motionless, watching television or staring in space. Their only stimulation was a nurse checking in for a minute or two on the hour. I knew this was not right. It upset me. I felt guilty because I had so many good people and so much positive energy around me. I made a silent promise that if I were given life after cancer, I would help these people.

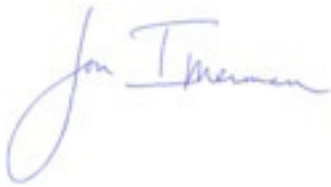
So, how could I help? I walked into the other rooms, one at a time, and introduced myself. "Hey, what's up, I'm Jonny. What's your name? I have testicular cancer. What type of cancer do you have?" Many were older than me. A few were younger. Although they were exhausted just like me, everyone was friendly and welcomed my conversation. We shared stories, emotions, and opinions about many things in life. We all had our own type of the same disease. Some fought for themselves, others for their children, and yet others for a spouse. But no matter the motivation, we were all fighting for life. And I wanted to help them get it back.

I wondered: “What if every cancer fighter could talk to a cancer survivor, who not only had beaten the same type of cancer, but who also was the same age and gender as the fighter?” The cancer survivor would be an angel—walking, living proof that the fighter could win too. What an amazing connection. This is why I created *Imerman Angels*.

I want to thank “each” of you for taking the time to learn about our mission. The number one way to help is to connect us with cancer fighters and survivors. They are the lifeblood of our service. No one should fight this disease alone.

I wish each of you well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jonny Imerman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jonny" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Imerman".

Jonny Imerman
Executive Director
Imerman Angels

P.S. I strongly believe that all charitable organizations must work together for the collective good. That is why I have served, or currently serve, on many other non-profit boards and committees. They are:

Communications Committee for American Cancer Society Chicago; Associates Board of Gilda’s Club Chicago; Associates Board of Lynn Sage Cancer Research Foundation of Northwestern Memorial Foundation; Associates Board of Bear Necessities Pediatric Cancer Foundation; Associates Board of Kid Power; Associates Board of A Silver Lining Foundation; Auxiliary Board of the Center for Independent Futures; Executive Board of Right Angle Educational Foundation; Associates Board of Chicago Gateway Green; Annual Event Committee of the Young Leadership Division of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago; Membership Committee of the Greater North Michigan Avenue Association (GNMAA); Associates Committee and Membership Committee of the Standard Club Chicago; Executive Board of the Broadtree Adventures Foundation; Junior Board of the Lookingglass Theatre Foundation; Cranbrook Kingswood Alumni Association; Advisory Committee of the Alzheimer’s Foundation of America; Advisory Committee for Camp Kesem at Northwestern University (camp for kids whose parents have had/have cancer).