

Go. Do.

by Ashlie White

“My life is about more than being a cancer patient, it’s about more than being an amputee.”

David Ostiguy isn’t going to tell you that he has cancer. He’s not going to tell you that he’s had multiple amputations and numerous surgeries because of his cancer. David assumes that people will notice his missing right arm, but he lives his life in a way that, for most who meet him, his limb loss is an afterthought.

When David was diagnosed in July 2003 with Alveolar Rhabdomyosarcoma, he never imagined that 7 years later he would still be fighting his battle with cancer. “Initially, I was surprised but I never once thought that it would be something that I couldn’t beat,” said David.



David tosses a ball before throwing it to his dog, Bindy, at his home in Cary, North Carolina.

Photo by Ashlie White

Near the end of 2009 David was told by his doctors that his cancer had metastasized in his spine. The doctors said that radiation may help reduce the size of the lesions and that an aggressive regimen of chemotherapy might prolong his life and slow the progression of the cancer, but that there wasn’t much else they could do.

Despite the doctors’ gloomy outlook, David took the news in stride and began to make plans to do some of the things he had always wanted to do. Attending Bonnaroo was one of the many things on a long list of experiences David had in mind. At the time he began making plans to attend the festival, the future of his treatment plan was undetermined. He had just received a series of radiation treatments designed to stop the growth of the lesions in his spine. “I don’t care how I have to get around, I’ll get around,” he said.

A few months later, David joined 75,000 other music fans for the 4-day Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival in Manchester, Tennessee. “I’m not going to stop living, I’m going to do the things I enjoy doing and not let this (cancer) stop me,” he said at the festival.

His friend decided to rent an RV and his fellow camper-mates wanted him to have the bigger, more comfortable sleeping area. David accepted, but would not have expected the gesture. David expects very little in terms of sympathy from anyone and rather prefers not to receive any at all.

David chose not to take advantage of any accommodations or special accessibilities provided by Bonnaroo, which is known for being one of the most accessible festivals around. “You know I’m not going to pull the cancer card,” said David.



David jokingly takes a piggyback ride on his wife Leilani’s back at Duke Gardens on the Duke University Hospital’s campus. David often goes to Duke Gardens in between appointments and treatments at the hospital.

David’s strength and mental ability to overcome some of the physical obstacles that he has faced through his treatments and amputations have often surprised even David. That strength paid off during the 4-days of blistering heat at Bonnaroo. After



David eats a bratwurst before the Phoenix show at the “Which Stage” venue at the 2010 Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival.



David is surrounded by fellow Bonnaroo attendees to see Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros in the “This Tent” venue at the 2010 Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival. Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros is one of David’s favorite bands and one of the main shows he wanted to see at this year’s festival.



David, left, rides his mountain bike wearing his new prosthesis designed specifically for biking while Brian Gold, right, a resident at Beacon Prosthetics and Orthotics, observes his progress.

enduring hours outside in temperatures in the 90s and a heat index of over 100 degrees, David found an uninhabited piece of ground, took a seat and listened to the *The National*, just one of the many bands he would see during his 4-day music binge.

“It was seriously awesome. I was pretty psyched going in, but man, the whole experience and atmosphere of the different genres of music and people all jamming along together was so cool, so glad I made it,” says David reflecting on his experience at the festival.

David is no stranger to self-motivation. He goes to work every day. He still mows his lawn and changes the oil in his car. An avid mountain biker, David began to miss riding after his second amputation. He went to his prosthetist, Eddie White of Beacon Prosthetics and Orthotics, and asked him to make an arm that he could wear to ride his mountain bike. At the time, David had undergone an amputation that left him without an elbow. His prosthetist was enthusiastic about the project and began researching possibilities for construction of the arm.

The day that David rode his bike with his first mountain biking prosthesis was a special day for him and everyone who knew anything about his journey. “He’s my hero. I’ve never met anyone with a more positive outlook on life,” says White.

David’s discovery of yet another recurrence would come after a weekend of riding his bike. He discovered a small bump on the end of his residual limb and first thought it may be a simple irritation from riding, but after a visit to his oncologist, he found out that he would have to have a revision

surgery. This time it would be a shoulder disarticulation.

One of David’s first questions to his prosthetist was whether he could make a riding arm for a shoulder disarticulation. David was cast for his new socket a week after his surgery.

“When I lost my hand, that was hard, but oh well. I lost an elbow; I didn’t cry over that. That wasn’t that big of a deal. I lost the rest of my arm, and yeah that was an inconvenience . . . but it’s always been about survival and whatever they need to do to help with that, I’ve kind of been cool with,” says David.

David’s wife and biggest supporter, Leilani, has walked beside him through it all. She has made the sacrifices necessary in her own life to make sure that she could be there to support him. This past May, Leilani graduated from Peace College, a personal goal that she had long hoped to achieve. It was David’s turn to support her, and he was there to cheer her on as she walked across the stage.

David’s life isn’t only about challenging himself to go and do, but it’s also about helping others do the same. Nancy Payne, RN, MSN, Limb Loss Clinical Nurse Specialist at Duke University and member of the ACA’s Medical Advisory Committee, noted that David is an active member of the Triangle Amputee Support Group and that he has volunteered with the Duke University physical therapy students to help them become more knowledgeable about patients with upper-extremity amputations. Nancy also pointed out that his help with the Duke Sarcoma Run/Walk both the first and second year has helped raise a significant amount of money for the cause. “David’s outgoing and positive attitude has been an inspiration to everyone, including the medical staff at Duke University Hospital, as well as the members of the support group,” says Payne.

To anyone who knows David or has ever had the privilege of meeting him, it is obvious that his life is about more than being a cancer patient and amputee, it is about going and doing and helping and being. ■

Photos by Ashlie White

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