

"A Parting Gift"

Shane Varga Update 6/15/2011

The beginning of June marked the end of my "Salvage" chemotherapy treatments. Again, the goal of these treatments was to not rid, but reduce the amount of cancer in my body before my stem cell transplant in July. As awful as chemo is, I think the treatments I had were something I needed to re-experience. The doses I get during my stem cell transplant will be significantly higher and I think enduring chemo now is preparing me both mentally and physically. I can't imagine what it would be like to go in for my transplant and have my cells "nuked" without any conditioning.

One thing to remember is that I am still recovering from my sternotomy. I am a little over a month and a half now and still not fully recovered. I did however feel good enough to start working out with weights again. I wanted to wait until after my last chemotherapy treatment to start. It just seemed like good timing as a new month was beginning.

My first test was to try a bench press with the bar. The bar only weighs 45lbs, but to this point the most weight I have tested my chest with was 18lbs. The weight was not heavy, but I could tell my muscles were not quite right. Your chest muscles usually connect to each other, but with the surgery I had they were obviously cut apart and any type of activity stretches them in a painful way. It will take time to feel right, but I was just happy I could bench the bar without injury. This meant I would be able to perform my favorite exercise and slowly work my way back up. This lasted ONE day.

The following morning I woke up and noticed my left bicep looked a little more defined than usual and just a little red like something had bit me. I hadn't really lifted weights in over two months so I knew that wasn't it, and I never really could get my arms big no matter how much I lifted so it just seemed odd. It was just my left arm and just a little bigger than my right. I knew those 10 reps of bench press didn't give me those results. So, being aware of my body I decided I needed to have my doctor take a look at it. One ultrasound later and I found out that I had blood clots that were caused by my chemotherapy. I had two veins with clots. One of the veins was clotted from my elbow to my shoulder. Just as I finished my last treatment I find out that chemotherapy wanted to send me off to IU with the gift of blood clots.

For 21 days I have to take a blood thinning shot at the hospital in my stomach to keep any future clots from occurring. Every shot leaves a pretty nasty bruise, but other than that it doesn't really make me feel different. I will then need to go on oral blood thinners for at least 6 months. This never happened last time, but I can't say I am surprised this time. It seems like whatever can happen, will happen. This doesn't really bother me though. The more I have to endure the more I appreciate the experience. The tougher it makes me. The more I know I can make it through.

I wanted to start lifting again to go into my transplant as physically strong as I could. However, the

fact that I am able to roll with this news and never once have one bit of “man this sucks” attitude is more important to me. It means I am learning from myself. My attitude is going from effort to habit and negativity is no longer a way of life. In fact, it is not an option. No one will believe me when I say this, but I promise you it is true. “Swear to God” if you will. I have never been more stress free than I am now! How can a guy given a 50% chance of living and about to head down for one of the biggest procedures most people will ever experience be stress free? ATTITUDE! I have finally taken control over my life. I have little control over getting ill, disease, accidents, etc, but I do have control over everything else. All the things that cause stress. Stress is what truly breaks us down causing us to get sick, get disease, or be depressed.

Looking at everything I have gone through and continue to go through I can tell you how empowering it is to look at life’s obstacles and push right through them with a smile on my face. That is why I am almost happy now when things go wrong because it can’t break me and every time something else happens to me I smile because it is another thing I have conquered. These bad things keep adding up and they should have a cumulative affect that should weigh me down, but it doesn’t, it makes me stronger. I may not be able to lift weights right now, but I feel like a weight lifter that has a bar on his back and people keep adding weights to see how much weight they can put on before he collapses. However every time a something bad happens and another weight gets added on, something supernatural increases my strength so that people can see that when you tap in to a higher power no amount of weight, no amount of bad things are heavy enough to bring you down.