



blessings

Triathlon of Hope

When it really counted, my sons were a dream team **By Sally Koslow**

Last year, I found myself in one of the last places anyone wants to be: an oncologist's office. My son Nat, 25, a TV assistant in Los Angeles, had just been diagnosed with incurable (though, thank God, treatable) lymphoma.

What made this even more surreal was that exactly a year earlier, he'd completed a triathlon sponsored by Team in Training, and had raised \$6,400 for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

"Could Nat have had lymphoma when he did the triathlon?" I asked the doctor, incredulous at the irony.

"Most likely," he said.

Nat began treatment, followed by a wait to see if the drugs worked. That's when I got a second, happier, surprise: He felt well enough to do another race, and his doctor agreed.

As Nat's story ricocheted through our network of friends and family, this time he raised almost \$25,000. One top giver was his older brother Jed, 32, a lawyer in New York City.

My sons are as different as they are close. While Nat might be running, biking, skiing, or

snowboarding, you'd find Jed cooking (homemade sausage, anyone?) or, perhaps, reading a novel. His idea of sport was bocce in a bar. Nonetheless, Jed announced that he, too, had committed to a triathlon to benefit Leukemia & Lymphoma. Even better, he'd formed a team of friends and colleagues.

Throughout the winter, the Brooklyn Landsharks—their name inspired by an iconic *Saturday Night Live* sketch—huffed and puffed at indoor pools and on city streets. They hawked T-shirts, catered a Super Bowl bash, raffled off their talents, and publicized their fund-raising through Facebook, Twitter, and a Web site.

With unwavering determination, Jed trained at dawn or after work and, as he strengthened his body, took it from cuddly to cut. Meanwhile, Nat's treatments proved ineffective and he began a triathlon of one: chemotherapy, accompanied by self-administered immune-boosting injections. Despite grisly side effects, he took only a handful of sick days.

Finally, last May, our family joined thousands near Monterey, CA, for the Avia Wildflower Triathlon, an extravaganza with live bands and a Woodstock vibe. The Landsharks raised \$34,000, the second-highest sum.

But the bigger thrill came as I watched Jed tackle the course. The race kicked off with a 1.5K swim and so many athletes it took more than an hour for Jed's heat to dive in. He sprinted from the lake to strip off his wet suit and hop on his bike for a hilly 40K ride. Under the pounding sun, my spandex-clad former couch potato—who six months before had not jogged even a mile—ran a 10K. Nat, my husband, and I were at the finish line, hoarse with joy.

Jed finished the race in 3.49.31 hours. Nat, we had recently learned, was in remission. As I looked from son to son, their faces appeared to me at every stage: boys who'd shared more than a bedroom, LEGOs, and a cocker spaniel. Now they were men, a team of two linked by love, their emotional stamina as solid as titanium. ■

Sally Koslow's latest novel, The Late, Lamented Molly Marx, will be out in paperback this spring. She lives in New York City.

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