Still Breathing…Still Fighting

The grind meaning that losses don't make me a loser — but that losing gives me an opportunity to learn and grow.

February 12, 2019 By Avie Barron

February 2, 2019

I can feel it again — the tightness in my chest as I try to take a deep, long breath. My heart rate rises and I can't hear anything now except for the sound of my heart racing. Everything around me blurs as I focus on what is about to happen to me. I try to take another deep breath…as much as I'm able to…and I can hear the tiny rasp in my lungs that have been stunted by the aftermath of chemo and radiation. My hands ache and my body is tight…and I remind myself that I need to relax. My mind is racing while I'm trying to keep a calmness about my face…

Don't hold your breath…
Just breathe…
You can do this.
No you can't.
What are you doing?
Why are you doing this?!?
Shut up, brain…we're doing this!

I look up at the person in front of me and then I look to my left and wait for the ref to call out, "Fight!" And for five minutes, I'm fighting…months and months of being on the mat all leading to this moment. The fight finishes and I stare at the score board: I lost. I should be mad…but I'm not…instead I decide to stand straight up and hug the girl across from me and tell her she's amazing. I fight a second time and I lose again…and I should be even more mad and more disappointed…but I'm not…and I hug this girl too and congratulate her on her win.

Two years ago, I was standing in the same exact venue in San Diego getting ready to fight in my 2nd jiu jitsu tournament ever. I didn't know back then that I was competing while I had a tumor in my lung that was growing bigger every day. Last Saturday, almost two years later, I was competing again for Tap Cancer Out and found myself standing on the podium in 3rd place knowing I was walking away with more than just a medal. I could have spent the rest of my day agonizing over every single move I should have done correctly to get that win…but that's just not my style:

Personal Victory #1 — I wasn't just a fighter…I was a fighter that survived cancer (and kicked its

butt..like HARD)

Personal Victory #2 — My breathing isn't 100% yet but I didn't turn blue while I was fighting which means that I'm improving.

Personal Victory #3 — I got back on the mats when the doctors keep telling me I should be more focused on recovering than competing.

I no longer have to actively fight cancer…I'm more than over a year into remission but it still hasn't been the easiest road to recovering. My breathing is still severely stunted…I'm now having to use a breathing resistance trainer to break up the scar tissue in my lungs — trying to erase the damage done mostly by the radiation treatments. This tiny little contraption that looks like a mouth guard with a valve at the end makes my lungs burn and my chest ache like I've just got done running 5 miles after using it for only 10 minutes. Twice a day I have to do my rehab and on top of that I also now have an inhaler that I have to use before I do any kind of exercise. My body is not how it used to be. On the outside, I may look like I'm doing okay…but I'm still dealing with scar tissue, scars, hormone issues, weight issues from the steroids, fatigue, just to name a few…

People ask how I'm doing and most of the time I'm okay, but there are still days when I cry from being frustrated. There are days when my body just doesn't want to respond to what I want it to do. There are days when my mind just goes on hiatus…it usually starts with an episode of chemo brain…yes, a year after chemo has finished I'm still getting it… I'm not as sharp as I used to be, I have a hard time concentrating and I struggle when I'm trying to learn something new (which is every time I train..haha). And usually after I have a really, bad chemo brain episode, I find that it sends me into a mental funk that can last for a few days.

Blogging took a huge back seat for me last year. You walked with me while I was going through treatment in 2017…to see the ins and outs of chemo and fighting…but I needed to be quiet in 2018. I needed to find the quiet with Him. I needed to rest in a different way by letting go of some of the things that I felt like Ishouldbe doing or had to be doing.

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." — 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

2018 taught me that I need to quiet the old lies and unrealistic expectations I have for myself. To take my thoughts captive, I have to remind myself that my journey is different. It's easy to compare myself to others who don't have the struggles that I do…to harbor jealousy or resentment against someone because I want to some day be where they are at right now. Last Saturday was a test of whether I was going to feed my insecurities or face my fears.

2019 is all about the grind for me…The grind meaning that losses don't make me a loser — but that losing gives me an opportunity to learn and grow. The grind meaning that I'm setting goals

and going to crush them this year and every year God blesses me with.

I’m alive.
I’m a survivor.
I’m stronger now in more ways than I thought I was before cancer.
I’m still here…
I’m still breathing..
and I’m still fighting…

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