

Meet Ron: Our September Honored Hero

Recovery

“a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.”

“The act or process of returning to a normal state...the return of something that has been lost, stolen, etc.”

On October 3rd, 2012 around 7:30 am, I walked into the ER unit at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha, NE. I had been experiencing severe gum and tooth aches for the past week and a half, and throat aches for two weeks prior to that. I was feeling very weak, disoriented and in pain, and the day before I had to leave work at lunch to go home and sleep.

At the ER, after explaining my three weeks leading up to that day, Dr. Nick Barber ordered a blood test, discovering that the Leukemia was quite rampant throughout my blood. He told me what he planned to do medically, and I called my school principal, Lisa Utterback, to tell her that I wouldn't be able to coach the soccer team that afternoon, and to make sure they had their uniforms and a referee for the game the following day.

Over the next few hours, I remember being moved from room to room, with different tests being done in each. I remember Dr. Barber telling me that they were going to fight for my life, and that I had to be mentally strong throughout the process. I remember the needle going into my backside for a bone marrow analysis.

What seemed like the following night turned out to be 9 days after I was admitted to OSCHU. My room was dimly lit with lights from machines, the helicopter pad, and Omaha night lights. Crystal, an OSCHU nurse, was present in the room. It had only been a couple of days since I became semi-awake and aware of the senseless turmoil and trauma happening around my illness.

At this point I was a mess! I was connected to tubes and wires, there was a port attached to the right side of my chest, and I could sense everyone's fear. I was in pain, weak, and unable to move any part of my body on my own. I remember feeling conscious, and fully aware of every sensation, every needle, every heartbeat, and every smile – the trauma of my situation was tearing those I loved apart, and I remember thinking, “I'm still alive, I'm still alive, I'm still alive”.

I asked Crystal how do I recover and get out of the hospital. “*How do other patients do it?*” Crystal came over to the bed and put her hand on my shoulder. “*You have to focus on setting small goals and do them.*” She gave the example of the water cup. If I wanted water, I had a difficult time lifting my head, so someone had to adjust the straw to fit in my mouth. “Next time, lift your head a little. It might not work the first few times, but it will eventually,” Crystal said.

Recovery became a minute-by-minute mission. Setting goals defined the success for the mission. I envisioned myself doing and then I watched myself performing, and I noticed patterns, and made mental notes.

If I became frustrated, I reminded myself to be patient. If I completed a goal, I gave myself a pat on the back, and headed right into the next one.

At day 525, after a life saving BMT from my sister Dorit on February 18, 2013, I am still recovering, I'm still setting goals, and every morning, I still whisper to myself, “I'm still alive! I'm still alive!”



Full Name	<i>Ron Azoulay</i>
Age	<i>38 (6-8-76)</i>
Ethnicity	<i>Multi-Racial/Israeli</i>
Diagnosis	<i>AML Type V flt3</i>
Current Status	<i>Alive</i>