

BILL CREWS

If you asked Bill Crews to describe himself, he would first say husband, father, then very likely — swimmer. Crews, a native of The Woodlands, has been a competitive swimmer nearly his entire life, not only participating as an athlete, but also coaching the sport for more than 20 years.

And it was swimming, or rather, what he thought was a swimming injury, that ultimately saved his life.

“When I was 36 years old, I started training for a triathlon because I had already been doing a little biking and running for cross training and enjoyed it,” he recalls. “Right after my 37th birthday, my shoulder started hurting very badly and I assumed it was a result of my training. Three weeks after the pain began, I had an MRI and thought the doctor was going to tell me I’d torn my rotator cuff. I went to see the doctor alone that day, leaving my wife home with our 5- and 3-year-old children. The doctor told me I had cancer — non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. It was stage IV and very aggressive. The disease was in my bones, bone marrow, neck, chest, abdomen and pelvis. I was told it was incurable, but treatable.”

Crews’ first eight rounds of chemotherapy were the most intense, followed by two more years of maintenance treatments. But being the athlete he is, Crews went to work, attacking his cancer the way he attacked the pool.

“I pushed through the pain, focused on staying strong and positive and made myself live as a normal a life as possible,” he said.

On Jan. 26, 2004, nearly three months after the initial diagnosis, Crews’ doctor walked into the exam room with a smile and said, “You’re in complete remission.” Though he continued with cancer treatments for two additional years, Crews got back into triathlons and marathons thanks in large part to the amazing support he received from his family. His wife, Dana-Susan, also a competitive swimmer, trained right along with Bill and joined him in the competitions. In fact, they completed an Ironman together in April 2008.

“Having cancer is strange,” said Crews, now 45. “In some ways, it’s the worst thing that ever happened to me, but I wouldn’t trade



PHOTO BY DEBBIE PORTER

the experience for anything. It brought me closer to God, closer to my wife and kids, and it built incredible confidence and faith in me. When you realize the very real truth that life is temporary, it makes you want to live the best life you can. It makes you want to accomplish your goals and dreams and it makes you want to be a blessing to the people you meet.”

And for Crews, accomplishing those goals and living his best life includes continuing to do what he loves, which is swimming, running and biking.

“Our family will keep on staying fit together. We will keep enjoying life and pursuing our athletic goals,” he said. “But more important than the things we do for ourselves are the things we believe we are called to do for others. We didn’t go through 2½ years of cancer for nothing. It’s our family’s

duty to go out and raise awareness and funds for research and most of all, to help other families dealing with cancer.”

One of the ways the Crews family gives back is through the Remission Run, started in January 2009, five years after Crews first found out he was in remission. Three hundred people took part in the first race, and \$7,000 was donated to the MD Anderson Cancer Center tissue bank. The second race doubled in success, pulling in 500 participants and raising \$14,000, and last year drew 600 people and \$25,000 in donations. The next race will be held Jan. 28, 2012, at Carl Barton Jr. Park in Conroe. For more information, visit Remissionrun.org.

— Lisa Malosky

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