

SPOTLIGHT

A chance to get to know the young adults with cancer in your community

**For the June 2021 *Spotlight*, we could not be more thrilled to feature
Scott Petinga this Father's Day**



Scott was 31 years old when he received a testicular cancer, stage 1A diagnosis. He underwent an orchiectomy, followed by 10-rounds of photon beam radiation therapy. Now at 48, he can't think of a better way to celebrate life than on the day he celebrates the birth of his children.

AYA@USC: What has been the 'Rose' and 'Thorn' of your cancer experience?

Thorn: The radiation used to treat me has severely weakened me and has plagued me with a handful of rare ailments ever since. Within the last 6 years alone I've had countless diagnostic tests, hundreds of blood draws, 33 surgical procedures for hormone replenishment which I must endure 5x a year and now I'm heading into my third major surgery due to muscle atrophy, tendon detachment and cartilage damage.

Rose: Even though on several occasions throughout the years my brain wanted to admit to being defeated, my heart and soul refused to settle for anything less of victory. This is what drove me to move forward — to reach new heights. The silver-lining out of all this was in 2013. I decided someone needed to pick up the baton that Lance Armstrong dropped if we truly wanted change. So I personally made a \$500,000 donation to USC Norris (<https://www.thinkdifferent.org>) to help the medical community finally start making better decisions—decisions driven by data so that others who walk in my footsteps face less of a burden.

AYA@USC: What is one thing you wish people knew about cancer?

Cancer was with difficulty quelled, partly by year long battles so many of us fight after remission. But while I have been forged by the journey, I wouldn't have it any other way. Since then, my world has been full of extraordinary pleasure and I'm especially grateful for those I have had the opportunity to meet along the way.

AYA@USC: Are there any quotes or sayings that you have remembered or found helpful?

"We unfortunately don't live forever and forget how quickly everything could end. Focus on the positive, celebrate you and smile more." - Scott Petinga

AYA@USC: Do you have any 'cancerversary' traditions?

Every May 3, I lift my glass to celebrate this beautiful day with my daughters because I can't help but always think what a lucky bastard I am!



AYA@USC: Between need to do, have to do, and want to do- how do you spend your days?

Sitting on the sidelines watching the world drift by. The same boring routine every single day which like so many others, I detested. Merely a hen in a battery cage serving my role until I was considered economically unviable. But it's what society expected of me. I existed but didn't have any real purpose. I thought simply breathing meant I was alive. However, a single moment changed my life. Along side my wife of exactly thirty-days I heard the three most dreaded words in the English language, "you have cancer." Back then, I was too manly to cry. Too macho to let anyone know I was scared shitless. I was a Marine for Christ's sake. Emotionless and completely numb, I immediately had surgery and subsequently radiation therapy - it was exactly what the doctor's prescribed. They were doctors, I was not, and so it never crossed my mind to question their authority. I lost a lot more than my testicle back then - a downward spiral where eventually my masculinity would vanish as well. Another unsettling discovery happened as a result: I cried six year ago as much as a newborn baby. Perhaps forty-plus years of extreme emotional build up mixed together with precisely the right amount of estrogen caused the outburst. I'm certainly not embarrassed by it. It is who I've become. At that moment I realized it wasn't about surviving anymore, I needed to thrive. To get healthy, flourish, and forge ahead. It was not about just taking the road less traveled, it was now time to leave my own mark on this planet. To question authority along the way and not wait around for anyone or anything...

in particular. Equally, I need to propel others to greatness even if it means sacrificing myself to do so. I truly believe I was given a second chance at life. A life that will be much more happier, vibrant and full of affection. And one, I'll never again take for granted.

AYA@USC: Have you been forced, or chosen to change your life in any meaningful way because of your diagnosis?

Nothing made me realize how human I am as being diagnosed with cancer and everyday now the scar from my latest surgery reminds me that I am definitely vulnerable. And from that moment I now understand more deeply, appreciate more quickly, cry more easily, hope more desperately, love more openly and live more passionately.

AYA@USC: Is there anything else you would like to add?

I'm a THRIVER, I'm just not alive post cancer, it has lit the wick that fuels my flourishing.



In the spirit of making a bigger influence, in mid-2015 I've also founded an international advocacy network whose mission is to advance the practice, research and education in the field of testes cancer: Center for Advocacy for Cancer of the Testes International – CACTI (<https://www.caci.org>).

With the formation of CACTI, my hope is that every new testicular cancer patient will have access to more qualified healthcare personnel who can make a quick and accurate diagnosis and better treatment options thereby minimizing the severity of their treatment and reducing any long-term side effects to ultimately allow them to live better lives.



You can learn more about the AYA@USC program by visiting <https://aya.usc.edu/>



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