

Aurora High's Rath Kong will share cancer journey as Relay for Life's Honourary Survivor



By Brock Weir

Rath Kong was just 16 when left reeling with a cancer diagnosis.

Ms. Kong, then a student at Newmarket High School, was diagnosed with a Primitive Neuroectodermal Tumour. After receiving the news, her mind understandably raced.

It was almost like she ran into a brick wall. Options and suggestions were not being absorbed and the entire situation became increasingly overwhelming.

"The first thing that was in my mind when I found out was, 'I am going to die,'" says Ms. Kong. "I didn't really think I would have a chance to live at all. I just thought it was the end and I was done for. As days passed by, things just kept getting worse. I was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit and I thought nothing was going my way. I didn't feel like I was fighting at all, but when it came to the point where they removed the tumour from my stomach, I felt it was about time for me to start fighting back!?"

And fight back she did. Missing two semesters due to her cancer treatment, Ms. Kong, now 19, is working hard finishing off Grade 12 at Aurora High School. She will share her cancer journey with hundreds of people from Aurora and the surrounding area at Relay for Life as 2014's Honourary Survivor.

As she began the tentative steps on her path to kicking cancer, it was almost an entirely foreign concept to her. At the time, it simply didn't seem real, let alone something that could happen to her.

"But, once it did happen to me, I was really shocked and confused."

In time, Ms. Kong has found that her initial thoughts are those that are shared by so many young people before they embark on that difficult journey of eventually fighting back. When she was at that point to really kick cancer's proverbial ass, it was a matter of getting into the right place psychologically and emotionally.

"I needed to maintain my emotions and stay calm and positive about it rather than being negative, because that would just bring my whole body down even more and we wouldn't be able to fight back," she says. "My main focus was to try and be happier, be happy with how far I had come. For me, if I were to find out more information about this cancer, it would kind of scare me more and I wouldn't be able to go through it because I would just be looking at the negative parts. I just had to ignore those negative parts."

Ms. Kong received most of her treatment at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children. As a patient, friends and family were often the last people she wanted to see, but she soon came to realise the vital support they provided on her journey.

‘They would come and visit me every now and then and every time they did, I would tell them not to because of how much I hated myself and how I looked,’ she says. ‘I didn’t want to scare them with how I looked, so I would always tell them not to come and visit. But, they kept coming anyway, which ended up making me really happy. They just kept me going.’

‘Through it all, I developed lessons such as never giving up with the terrible things that are happening all around you. You just have to keep moving forward and just try to look up to what is coming in the future. I have always said to myself that in every tunnel, there is always a light and as long as you keep going you will find that light.’

This is the message she plans on sharing with participants in Relay for Life Aurora, which will take place through the night on June 6 and 7 at Magna International.

When she was asked to be Honourary Survivor by organizer Lynn Pearson, Ms. Kong says she was initially nervous about sharing her story.

‘A part of me didn’t really want to relive the memories of what happened,’ she explains. ‘It has been really hard to try and forget it because I didn’t want to be simply defined by cancer, but now that I think about it, I can help people because not many people know about the significance of it. I am just trying to do my best.’

‘Don’t give up. I know as the person who is affected by it or watching their loved ones struggle, they might feel as though they are helpless, but the one thing you need to keep in mind is never to give up or lose hope, because that is all you have.’