



**Brighter Tomorrows**  
 An Outreach to Families Touched by  
 Childhood Cancer  
 P.O. Box 126  
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 BrighterTomorrowsHope.org

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# THE BEACON

## Brighter Tomorrows Newsletter

Issue 6  
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## What Brighter Tomorrows Means to Me...

Tony Kuznik (20 years old) – a cancer survivor's perspective.

When Hope Shines Bright  
 By Tony Kuznik

Even in the darkest places, the smallest light shines a long way. For me that light was hope. The hope of getting healthy again. My battle against leukemia was the toughest thing I have ever endured. Even when I was told that things would not get better, I did not give up hope. I never let that light go out.

My cancer survival journey began during my freshmen year of college. Everything was going great for me -- I had friends, good grades, and was enjoying my independence away from home for the first time. Then things started to slow down. I started getting fevers multiple times a day and was always tired. At first, the doctors thought I had mononucleosis. When things started to get worse, they decided to test me for cancer. Before my tests I remember thinking to myself, "There is no way it's cancer. That won't happen to me." Two days later, on January 2, 2015, the doctor informed me that my bone marrow was producing cancer cells at an extremely rapid rate causing my lymph nodes to swell dramatically. I was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. When told that I had cancer, I couldn't help but feel isolated -- even though there were friends and family all around me. Regardless of how bad the situation was however, I remained unquestionably hopeful, telling myself, "I can beat this."



Leaving my home in Minneapolis and moving to Rochester indefinitely with my mother to receive treatment at the Mayo Clinic was pretty overwhelming for me. Thankfully, I had massive support from my friends and family who would come to visit me whenever they could. I even had friends who drove hours



# BRIGHTER TOMORROWS

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Register for the race at  
[www.goforthegoldrochester.com](http://www.goforthegoldrochester.com)  
 and take your photo with  
 Star Wars characters  
 from the 501<sup>st</sup> Legion Central  
 Garrison!

The Mission of Brighter Tomorrows is to provide emotional, educational, and spiritual support by listening to, understanding, and supporting families touched by childhood cancer. Brighter Tomorrows is a Minnesota non-profit corporation supported entirely by charitable contributions and primarily volunteer labor.

## What Brighter Tomorrows Means to Me...

Tony Kuznik (20 years old) – a cancer survivor's perspective.

for the sole purpose of shaving their heads with me when I started to lose my hair! In my experience, the first week away from home was the loneliest. It was difficult being separated from my family while going through chemotherapy treatments. I wasn't sure how I was going to get through everything and, at times, I feared my light was starting to go out. Then one day two women, whom I had never met before, came to my hospital room to speak with me. They introduced themselves as Sherrie and Shanna Decker from the organization Brighter Tomorrows. I was excited to meet new people as I did not know anyone in Rochester. My parents and I spoke with them for a couple of hours and, within that time, hope had again filled the room. Not only did Shanna share with us her amazing cancer survival story, but they also gave us many useful tips on how to make hospital life and treatments more tolerable. After speaking with them, I knew I could get through this and my light burned bright.

Throughout the next five months I received four rounds of increasingly intensive chemotherapy. Everyday seemed like a new battle. Since I was almost always surrounded by doctors and nurses, I often could not help but feel like I was just "the sick kid." One of the things I would always look forward to during this time was going to Brighter Tomorrows meetings. Every meeting was filled with constant encouragement and support. When I was at the meetings it was almost like I wasn't sick anymore. People treated me like a "normal person" and not "the guy with cancer." I met many supportive and amazing people who had gone through the same thing I was going through, which helped to reinforce

the thought that I would get better. My parents and I always enjoyed attending the meetings because they made Rochester feel more like home.

At the end of May, after finishing yet another round of chemotherapy, my doctor called my family and informed us that they wished to talk to us in person. That day we met with two of my doctors who explained that there was nothing more Mayo Clinic could do for me. My family and I were given two options: hospice care or try to find another hospital that would provide further treatment. We chose to travel to M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston to see what they could do for me. In Houston, over a five-month period, I received more chemotherapy, radiation, and a stem cell transplant from my amazing twelve-year-old sister, Camille -- whose bone marrow was a perfect match to mine. Today, I can happily say that with those additional treatments and a "never-give-up" attitude, I am now cancer free.

At the moment, I am still recovering from my transplant, but am in a much better place than I was a year ago. I am now taking online college classes and plan on returning to the University of Minnesota Duluth this fall. I am extremely grateful for the support I received from my friends, family, and everyone at Brighter Tomorrows. I know that cancer is a terribly difficult battle to fight, but even when things seem like they won't get better, never give up hope. Never let the light burn out. In the famous words of Winston Churchill, "Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never -- in nothing, great or small, large or petty... Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy."



Brighter Tomorrows is excited to introduce Emily Brownfield as their first Executive Director. Emily comes to the organization with a Master's Degree in Philanthropy and Non-Profit Management. She is excited to passionately work to help Brighter Tomorrows grow through connecting and collaborating with the community of Rochester and surrounding areas. She looks forward to meeting many of you through her new role. Welcome Emily!

## Go For The Gold

5k Run/3k Family Walk and Children's Races!

July 9, 2016

Silver Lake Pool NE, Rochester

Preregister at [www.goforthegoldrochester.com](http://www.goforthegoldrochester.com) and receive a shirt!



### 5k Run begins at 8:30 am

*Certified Race Course and Chip-timed  
Techweave Race shirts*

### NEW - Compete as a Team!

*Add some fun and sign up as a team to compete!  
Learn more at [www.GoforthegoldRochester.com](http://www.GoforthegoldRochester.com)*

### 3k Family Walk begins at 8:35 am

*Stroller Friendly  
Pets welcome if on leash*

### Awards Ceremony at 9:30 am

*Congratulate our winners and hear from our honorary family members! Great prizes awarded to top fundraisers! Win a Raleigh bike, Apple Watch or a stay at the Radisson Blu MOA*

### Children's Races begin at 10:30am

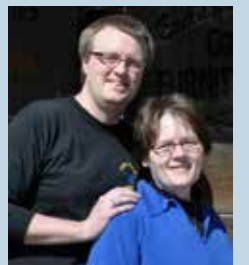
*Race T-shirts and ribbons! Cool Prize Drawings*

**Face Painting, Balloon Animals, and Popcorn!**



## Tomorrow's Chapter ~ Hope for Grieving Families

My husband Brad and I were welcomed into Brighter Tomorrows in 2010. Our daughter, Casey, was diagnosed with Acute promyelocytic leukemia (APL) in December 2009 and fought a good fight. She was in remission when she was struck with Demyelinating Tumefactive Multiple Sclerosis (DTMS) in August of 2013. She unfortunately lost her battle to the APL and DTMS on October 2, 2013.



Through Marianne Maruca, formerly at Season's Hospice, and the Diamond Program at Mayo Clinic, Brad and I were put in touch with Tomorrow's Chapter and encouraged to be a part of this remarkable support system. Tomorrow's Chapter has given Brad and me a place and connection to be who we are, without judgment. This organization has assisted us in our grief process and has helped us to work through a lot of our emotions and feelings. They helped and supported us in the days when our loss was so new and raw, and they are all still with us today. We would be lost without the connection with the other parents and staff in this group. As unfortunate as it is to lose a child, it is comforting to be with others who know what you are going through. Every story and situation is unique, but the understanding is present, and that is what makes all the difference. Tomorrow's Chapter is huge in the success of life after the loss of a child. I look forward to being there to help others in the future.

Sincerely,  
Joy and Brad Cole