



breathe in hope,
breathe out love

by LAUREN VINER | photo by SEAN MCGINTY

The same night he received the most sobering news possible regarding his illness, and just a few days before succumbing to his battle with Sarcoma, Jeffrey Guyer told one of his old high school friends that “When I meet the Big Guy, I’ll make sure he does something about your receding hairline.” At a time when no one would have faulted words of sadness or anger, his choice to enjoy the company of friends and family, and maintain a sense of humor, was completely in character. It’s clear from Jeffrey’s blog (Jeffreysfightwithcancer.blogspot.com) he lived his life according to a favorite phrase of, “Do it once, and do it right”, focusing on what needed to be done in the present rather than getting lost in an unfair, tragic situation.

Jeffrey’s family now wants to offer their journey with him, his inspirational blog and dedication to finding a cure for his illness as encouragement to anyone going through a similar struggle. A talented medical device engineer, Jeffrey invented the Guyer Lift which was named for him. An avid cycling enthusiast, Jeffrey was known for pursuing interests passionately. After his diagnosis he simply expanded his field of expertise and interests to include the cancer he was fighting.

Jeffrey’s father, Dr. Richard Guyer, co-founder of the Texas Back Institute, recalls June of 2010 when an initially innocuous pain in Jeffrey’s leg eventually became so severe it resulted in the cancellation of a traditional family trip to Montreal for a Formula One race. Dr. Guyer made arrangements for a scan in his son’s adopted home town of Boston which revealed the metastatic disease in his lumbar spine. Several biopsies finally resulted in a diagnosis of Sarcoma, a relatively rare cancer of the connective tissue which affects approximately 12,000 Americans each year. Surrounded by wonderful doctors Jeffrey started chemotherapy immediately. The treatment worked intermittently; in November/December things started to look up after Jeffrey began taking an experimental

drug. He was able to visit his family in Dallas for Christmas and “looked great. You never would have suspected he had cancer.” In January however the drug Jeffrey was taking, currently the best available for his illness, was no longer working and he underwent taxing surgeries in February and March. Throughout the duration of his illness he was “always very, very optimistic, [asking] what are we going to do next”.

Jeffrey ardently monitored his care. He and his wife Autumn kept a list of his medications and would send nurses off for answers if unable to answer their thorough questioning. It is this attentive approach Dr. Guyer most strongly wants to advise others to adopt. Patients need to be their own advocate and “you need someone in the family to be [the patient’s] advocate... I have great nurses on my staff but the best care comes from family.” He notes self-advocacy is a more common attitude now than it was in the past, patients have become much more savvy, fewer are content with telling their doctor to “do what you want”. By taking as much responsibility for their health and treatment as possible patients contribute to more effective treatment and they reap the psychological benefits of understanding their own situation.

He points out Jeffrey also did a lot of research, investigating different trials and reaching out to health professionals online. His blog closely chronicles the ups and downs of his struggle with a clarity that shows he was actively involved with the minutiae of his treatment as well as larger developments in the research field. Often his Oncologist hadn’t yet heard of the trials Jeffrey would bring up during appointments.

Dr. Guyer says the efforts to find a cure for Sarcoma are relatively underfunded and research is quite behind. The chemo Jeffrey initially started on was 20 years old, and while promising trial drugs are awaiting approval in the US, Sarcoma doesn’t have the visibility to prompt the same action directed toward other types of cancers.

Raising awareness of the disease be-

came a passion for Jeffrey and organizing people for a cause was another area in which he excelled. He joined and contributed to a community of people with similar cancers, often talking and networking via social media with patients around the world. In March Jeffrey and several of his friends joined forces to become ‘Team Jaguar’ and organized Cycling Against Sarcoma to raise money for Sarcoma Research. In May and June of 2011 Cycling Against Sarcoma organized two 10 to 145 mile rides in both Dallas and Long Island. Through the efforts of Jeffrey, his friends and family, and the Texas Back Institute, the ‘Head for the Hills’ ride in Dallas raised nearly \$20,000! In May Team Jaguar also hosted a Texas BBQ fundraiser in DC, bringing in an additional \$600.

Jeffrey’s parents are continuing his efforts and are considering establishing their own foundation to direct greater resources to cutting edge research. Dr. Guyer says \$500,000 is really the threshold for substantial research. This scale of undertaking is “really what Jeffrey wanted. [And] nothing is going to change until we really attack it.” They are also hoping to publish Jeffrey’s blog to which he posted faithfully, beginning almost immediately after being diagnosed. It’s an inspirational and educative read; he conveys a significant amount of information, but with an active sense of humor. Jeffrey’s parents hope reading about how Jeffrey approached his illness may serve as a resource to others looking for help or guidance.

The night before he passed away Jeffrey insisted on walking two laps around the nurses’ station. Numbness in his legs made getting around difficult, but he was determined to do all he could at all times. The Guyers share a family motto which was also Jeffrey’s last words: “Breathe in Hope, Breathe out Love”. Their determination to fight insurmountable difficulty while continuing to enjoy life is a standard to which all can aspire.

For more information about cancer research visit jimmyfund.org.