

KICKING TESTICULAR CANCER WHERE IT COUNTS





PHOTOGRAPHY
YUE WU

“I’m going to
call you Lance
from now on,”

That’s the first thing Brian Simons said to his best friend, Jordan Tchon, right after Tchon broke the news that he had testicular cancer and was losing his left testicle. At the time, Tchon was 16, and was about to go through the hardest three months of his life.

by BAILEY MCGRATH

A smartass comment from his best friend was just what he needed.

Tchon had grown up on the same street in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, since he was five. Simons, his life-long best friend, lived just a few houses down from him. Throughout their life, Tchon's basement was where they would kick back after a long day. It was in that same room that Tchon first felt the pain.

Sharp, strange pains kept stabbing his lower abdomen. He kept shaking them off as growing pains, but it only grew worse.

The breaking point finally came during the boy's junior year of high school. While watching the Superbowl, pain caused Tchon to writhe into a ball on the couch and tightly squeeze a pillow between his legs, moaning loudly. Simons told him to shake it off, but this time it was too much.

"It was like getting hit in the balls. It started off not as bad, but towards the end, that's what it was feeling like," Jordan says.

A howling blizzard kept Tchon's mother from driving him to the emergency room that night.

The next morning, Jordan woke up without pain and shrugged it off, but his mother was still rattled

enough to pull him from school just before first period.

That quick decision changed Tchon's life forever.

It was calm until his doctor requested another's opinion on Tchon's test results. Then another doctor, and another until several doctors were poking and prodding at him, taking turns to squint at the ultrasound results. There were two tumors in Tchon's left testicle.

Two days later he was sent to a urologist. This doctor gave him some news he'll never forget.

"You have testicular cancer."

He couldn't believe it and at the same time had expected it. The thought had crossed his mind a lot the

past few days.

Everything in the doctor's office -- the medical instruments lining the wall, his mother and the doctor standing next to him -- all felt surreal. The doctor was talking, but Jordan wasn't listening. He was mindlessly fiddling with his cellphone.

He needed surgery to remove his left testicle. At the time it wasn't cancer that bothered him most, it was losing such an important part of his body.

He suddenly had the urge to get up and leave. He lied and said he needed to use the restroom.

"[I was] tired of talking about it," he said.



Tchon and his nursing staff. Courtesy of Jordan Tchon.

IT WASN'T THE CANCER THAT BOTHERED HIM. IT WAS LOSING SUCH AN IMPORTANT PART OF HIS BODY.

His father was away for business, but Tchon decided to text him the news. His father bought a ticket on the next flight back. In the car home, Tchon asked his mother to break the news to his older brother. He didn't know how to tell him.

The next few days were spent telling his friends, an awkward and uncomfortable experience. Simons was one of the last people Tchon told out of fear that their friendship would change. Instead, Simons handled it with a lighthearted and casual spirit, making a joke of it -- just what Tchon needed.

Surgery to determine what kind of cancer was the next hurdle. Knowing he might not have much chance afterward, he took as much time to socialize with friends as possible, a distraction from the looming surgery.

The results revealed Tchon had nonseminoma testicular cancer, a type of fast-growing testicular cancer that has the potential to spread throughout the body.

There was no time to waste. His lymph nodes were inflamed, showing the

high possibility the cancer had already spread. He faced two intense options -- a dangerous surgery cutting open his chest, or starting chemotherapy immediately. Both meant missing the school marching band trip to Florida he had been looking forward to for so long, he remembers. He chose chemotherapy, and the fight began.

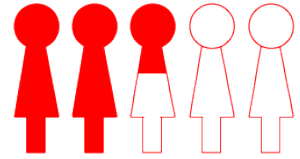
Treatment began February 24, 2010. For the first five days, Tchon spent eight hours a day at an Iowa Cancer Care Oncology Associates, hooked up to an IV that pumped him full of fluids and medicines. At 17, he was the only one at the clinic without a single gray hair on his head.

Only a few weeks prior, Tchon's biggest concerns were homework or deciding to pick up an extra shift at his after school job at the Hy-Vee Drugstore. Now he had to fight every day to live.

After the first five days he received chemo twice a week, an hour a day, for three weeks. The same cycle continued for three months.

Nothing had dragged on so long in his life. Nothing could keep him entertained

C A N - C E R Q U I C K



48.8% of testicular cancer cases happen in men ages 20-34.

15.3

The percentage of men who will be diagnosed with prostate cancer at some point in their lifetime.



Percent increase in prostate cancer cases over the past 10 years.

Statistics obtained from The National Cancer Institute.

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-- not books, not movies, not even even video games. All he wanted to do was get up and move. Tchon's family, family friends and church pastor kept him company. He appreciated it, but was irritable and never felt like talking. The pressure to entertain the people there to support him was overwhelming.

"I'm sitting here. I'm uncomfortable. I'm feeling sick. I don't want to be forced to have conversation," he said.

Chemotherapy took its toll. Tchon's hands were covered in painful blisters, he couldn't sleep, everything he ate tasted like copper, his hair was falling out and even his sight began to deteriorate.

Stripped of energy, Tchon spent time out of chemo at home watching TV. School, his social life and playing the trombone in marching band were put on hold.

"I felt like the world was on pause during that whole time, yet the same time things were still going on," he said.

Being cooped up made him restless. He missed his old life, his cancer-free life. He missed his social life, even school. Tchon wanted to be anywhere else but isolated in his own home.

Sometimes he could muster the strength to go see his friends, but even

that was more than he could handle. Half the time, after showering, he was completely exhausted, too weak to walk out the door. When he did get out, all he wanted to do was go home, feeling too worn out to socialize.

Simons was used to seeing Tchon everyday. It was hard for him to watch his best friend go through something so scary, but it was even harder not having him around. Weeks would go by without seeing Tchon.

"I don't want to say I felt deserted, but there were times when I felt like I had lost him actually," Simons said. "It was almost like I had lost him because he wasn't there, which is kind of scary when you think about it, because that would be terrible if we had actually lost him."

Tchon was a very outgoing kid at Linn-Marr High School and a lot of students knew him. When word spread about his cancer, he was overwhelmed by an army of new friends and supporters.

Everyone always wanted to talk about his cancer, but Tchon wasn't talking. He hated the pity. Everyone wanted to know how he was doing, and even though he was miserable, he felt obligated to say he was doing well.

Everyone at school asked Simons how Tchon

was doing -- even the lunch lady. He always brushed it off saying Tchon's headstrong and stubborn ways would surely beat the cancer. Underneath the thick skin was a distressed best friend.

"The fear of losing your best friend, you can try to hide it but it was definitely there," Simons said. "Every time I told someone it was going to be OK, I was scared, because what if it wasn't?"

Tchon didn't want to fall behind in school, so his teachers and friends helped him make it through the semester. Everything was sent to him, from take home tests to chemistry labs. Most of it he had no idea how to do, since he wasn't there in the classroom learning the material. His teachers were understanding. It was the first semester in high school he received all As.

"It's almost like I cheated my way through the semester," Tchon chuckled.

Another round of testing had gone by, and the results had come back clean. Chemo would end soon and his life could resume. Two weeks crept by until Tchon woke up knowing he was about to finish his final chemotherapy session. This session would be the worst of them all.

Because he opted to get a new IV every time he

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received chemotherapy, it took his nurse almost 20 minutes just to find a working vein. Tchon was sweaty and weak, the nurses covered him in damp cloths to keep him from passing out.

It was almost over. He'd been fighting a three month battle filled with agonizing chemo sessions and countless hours spent laying in bed and missing out on life. He lost a part of his own body, but the battle was finally coming to a close.

On May 11, 2010, after a two hour long final chemo session, Jordan got to ring the golden bell hanging on the hospital wall, symbolizing the end of his battle with cancer. As his caretakers gathered around him for a photograph, Jordan smiled, feeling all the weight of the world that had crashed down on him being lifted off of his shoulders. He had won the battle.

Tchon left the hospital that day a survivor.

He took all the misery and frustration that was his fight against cancer and placed it behind him. More than ready to get back to school and his social life, the transition was smooth

since his best friends had kept everything between them normal.

"I transitioned into normal life way easier because they treated me the same as they did before," Tchon said.

However, no matter how badly he wanted things to be normal there were still a few obstacles he had to overcome.

It took him six months to gain back his physical strength. He lost some feeling in his fingertips and still has poor circulation. His hair eventually grew back, but it grew back a little too thin, so even to this day he proudly rocks a bald head and says he wouldn't want it any other way.

"I don't even really like hair touching my head," he said, explaining how strange hair feels anymore.

Simons and Tchon were roommates their freshman year at Iowa State. Having just come out of a difficult time, freshman year wasn't easy.

Tchon went through a stage of severe anxiety and had difficulty with trust. He was skeptical about who his true friends were. Were they just another person

who felt bad for him?

Tchon eventually learned to put the cancer in his past and use it as a positive experience.

It made him more appreciative and grateful for what he has, and how quickly and easily it can all be taken away. He learned this lesson at 16.

"My biggest advice is that if something is uncomfortable, just go get it checked out, because the sooner the better," he said. The risk far outweighs any possible embarrassment.

TCHON'S TIMELINE

FEB 7, 2010

TCHON EXPERIENCES
UNBEARABLE PAIN
FOR THE FIRST TIME

FEB 8, 2012

TESTS CONFIRM
TWO TUMORS IN
TCHON'S LEFT
TESTICAL

FEB 24, 2010

CHEMOTHERAPY BEGINS



How to touch your balls ..to check for cancer.

We're not assuming you don't know how to touch your balls. You've probably been doing it everyday since you were just a wee young lad. Next time your hand is down your pants, why don't you use that precious time to check for anything out of the ordinary, too? Hell, it could end up saving your life.

The good news is, testicular cancer remains a relatively rare form of cancer - according to the American Cancer Society, a man's chance of developing testicular cancer during his lifetime is about one in 270. But according to the American Cancer Society, rates have been steadily rising over the last few decades. Men between the ages of 20 to 34 are the most at risk.

Most people who contract the cancer would not know they had it unless they felt the tumors during a self-examination.

"Unfortunately testicular cancer typically presents itself without any pain. People have a lump and they would never know it unless they actually felt for it," says Dr. Dean Juguilon of McFarland Clinic.

Juguilon suggests that men do their self-examinations while they are in the

shower, because, you know... that's when they hang a little lower and looser, if you catch our drift.

Hold your penis out of the way to check one testicle at a time. As you roll the testicle between your thumb and fingers you are looking for hard lumps, smooth rounded bumps or any change in the shape, size or feel of the testicles.

If anything looks or feels like it doesn't belong - and you should know, they're your balls and you know them well - go in to a doctor and get it checked out.

Yes, we know how much it sucks having a strange man in a white lab coat put his hands on your love muscle. But hey, maybe this time around it will be a sexy nurse, just like in that porno! Hooray for staying for healthy!

MAY 11, 2010

TODAY

TCHON RINGS
THE GOLDEN
BELL, SIGNIFY-
ING BEATING
CANCER

TCHON IS A
CANCER-FREE
JUNIOR AT
IOWA STATE

