

News

Office of Medical Information
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas
5323 Harry Hines Boulevard Dallas, Texas 75235-9060 214/688-3404

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CONTACT: Amy Dick
Office: 214/688-3404
Home: 214/691-5578
Fax: 214/688-8252

****Student's triumph over cancer inspires pediatric cancer career

Mark Owen was just 17 and about to graduate from high school at the head of his class when he was diagnosed with osteogenic sarcoma, a bone cancer most commonly seen in children.

Instead of giving his valedictory speech, on graduation day Owen found himself hospitalized at The University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston to begin 14 months of intensive treatment in hope of saving his life.

Today--more than four years later--Owen is a first-year medical student at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, planning to specialize in pediatric cancer research and surgery.

It was his own bout with cancer, Owen says, that inspired him to pursue a career of helping children suffering from cancer. And it was a \$3,000 annual scholarship from the Houston cancer center's Children's Christmas Card Project that helped him finance three years of premedical education at Louisiana Tech University.

Owen feels it would be poetic justice if he--who battled cancer himself--could have a hand in finding its cure. He has already

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devoted two summers to working with cancer researchers in a bone marrow transplant lab and has contributed to two articles published in professional journals.

Owen says he will be dedicating his life's work to the friends he made during his cancer treatment, especially the ones who didn't make it. "And a lot of them didn't make it," the medical student adds.

In fact, one "very special friend"--who didn't make it--left him with these words he lives by: "Take advantage of what you have today, and live each day as your last, with common sense. And most of all, trust in God."

Cancer patients' social lives come to revolve around the hospital and the people they meet there, Owen observes. "Other patients become your best friends. You spend most of your time with them, and you have things in common because they're going through the same type of treatment you are." Other patients understand about feeling sick and scared, he explained, and they aren't shocked by the loss of hair or limbs so often associated with cancer treatment.

Owen says that having cancer helped him focus a longtime interest in science and gave him a different perspective on life.

"You have to deal with what happened," he explains. "Some people try to ignore it, but I chose to use my experience to do something constructive that will mean something to others."

Owen believes his own personal struggle with cancer will enable him to understand his patients' thoughts and feelings, making him a better physician.

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Note: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.