

More Than Meets The Eye

A student's reflections on fraternity, brotherhood, life, and a year and a half battle with cancer

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In the fall of 2005, I made a decision that would dramatically change my time at Monmouth University by joining Sigma Pi Fraternity. At first, I was hesitant, but knowing that my best friends would go through the process by my side was a reassurance to say the least.

Now, more than two years later, I realize it was the best decision I have made in my life.

People typically stereotype fraternities as a drinking club full of wild party animals with no regard for themselves or the people around them. This is the total opposite of what Sigma Pi is all about. They are a family

the art treatment at Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital in New York City. Looking at me now you might notice my hair loss but there is much more to the story that meets the eye. Now one year in remission, I believe it is time to tell my story.

The point of this article is not to inform the school of my disease or struggle but to give recognition and appreciation to Sigma Pi and the Greek community in general here at Monmouth University.

When the news spread to the members of my fraternity, obviously they were devastated. The brothers were heartbroken and wished me the best for a speedy recovery.

At this point in my life all I wanted to do is be with my friends, be back to that perfect

of hats to try on and make me feel more secure about my hair loss.

I also recall Mike, one of my pledge brothers, driving in the rain from Philadelphia to come see me. When he arrived I was totally shocked to see him. He told me that he heard the news, got in this car and just started driving north, not knowing where he was going.

The last visit that I recall was when Warren, my Big, came and saw me; he was almost in tears to see me in this state. I do not recall crying much throughout my battle with cancer, but when I saw him, I could not fight the tears.

The brothers of Sigma Pi were always there for me, cheering me on, and making sure my head stayed high.

This was not an easy task, but the small things that they did such as these visits definitely helped me keep a positive outlook and know that one day I would be back to that lifestyle I had once before.

The little things like constant text messages and Facebook wall posts and messages sometimes might have been thought as insignificant, but in reality I think those people who never lost touch with me in my time of illness.

Daily, I would check my Facebook profile and see comments such as "We Miss You", "Hope all is well", "Can I do anything", and so on.

Again, these little things had such impact and made me know that I truly had great friends behind me. I knew I could beat this disease.

Just about the time I was getting my legs back and out of the hospital was homecoming here at Monmouth University. In the years past, I enjoyed and looked forward to this celebratory event, but suddenly I was reluctant to go to due to my appearance. I had no hair, bad skin color, and weighed 135 lbs.

I repeatedly told myself I was not going to go, but my friends would not let me stay home on the couch. I made my way to homecoming and was greeted by a mob of people. Not being able to stand for a long time, I took a seat and took in the sight of the people around me.

I was met with hugs, tears, stories of the past, and people who just wanted to be with me.

This was a touching moment and finally made me realize that even though I was gone a year, no one forgot about me,

and everyone awaited my return. I was then determined to make it back to start the next year of school.

A couple of more hospital visits and rounds of chemotherapy then ensued. While

brothers, and a wonderful girlfriend.

To the men in my fraternity, I could not thank you more and I'm proud to associate myself with each of you. The support that was shown to me through

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filled with love, concerns, and compassion for each other.

After I pledged, I was living the dream and perfect life as a 20 year old college student. I was in a great fraternity, had great friends, hung out with the best girls, and achieving good grades. After the spring semester ended, I was looking forward to summer, but in my heart I just wanted to be back in school.

Things were going as planned-my summer consisted of the beach and working when I can, in that order. August came and I was getting packed up to eventually move in with some of my fraternity brothers later that month.

My excitement came to an abrupt halt with one doctor's appointment.

I went to a local doctor with complaints of back pain. Living an active lifestyle, the doctors and I assumed this was a muscular injury. We both assumed wrong.

After taking a cat scan, the doctor came back with the results saying that I need to see an oncologist.

At this point I had no idea what oncology was, but then the doctor explained that I had a cancerous mass in my abdomen.

Several hospital visits to Columbia Presbyterian, along with a 20 day stay, resulted in diagnosis of Neuroblastoma on September 9th 2006.

Neuroblastoma is a life threatening cancer of the nervous system that needs to be treated as soon as possible. Since then, I have undergone two surgeries, seven rounds of chemotherapy, and several rounds of different state of

life that I once had, but the cruel reality was that this was impossible. My friends knew this and made it their best interest to keep my spirits up.

In my time of illness there was so much outpour and concern, but a few visits stuck out the most. I recall one time, when I was first diagnosed, two of the brothers came to the hospital and just stayed and talked to me.

This meant the world to me, I had not seen these guys all summer and they came to reassure me that everything will be alright and that they missed me.

One of my friends, Steve, who was a football player in high school, gave me a neck-

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JERRY MESSANA TALKING ABOUT WHEN HIS SIGMA PI "BIG" WARREN VISITED HIM IN THE HOSPITAL

lace when he visited me. He emotionally told me that he wore this necklace every game in high school for luck and to keep him safe.

He handed me this old, beat up, string tied necklace and I broke down in tears. I wore this necklace throughout my recovery and just recently was proud to give it back to him as a survivor.

Another visit was from my old roommate Oliver. Due to the chemotherapy, I had lost all the hair on my head. Oliver knew from speaking to me many times that this was bothering me, so when he visited me he bought me a couple

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