



Magda Jacobs: Global Hero of Hope – 2013

At the age of 21, I was diagnosed with brain cancer. I was told that I only had a 20% chance of surviving surgery and that even if it was successful I may not recover fully. Surgery was scheduled for just a week after my diagnosis and I remember saying goodbye to family and friends shortly beforehand. Yet, despite the fact that I had brain cancer and that there was a strong possibility that I might die, I had a feeling that everything was going to be fine. Before going in to surgery, I was calm, because I knew that I would see my loved ones again.

My faith, supportive family, as well as the willingness of the staff at the oncology centre to share my jokes about the “Halloween mask” I wore during radiation therapy, helped me to cope with what was happening to me.

Before the operation the doctors shaved the one side of my head. I remember feeling embarrassed about my appearance, as I had always felt my hair was my best feature. My right eye was damaged during the operation and was now closed. Afterwards, before radiation therapy commenced, I visited the local CANSA Care Centre to look at some wigs, because it was likely that I would lose all my hair as a result of treatment. This reality completely overwhelmed me as I stood looking at the wigs and I ran out – I had already lost one eye and felt that I wouldn’t be able to bear looking at myself if I also lost all my hair.

At the same time, I realised that I had been given a 2nd chance and that there was no room in my life for self-pity. I decided to make the most of it and told myself I would beat cancer!

As I recovered, the staff at the Rustenburg CANSA Care Centre became like family to me. I felt that they understood what I had gone through. I still go there for regular check-ups and am touched by their support. It strengthens me to know that their door is always open for a quick chat when I need encouragement.

I first heard about Relay For Life (RFL) a few years ago, when I was invited by a team to participate as a cancer survivor in an event. This experience proved to be life changing!

As I took my 1st steps behind the Survivor Banner, while “Amazing Grace” played in the background and heard the thunderous applause from all the participating teams and members of the community supporting them – applause for all the survivors on the track, including myself – I was reminded forcefully that there were people who cared about me and others in my position. I realised I was not alone and that I am a survivor. I had survived brain cancer and I was here to celebrate my life, remember those who had lost the fight and to encourage others with cancer to fight back, because I was living proof that cancer could be beaten!

Since my first RFL I have eagerly participated in our annual Rustenburg RFL event and each year I can’t wait to walk the Survivors’ Lap to celebrate that I have put another year between myself and

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cancer. Every RFL is memorable and as I walk behind the Survivors' Banner, I become emotional, but the applause becomes my strength - my tears subside and my smile broadens as I walk around the track.

Looking around at those participating in the RFL events I have been part of, shows that cancer doesn't discriminate – it knows no age or gender. At Relay, Survivors get the chance to be part of a family of individuals who have shared the same heartache, gone through the same ordeal and have lived to tell the tale. Caregivers are also made to feel special. This is important to me, as I know how much my parents went through while they supported me.

The reason I want to share my story is so that I can give others hope. I am now the Survivor Chair on our RFL Committee and I volunteer at my local CANSA Care Centre. Today I am a richer person due to cancer – when I look in the mirror and am reminded of the cancer when I see my closed eye, I realise I am privileged to be alive.

I believe that my Big Daddy brought cancer into my life in order to open my eyes. He closed one eye again though, to give me the opportunity to share what happened to me with others – when people see my eye they often ask me what happened – and then I am able to share my story of HOPE with them.

It's been 12 years since my diagnosis and I wish to continue touching lives, inspiring those affected by cancer and making a positive difference for many more years to come.

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