



Karie Schlukebir
Melanoma

When I was first diagnosed with melanoma, in January of 1999, I had no idea that my life would change drastically. I knew that the “C” word was very serious, but I was only 18 years old, a freshman at Indiana University (IU) in Bloomington, and no one in my family had ever fought the disease. I was also in great shape and training to start my collegiate tennis career. I felt invincible. My outlook changed immensely when the melanoma metastasized to my lungs in January of 2000. I was forced to leave Bloomington, drop out of my spring semester courses, and forego the tennis season.

Since my diagnosis almost 10 years ago, I have undergone a multitude of treatments including interferon, bio-chemotherapy (three times), radiation, gamma knife radiation, IL-2, and GMCSF. On top of that, I have undergone about a dozen surgeries, a collapsed lung, chest tube, *thorecentesis*, blood transfusions, and been stuck with a needle more times than should be allowed by law.

My cancer has recurred three times in 10 years, and I often have people marvel at how I still manage to fight the disease and remain positive. My response is that I don’t really have a choice! I have faced many worthy adversaries on the tennis court in my life, but melanoma is one opponent where losing is not an option. Despite my many setbacks, I have not let melanoma define my life. I received my bachelor’s degree in marketing and my master’s degree in sports marketing and management, both from IU. I also was a member of the women’s tennis team where I helped captain the team to a Big Ten Championship in 2004.

Throughout the ups and downs that I have faced, I have always been able to rely on my friends and family for support. My dad was a constant companion to all of my treatments in California. My mother was my stay at home nurse in between treatments. My two sisters provided me with constant love and support. My friends and teammates kept my spirits high. My coaches at IU, Lin Loring and Ramiro Azcui, supported and believed in me. The amazing oncologists and nurses at The Angeles Clinic and St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica, California gave me endless love, support, and direction.

While I was undergoing the bio-chemotherapy and radiation treatments earlier this year, I vowed to give back and help others battling the disease. My last rounds of bio-chemotherapy and radiation ended in late July. The scans after my treatments were clear, and my strength has returned to almost 100 percent. Even though there were many times that walking to the mailbox and back was a challenge, I am now training to run a marathon in April 2009.

The SHADE Foundation has provided me with an amazing opportunity to run in the prestigious Boston Marathon while raising money for a cause about which I am extremely passionate. The money that I raise will support continuing efforts to eradicate melanoma as well as education for prevention and early detection of the disease. For more information, please visit my Web site at

www.shadefoundation.org/events/2009_Boston_Marathon/KarieSchlukebir.

Cancer has changed my outlook on life. I realize that every single day I am alive is a blessing, and I am thankful every morning to be alive. One of the best quotes I saw was, "Don't sweat the small stuff. And, it's all the small stuff." No one knows if his or her life will end tomorrow or in 80 years. Cancer has taught me to live everyday as if it is my last and to not put off going after my dreams. And, wear sunscreen!