**Darcy Enrille: Forging Ahead**

*By Jennifer Latham Robinson*

Darcy Enrille’s older sister died in July of 2005. The circumstances were tragic and unimaginable. On Darcy’s car visor today hangs a picture of her very young sister holding an infant Darcy. After her sister’s death, Darcy became depressed and found it difficult to even get out of bed.

Eventually, Darcy decided to pick herself up and started going back to the gym to work out. She had always been very active and wanted to begin to heal her mind and body. The pain in her left knee began when she started using the treadmill. This pain continued, so she switched machines… the elliptical this time. The pain did not subside. She eventually stopped exercising all together, but still the pain was constant. Soon, her left knee swelled and Darcy was unable to maneuver the stairs in their townhome. Thinking she had suffered some sort of knee damage when working out, or playing tennis, she decided to consult a physician approximately 2 months after the pain began. The next thing she knew, she found herself in an oncologist’s office being told she had osteosarcoma, a rare form of pediatric bone cancer.

She was immediately put on a treatment plan consisting of 3 months of chemotherapy, followed by reconstruction, and then 3 more months of chemotherapy. After the initial chemotherapy was completed, Darcy had another scan... and the news was not good. The tumor had grown by 33%, engulfing her left femur and tibia.

Darcy’s option was to either proceed with reconstruction, or undergo left above knee amputation. Darcy was told that further reconstruction in her case, left a chance that the cancer would not be completely removed, and it could grow even more. It was at this point, Darcy explains, that she began frantically researching amputation online. She was horribly disappointed by the information she found, which was very little.

“I kept reading on the internet about socket this, socket that,” Darcy recalls, “... I didn’t care about reading what exactly a socket was. I wanted to see what the actual leg would look like”. The only images Darcy could find showing limbs after amputation were horrible. Sure, there were plenty of pictures of infected wounds, and other horror stories, but not much else. It was then that Darcy decided to document her journey, in the hopes that her story would help another.

Darcy opted for the amputation, which was followed by 4 months of intensive, aggressive chemotherapy.
Still in this battle today, she wants to share her experiences. And pictures are worth a thousand words.

This is Darcy, to the right, after her initial round of chemotherapy. This is when she considered herself ‘truly bald’ and was without any body hair. She became an expert at painting on eyebrows with make-up.

The picture on the left shows Darcy in a hotel room, the night before her amputation. She spent the night in the hotel room with five of her best friends and her mother. The previous day she had received a pedicure, the last one she would get before becoming an amputee.

Darcy spent her 22nd birthday in the hospital with her best friends at her side.

She recounts the days when her friends taxied back and forth to give support and love, as they always had throughout their friendships.
Darcy’s hair began falling out after her initial chemotherapy session. At the first sign of this, she decided to have her best girlfriends over for a head shaving party. By the time this picture was taken, Darcy’s hair had begun to grow back slowly. This picture was actually taken during a chemotherapy session.

The picture to the right is Darcy 2 days after her amputation. Standing and using crutches was exhausting and she remembers having to sit down after every 10 steps.

The exercise was grueling, but necessary. Because of her perseverance, Darcy now walks extremely well and is incredibly active in her community.

Darcy had this picture taken of her residual limb 1 month after her surgery. She explains that she took this picture because she could not find information like this on the internet prior to her amputation. Darcy hopes that this will help other people searching for answers.

She remembers, at this time, the intolerable pain she felt in her residual limb, which was very sensitive to touch. She also remembers the phantom pain and the heavy medication she was prescribed in an attempt to relieve it. Darcy describes this pain as if someone was stabbing a sharp knife repeatedly into her left foot (her amputated foot). The only relief she could find was sleep.
Using high doses of powerful pain medication meant Darcy couldn’t drive. So, only 6 weeks after her amputation, and still in pain, she discontinued her pain medication so she could drive again.

6 weeks after her above knee amputation, Darcy was casted for a prosthesis by Greg Bauer, CPO. The casting procedure is incredibly intimate, Darcy recalls, “and nothing can really prepare you for it... except maybe a gynecological exam”, she laughs.

At this point, people touching her residual limb felt very foreign and amputees often feel very exposed during this process. Darcy remembers even wondering what the best underwear would be to use that day.

How did she get through it? “I brought a good friend and we just had fun with it. I tried not to think, ‘oh, gosh... my butt is showing’.”

The photograph to the right shows Darcy being fit with her initial above knee prosthesis. She remembers everything going well at the appointment, but having trouble remembering how to put the prosthesis on when she got home. This was a horribly frustrating experience, and a common one with new amputees.

At this point, Darcy was still undergoing chemotherapy.

Darcy’s hard work in physical therapy paid off. She strengthened her abs and residual limb, which translated into a faster recovery.
Darcy had this picture taken of her residual limb to document the improvement 6 months after surgery. The swelling had gone down significantly and the scar line was well healed.

The photograph to the right shows Darcy on her last day of chemotherapy. Patients at this hospital are given ceiling tiles to decorate. The ceiling tiles are then re-installed and provide the pediatric cancer patients with some interested ceiling art. Darcy painted a blue ribbon, to symbolize a cure for osteosarcoma, and 3 tulips, her favorite flowers. ‘USF BULLS’ is written at the bottom of her tile.

The photograph to the left shows Darcy approximately 2 months after chemotherapy was completed. Her hair had begun to grow back and she no longer had to draw on eyebrows with makeup.

For her 23rd birthday, Darcy went out to celebrate with friends. The photograph to the right shows her right before leaving her home that evening. This was a good night... her prosthesis was fitting very well and she was even able to wear tight jeans again. Her phantom pains were pretty much gone and she wasn’t using crutches anymore.
Darcy graduated from the University of South Florida on August 11, 2007 with her B.A. degree. Her major was Mass Communications.

This was a momentous occasion for Darcy, her mother, and her friends. Much of the final work on her degree was completed while strategizing her cancer treatment plan, undergoing prosthetic fittings, and continuing intensive physical therapy. Darcy graduated with a 3.56 GPA.

Darcy remembers being nervous to walk across the stage to receive her diploma. She laughs about it now, “The graduation gown was hot and I was sweating”. She was afraid that the sweat would affect the way her prosthesis fit, but everything ended up fine.

Darcy stands here, side-by-side, with a powerful ally in her battle... her oncologist.
Darcy’s goal now is to raise awareness for osteosarcoma, the cancer she continues to battle.

“I’d like to think that’s why I have this cancer... this is the reason, the justification. I need to educate people about it, so we can find a cure. I never ask ‘why me’.”

The photograph to the left shows Darcy speaking on osteosarcoma at a benefit.

Darcy plans to continue speaking about this cancer and wants to reach as many people as possible, to teach the world about it.

Having just returned from a trip to Alaska with her mother, Darcy is now awaiting some very important news: to see if she qualifies to participate in an experimental osteosarcoma treatment at Johns Hopkins University.

In the meantime, Darcy plans to travel and to continue her education. Darcy forges ahead, inspiring and educating everyone she meets in her path: living an extraordinary life under extraordinary circumstances.