Kenny Kane — CEO of Testicular Cancer Foundation

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Welcome to the Band of Ballers! In this series on ABSOT, I'm turning over control to some other ballsy testicular cancer survivors and patients who have inspired me with their work in advocacy and awareness during and after their diagnosis. This month's feature is all about Kenny Kane, the CEO of the Testicular Cancer Foundation. Enjoy!

When I was 18, my father (also Kenny Kane) was diagnosed with testicular cancer, specifically stage 2B embryonal carcinoma. Working in healthcare, he had access to a Urologist who performed a quick exam to confirm what he had felt. It was testicular cancer. It was days after his 50th birthday and a month before the end of my senior year of high school. My dad and I have historically had an open and comedic relationship.

When he sat me down with a serious tone, I knew something awful was coming.

Dad and I spent the summer of 2005 navigating his surgeries and chemo. I will never forget picking him up from chemo and driving to my high school graduation. As that summer concluded, it was decided that dad should endure a Retroperitoneal Lymph Node Dissection (RPLND) surgery to remove any possibility of the cancer spreading.

It was easily one of the worst days of our life, as we had more questions than answers at the time about what life would be like in the days, weeks, and months following. Luckily, dad recovered well and the time that passed without incident equated calmed our nerves as we exited the metaphorical woods of the cancer experience.

In the fall of 2009, I entered my senior year of college (5-year plan for those keeping track) and took a random advanced elective: Grant Writing. It was either that or Advanced Research Techniques. I felt like I was pursuing the lesser of two evils.

One random night in October our class had a guest speaker, who spoke on grant writing and nonprofits. While I don't remember much of the talk, I do remember getting in trouble for not being an active listener.

I was enamored and clicking away on the organization’s website.

Back then, the website URL was i2y.com which was shorthand for the I’m Too Young For This! Cancer Foundation. My interest was two-pronged. First, I was curious to learn more about this hip looking nonprofit, and second I needed an internship to graduate college the following May.

An email inquiry turned into an invitation to come see the office in Lower Manhattan, and an internship soon followed. I had a bit of a Wizard of Oz experience when I arrived at the i2y office, as it was a small room with a single occupant, Matthew Zachary.

MZ and I immediately nerded out together and a friendship was born. Alongside my internship, Matthew’s wife Jessica was preparing to give birth to not one, but two little angels that undoubtedly put me in the fast lane for a full-time position. Two weeks before college graduation, I was offered a full-time position as employee #2.

Between 2010 and late 2011, the organization went through a lot of changes that set us up for the success that followed. We changed the organization from i2y/I’m Too Young For This! Cancer Foundation to our tagline, Stupid Cancer.

We decided to take our “regional” conference from NY to Las Vegas. We secured an automotive sponsor and it was decided that I should drive a Volkswagen Beetle from New York to California before arriving at my final destination, The OMG! Cancer Summit for Young Adults (OMG2012). We also raised a lot of capital that gave the organization some much needed stability.

The initial Las Vegas conference attracted 550 patients, caregivers, healthcare professionals and advocates and really put Stupid Cancer on the map.

It was a watershed moment for organization and propelled us to national recognition in key parts of the healthcare world.

With this new level of excitement around Stupid Cancer, we were able to really build out programs and effect change within the young adult cancer world. Personally, I was able to sharpen my skills as a grassroots organizer, event planner, podcast personality, e-commerce operator, and more.

In the fall of 2015, I was getting hints from my good friend in the adolescent/young adult cancer space, Matt Ferstler. He was looking for his successor at the Testicular Cancer Foundation. The following spring, I embarked on what would be my fifth and final Stupid Cancer Road Trip to CancerCon (fka OMG! Cancer Summit). After 6.5 year with the organization, I moved from New York City to Austin, TX and began my latest chapter as the Testicular Cancer Foundation as Chief Executive Officer.

During this time, I also co-founded GRYT Health, a mobile health company. The GRYT App serves cancer survivors and caregivers by connecting them in real time. It’s available for iOS & Android with web coming soon! (Editor’s Note: Check out ABSOT’s posts about the app here.)

For me, cancer advocacy has been a way to tip my cap to my father and others in my life that have been affected by cancer or chronic illness.

Along the way, I amassed hundreds of friends that have been impacted. My work in cancer advocacy has been the most rewarding experience of my life.

I am honored to have been chosen as the honoree at Stupid Cancer’s TOAST event, as I celebrate a decade of cancer advocacy.

Stupid Cancer’s mantra has always been “Get Busy Living.” I have always felt that it didn’t matter if you’re a patient or caregiver…cancer reminds us all that life is fleeting and must be lived to its max potential.

Be sure to connect with Kenny by visiting him @KennyKane or kenny@tcancer.org. Until next time, Carpe Scrotiem!

Know someone (or even yourself!) who is supporting TC awareness and would be willing to share their story? Drop their name, contact, and why they should be featured into this Google Form and I’ll reach out to them and/or you!

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