



“My Story” by Kirsten

My involvement with Team in Training began from a hospital bed on the fifteenth floor of Vancouver General Hospital. It was October 2006 and I was undergoing high-dose chemo and a stem cell transplant. Six months earlier, a persistent cough had led me to my doctor’s office where a chest x-ray and biopsy confirmed that a 10 cm mass in my chest was Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. Rarely in my life had I been sick. Now I was facing months of chemotherapy. When five months of chemo was unable to bring about a remission, the next step was the transplant.

While I was isolated in the hospital, I came across the Team in Training website. I was very moved by the kindness of so many people taking time out of their lives to raise money for blood cancers. I was also on a lot of “medication” and decided that it would be a good idea for *me* to do a marathon once I got out of the hospital! This was somewhat ironic given that I was not in great shape and had literally no immune system at the time. Furthermore, during gym class in high school, my friends and I would hide behind a bush at the beginning of our “long” runs and sneak back into the group when they were on their way back. Practicality is clearly not my specialty.

Although the transplant was tough, I got through it with no complications. When I was strong enough, I had twenty rounds of radiation to get rid of any remaining disease. It was during this time that I began training with TNT. I had hardly any hair and my hemoglobin was so low that my legs felt like lead, but with the support of the Team and my friends who signed up to support me, I was able to keep going. In fact, I truly believe the positive physical and mental energy I gained from training with TNT helped my healing process.

By the end of February 2007, I was finished radiation and starting to feel like my old self again. By this point, we were completing about 13 km during training. It seemed like a long way to 42, but little by little, week by week, my body got stronger. By May, I felt ready.

On a rainy Sunday morning, I set out, side-by-side with my good friends, Lisa and Zoe, and the rest of the Team. It was a physically and emotionally challenging day. At many points during the race, I could see VGH, where I had my transplant just months earlier.

I thought of those there on the fifteenth floor now, battling blood cancers, hoping, like I had, that a transplant or the right medicine would cure them of their disease.

On that day, it was also all I could do not to cry every time a “purple person” (a TNT team member) went by. I cannot explain what it meant to have people running and walking that day, and many days before and since, raising money and awareness for the very disease I was battling. I will also never forget the image of my family and friends at the finish line, arms wide open with tears streaming down their faces.

While I have not yet been able to shake the Hodgkin’s, I feel it is only a matter of time before I will. In the words of my ever-tactful oncologist, “You are a stubborn girl, so you have a stubborn disease.” Normally, Hodgkin’s is curable in up to 85% of patients, so, more than ever, I understand the importance of fundraising and research. I am one of many - too many - waiting for the breakthrough that will save my life.

In the meantime, I continue to be amazed by all of you who join Team in Training. It is no easy feat to diligently train for an endurance event over many months, in all kinds of weather. Yet, knowing that you are out there, running or walking toward a cure, gives me the strength to continue fighting when I can’t find it in myself. For that, I thank each and every one of you.