It’s not a failure when you learn from it.

July 3, 2014 By Rick Nash

Before I get to explaining how my fourth treatment is going, (spoiler alert: I’ve survived the first three) I’d like to start with my first treatment.

When I was in high school my mother went on the first round of non-Peginterferon Ribavirin. The emotional swings, physical pain, and ultimately the failure of her treatment left me with a bitter taste. I didn’t want to deal with treatment. I delayed it until I saw a better one on the horizon. With my life on a swiftly-ticking clock, I asked my high school sweetheart to marry me in freshman year of college-- our engagement lasted a few years. In my senior year of college I jumped onto the Peginterferon and Ribivirin combo therapy, which would push me to hard limits. Imagine you’ve got the flu at its worst point, imagine it keeping that intensity for weeks on end. Throw in rashes, anemia, photosensitivity, and overall increased senses. That is Interferon. The mood swings I got would prompt me to cry at Steven Segal films and be moved by the personified feelings of a door handle. I helplessly witnessed my own futile rage at physical objects, as if somehow they would be compelled to submit to my will if I yelled loud enough. It took a few weeks to control the emotions enough to be able to resume working. With my then-fiancÃ© elsewhere, I turned to my friends for emotional support. It was something I wasn’t comfortable with doing, sharing my feelings with anyone other than my significant other was something I’d never done.

The treatment took its toll on both me and my engagement. They would both come to an abrupt end before summer began. None of my viral loads had moved, I began at 3,300,000 (5,000,000 is when you should have your tray tables up, because it’s gonna be a bumpy ride), and ended about the same. I dug myself out of these failures, literally. I dug holes, and moved dirt, I moved nearly a ton of dirt over the course of a month and a half from one side of my parents’ backyard to another. It was something where I could see my progress, something I could control, something tangible in a world I was losing hope in.

Over the next two years I graduated with my BA and started a new job at a local middle school. Each time a new treatment came around I would explain the circumstances to my coworkers. This second treatment wasn’t really new; it was the same one I’d taken previously, except at a higher dosage. The new treatment proved to only intensify side effects rather than intensifying its efficacy. Again, the treatment would test the boundaries of just how much of my shit people would deal with. With friends and family supporting me, I again failed, due to increasing in viral load from a little over 4,000,000 to 4,200,000. I was thrown for a loop, I took my energy to the gym and began to build back the muscle I’d lost. I mentally plotted out how my career decisions would be

restricted by the necessity to maintain my health insurance and how I could progress for treatments and my career. Working in education was becoming increasingly challenging because of constantly being issued pinks slips and having them retracted. My worsening liver disease began to manifest in ways I did not see coming.

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