I Turned Blue Last Night

Cancer Health blogger Avie Barron, 35, lives in Southern California with her husband and three children.

September 16, 2019 By Avie Barron

Three years ago, I told my husband, Tim, that I wanted to try something different. So we went to the new gym in our hometown, signed waivers and stepped onto the mats with no shoes on. For the next hour, we were introduced to Brazilian jiujitsu, the combat martial art.

I was so nervous that I turned a little blue from holding my breath. By the end of the night, we were sore, exhausted—and hooked.

A year later, though, my coach, Orlando, became concerned for me because my face kept turning blue during training. I'd been finding it harder to breathe and feeling pains in my chest but figured it was bronchitis. It turned out to be something more serious. In June 2017, I was diagnosed with Stage II non–Hodgkin lymphoma in my right lung. It was an aggressive cancer.

I went through seven cycles of chemotherapy and four weeks of radiation. My treatments ended in February 2018, but I was left with a lot of scar tissue in my lung. I was constantly aching and weak, and although my doctors warned me to stay away from jiujitsu, I kept going, hoping it would speed up my recovery.

In April of this year, standing in front of my coach and jiujitsu team, I turned blue again. But this time, it was for a very different reason. I was being presented with a blue belt.

In jiujitsu, you start from the bottom with a white belt and then progress to blue, then on to purple, brown and finally black. It's a sport that requires a certain level of crazy and stubborn. The blue belt is a symbol that you are no longer a beginner, a noob.

For me, turning blue meant so much more. The last three years have tested me, pushed me and almost broken me. I was tempted so many times to just give up on jiujitsu and focus on beating cancer. I had to fight the aches and pains of chemo on top of the normal pain and bruising from training. I kept going even when I could hardly breathe. Why? I needed the release of pushing myself to avoid the depression of being sick.

This blue strip of cloth is my reminder that not only did I beat cancer, but I crushed that voice inside myself that said I couldn't. It's my reminder that I am blessed to keep fighting when so

many others have lost their own battle. It’s my reminder that if I can get through the last three years of everything that has been thrown at me that I have no excuse not to keep going.

The truth is, I’m just getting started. I’ve found the thing that pushes me, grows me, challenges me. No more excuses that I’ll do it someday. Cancer has a way of showing you that sometimes there is no someday, that there’s only today to make the most of what you have.

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