

Survival and Hope Life After Cancer

About Me:

RESIDENCE: Victorville

OCCUPATION: Frontier frame worker, DJ

FAMILY: Roxann, 37, wife; Gabriel Hernandez, 21, son; Alina Villareal, 15, daughter; Regina Villareal, mother; Ernie Villareal, father

HOBBIES: DJ-ing

PHILOSOPHY: Everything happens for a reason

*“All I said was,
‘I want to
go home.’”*



The American Cancer Society provides a 24 hour service to answer questions about diagnosis, insurance, local support and resources

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If you or someone you know would like to be featured in this series, please contact Liz McGiffin at liz.mcgiffin@cancer.org.



Michael Villareal, 36 Type of Cancer: Testicular Cancer

By Alberta Hale Crigler

On Dec 12, 2007, Michael Villareal woke up with pain in his groin area.

He saw his primary doctor the same day and was told it was likely an infection.

But later that day, after work, Villareal decided something wasn't right, and he went to the emergency room.

“They did an ultrasound,” he said, “and they found a tumor.

“When I got out of ultrasound, they said, ‘Your room is ready.’

My wife and parents were in the room already.

“The doctor said, ‘I have bad news: We believe you have testicular cancer.’

“It was almost like a movie, where the sounds kind of went muffled and you could sort of hear the people talking.

“All I said was, ‘I want to go home.’ I thought this was something that happened only in the movies.

“My wife and I went home,” he said. “It hit me a couple hours later, what was happening. I became extremely emotional at that point.

“When I saw the urologist, he already had the disc. He said, ‘It looks like you have cancer; let's go ahead and schedule the surgery.’

“After surgery, they thought it was definitely cancer,” he said. “It was stage 1. They caught it early because of the pain.

Three or four weeks later, the pathology report confirmed cancer, and Villareal was strongly advised to undergo chemotherapy.

He started 10 weeks of chemotherapy treatments on March 21, 2008.

“It was Monday through Thursday for eight hours, then Friday was a short day of six hours,” he said.

“My days consisted of ‘The Price is Right,’ playing Scrabble with my wife and sleeping.

“The kids brought their mattress and stayed in our bedroom with me. The were 10 and 4 at the time.

“My daughter said her Teddy bear had cancer in his stomach and was going through it with me.

“I would have 8 o'clock chemo so I could be first and get the window seat and the TV.

During chemotherapy, Villareal's hair fell out.

“My kids understood dad lost his hair because of medicine,” he said. “They were very supportive.

“It was a scary moment when I went to scratch my head at 2 or 3 in the morning, and my hair was falling out.

“With losing hair, my brother Ernie shaved his head in support.

“I ate food with plastic utensils because metal ones would give me a real bad taste in my mouth.

“I had dry heaves in the shower, but that was the only time I got sick.

Villareal said he does think about the possibility of having a recurrence.

But, he said, “I kind of take it in stride, because in 2016, my dad ended up getting liver cancer.



“He was on the transplant list for two years and was blessed with a liver in 2018.

“We have always been extremely close. He also has a long history of back surgeries.

“Sharing a cancer survivor experience creates a very strong bond. I warned him about things. I believe I went through it first to help my dad 10 years later.”

“We joined Relay for Life, and my wife made a team for me,” he said. “That was really supportive, to meet people from Relay for Life.

“I haven't had a team for a few years, but we try to make the luminaria ceremony if I am not DJ-ing.

“My wife always had a very positive outlook. There were a lot of times I wanted to feel sorry for myself, but she really held it together and helped me see the positive in life.

“She is the one that really helped cure me of cancer. She went through it 24 hours a day.

Caregiver perspective:

Roxann Villareal said she was “shocked” upon hearing her husband's cancer diagnosis, because “he was only 24 at the time.”

“I kept my fears to myself. I was more focused on what we needed to do because of our kids.

“You don't have time to worry about what could happen. It is: ‘Let's get through this.’

“I was his support system. After he got the pic line, I was his in-home nurse. I tried to be as optimistic as possible without being annoying.

“Our kids knew what was happening, and I wanted to keep them involved.

“Now, we lean on each other and feel like we have experienced more at our age than people twice our age.

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