ABSOT Turns One!

November 20, 2017 By Justin Birckbichler

On October 28th, I celebrated my one year orchiectomyversary, and today marks another milestone in my cancer journey. A Ballsy Sense of Tumor officially launched one year ago today. Prior to beginning ABSOT, I was an avid education blogger. On that educational blog, I shared my diagnosis with the educational world in this post about how I told my students about my cancer, which then ended with a link announcing ABSOT's creation.

I enjoyed writing those teaching posts (and still do from time to time), but they weren't something I felt I needed to do. I wanted to share my ideas, but it didn't help me process anything, mainly because there was nothing to process. Writing a post on active review games isn't exactly ground-breaking stuff.

However, writing for ABSOT is something I feel compelled to do. While my educational blog was mainly to share ideas, I find that ABSOT is there to share and to help me process. When I find a new resource, such as eTC Express or the Stupid Cancer app, I want to share it with my readers, as it may be helpful to them. If I'm experiencing something upsetting, like the scare of thinking I've found a new lump or sensing a panic attack approaching, my first instinct is to write. I've basically determined that writing is my therapy and helps me process and cope, which is something I explored in a guest post for the Testicular Cancer Society.

I write for me, but I publish for others. One of my goals is for ABSOT to help others who have been diagnosed with testicular cancer to find the resource I wish I had when I first started. I couldn't find a patient-friendly resource that detailed the entire journey (from discovery to the struggles of survivorship) and was written from a twenty-something's perspective. I'm hoping to fill that void and am happy when I hear others have found it helpful.

While that's one of the missions of ABSOT, the main goal is to open up lines of dialogue about testicular cancer and men's health in general, such as in my recent post about enforcing the real meaning behind No Shave November. As I've moved into the survivorship phase of this cancer journey, I've found that promoting open communication been the primary focal point of my recent posts.

Seeing as that's my main goal now, it may be surprising to hear that ABSOT wasn't originally envisioned as a public work. Initially, it was a private Google Doc for me to process my thoughts. It wasn't even called "A Ballsy Sense of Tumor;" the working title was "The Cancer Chronicles."

I began writing on the day after my first CT scan to catch up to all that had happened to me up

until that point. Call it a premonition, but I had a feeling that the story was just beginning rather than ending. I've always felt that "The Post-Op" (which occurred after than CT scan) is one of my strongest pieces, as I wrote it in the heat of the moment, which is something that I've aimed to do ever since then.

After writing that section of the Doc, it had surpassed 20 pages. I began sharing chapters (which I was calling "stages" at that point, as a first sign of twisted humor) with various friends and family members. Katie, who would later become my ABSOT Editor-In-Chief and partner, put it in my mind that I should make it public.

I went back and forth on the idea and finally decided to do it. However, I wasn't sure if I wanted to out myself as having one testicle or keep that vague. If you've been following the blog and/or Instagram up to this point, you've probably guessed that I decided to bare it all (not literally).

I'm glad I did. I feel like I couldn't be an advocate for men's health and honest communication if I wasn't being honest myself. Being a known Uniballer hasn't negatively impacted my life in any way. If anything, it's been improved, as people don't have to feel uneasy around me not knowing if I am open about that fact or not.

If you're facing your own testicular cancer journey, or any other life changing event, I recommend you begin writing it down. I wasn't really a writing enthusiast before this, but now I can't seem to stop. I suppose writing roughly 55,000 words in a year will do that to you. That's about half the length of *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. JK Rowling, may I humbly suggest a spin-off novella—*Harry Potter and the Self-Check Challenge*?

Whether or not you share your cancer experience is entirely your business, but I'm glad I have all elements of my journey recorded in one place. I occasionally look back at old posts and find details I had forgotten (thanks chemo brain).

Looking back at old posts, it's hard to pick just one favorite. That being said, I'm going to pick my top posts. These differ from my most read posts, but they're all just as important to me.

Without further ado, I present the first annual top ten twelve (it was really hard to narrow it down) ABSOT posts of 2016-2017, in descending order:

Honorable Mentions:

Frustration Gone Rogue / Avenging My Port / A Stranger Things Episode—While these are all posts that deal with important times in my journey, I picked them mainly due to the sheer amount of Star Wars, Avengers, and Stranger Things references I crammed into each one, respectively.

How to Make No Shave November Meaningful—This is a newer post so it's hard to tell where exactly it'll fall in my mind ranking. However, it's an important post, especially this month, and has actionable steps in it.

The Official List:

1. Cancer, Christmas, and the New Year—I love the holidays, and it was important to me to share how cancer didn't squash my joy.
2. Losing My Hair, But Not My Control—This post ended up in a different place than I expected. I learned a lot about myself by losing my hair.
3. Everything Is Normal?—The end of one chapter in my journey and the beginning of the next. I already felt that survivorship wasn't going to be easy.
4. I Lost More Than a Ball…I Lost Time—Losing time to cancer sucks, but I've been making sure I make up for that time. This post keeps me accountable.
5. One Year Ago—The newest post of the top twelve, but a quick favorite. It illustrates just how far I've come and how much I've changed since last October.
6. The Recovery—The first post where I worked some emotion in and got to know about myself more.
7. The Discovery—The post that really started it all. I would feel remiss if I didn't include it here.
8. No Time for Excuses—I like this post because it pairs well with number one. If only I still had a pair…
9. Six Months Later—I've always wanted to be real with ABSOT and this post I feel is the most raw post in the PCL series.
10. The Surgery—This post went back and forth on editing until the last minute if I said "ball removed" or "mass removed." As I said, I'm glad I chose the former. It also first illustrated my fascination with the use of "balls" in society.
11. The Post Op—My first real, in-the-moment post. I've always come back to this as my gold standard for a post that I get vulnerable in.
12. Six Ways to Talk About Testicles—This is the post I've wanted to write since I started ABSOT—Simple, easy ways to get more balls in your word diet.

As ABSOT enters into its second year, I'm not sure which direction it'll go. I know I will have (thankfully) fewer medical-related events to write about but will still write as topics arise. However, the mission and goals of the blog remain important to me (as I recently shared on the Soar Above Cancer podcast), and I will continue to share the good word of ABSOT as long as Google Domains doesn't shut me down.

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