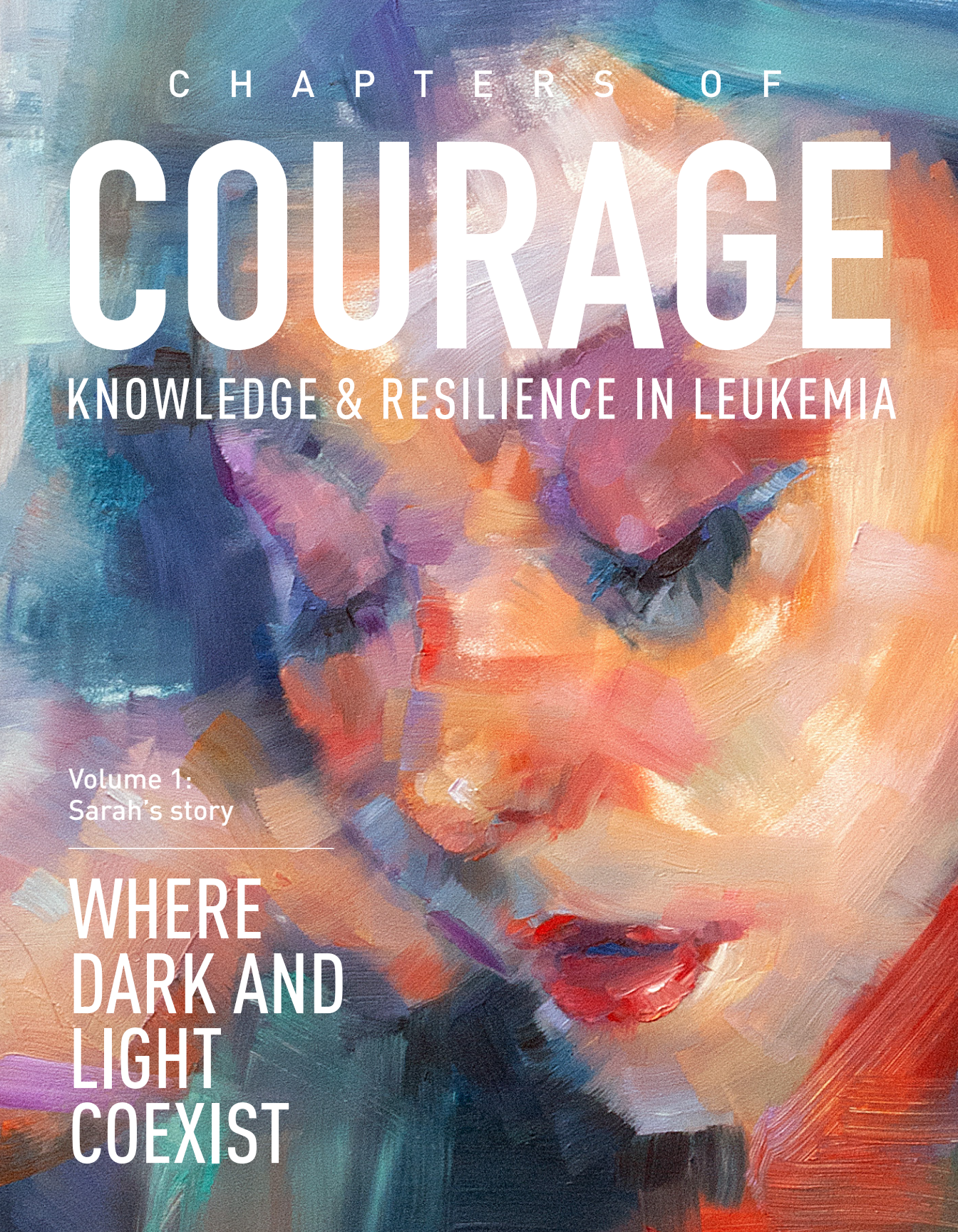
CHAPTERS OF
COURAGE
KNOWLEDGE & RESILIENCE IN LEUKEMIA
Volume 1:
Sarah's story
WHERE DARK AND LIGHT COEXIST

MEET SARAH

Sarah is 34 years old and bravely living life as an acute myelogenous leukemia (AML) survivor. First diagnosed in 2021, she faced a relapse but is now back in remission. **She shares her story to give hope and encourage others to reach out for help.**

"When everything else feels a little hopeless, you can be really, really down about it, which is fair. Or you can choose to find some joy, some laughter."

"It's really easy to shut down, and I knew that wasn't a great choice."

FACING THE SETBACK

For many people, including Sarah, hearing the words "relapsed/refractory AML" can feel extremely overwhelming. She had been feeling well for nearly a year, which **made the relapse news even harder to process** — in some ways, more difficult than her original diagnosis.

Not long after, Sarah faced another heartbreak. Her close friend, who was also living with relapsed/refractory AML and had been a source of comfort and strength during treatment, passed away. Losing that connection left Sarah feeling even more alone. As she shared, "It was devastating to hear... everything felt bleak."

As Sarah started feeling stronger physically, she **finally had the space to process everything mentally and emotionally,** and she decided she had to make an effort to find her support system.

Peer-to-peer mentorship programs can be a powerful source of strength, comfort, and connection

Be sure to explore these supportive resources:

Cancer Hope Network

Friend for Life

FINDING HER SUPPORT

Although it wasn't always easy for Sarah to ask for or accept help, she drew on many forms of support throughout her journey.

At the time, COVID and her immunocompromised status meant her support network was limited. Her husband and family provided essential emotional support, and she also joined virtual meetings with online groups and advocacy organizations. **These online connections gave her a way to meet other young adults facing similar challenges** — something that was hard to find locally.

Sarah found meaningful peer connections through these organizations:

Imerman Angels

Cancer Cactus Society

Sarah's cancer center also offered a lot of support. She worked with a therapist to help process her emotions and attended yoga classes for cancer patients — which helped her physically and gave her a chance to decompress. She also **explored other wellness and mindfulness programs and journaled when she could,** putting her thoughts and feelings on paper. True to her personality, she also leaned on humor as a way to cope during her journey.

Throughout her experience, Sarah discovered that **many of the resources she found became available simply by asking her care team what was offered.** Hospitals often provide access to social workers, wellness classes, and other supportive programs. Be sure to ask your care team about what's available to you.

"I remember laughing after my diagnosis, and I was just shocked that joy and laughter and the hard stuff that feels dark, can coexist."

Journaling can be a powerful form of self-therapy

At **Elephants and Tea,** guided prompts and open discussions can help you connect with peers and find your own strength. **Get started here**

PARTNERING WITH HER CARE TEAM

Sarah knew the medical details of AML could be overwhelming and hard for most patients to fully understand. Without guidance, it's easy to feel unsure about what questions to ask or how to share concerns.

While she valued her oncologist's expertise, **Sarah often turned to her nurse practitioner for support.** Approachable and attentive, her nurse practitioner listened to her concerns about disease management, encouraging Sarah to work proactively with her doctors and care team.

Try asking these top 3 questions at your next appointment

1. *I'm noticing [physical symptom]—is this normal, and what can we do about it?*
2. *How will my care plan affect my day-to-day schedule, and what does follow up care look like?*
3. *What should I do if an urgent concern comes up? Who should I call?*

Need help tracking your symptoms?

Consider keeping a symptom diary or use a list of suggested questions from

KnowAML

You can also find resources at:

Blood Cancer United

Mayo Clinic

Sometimes, Sarah discovered new information online that she had not heard from her care team yet. She quickly learned that this space is very complicated and that each patient's care plans differ. Some things that work for some, may not work for others. So, **it is important to speak up, ask questions, and advocate for yourself.** For more guidance on AML and what to expect, you can download the AML handbook at Blood Cancer United.

AML handbook

No matter what, Sarah stresses **how important it is to build trust with your healthcare team.** She encourages others to speak up and share every concern — big or small.

"Tell your team EVERYTHING *about what's been going on… everything."*

Explore more resources on how to build trust with your healthcare team at NFCR

CHOOSING JOY

Through therapy, peer connections, wellness practices, and the steady love of her family, Sarah has found ways to move forward. Some days are still hard, but **Sarah continues to draw strength from small joys** and the communities around her.

Most of all, Sarah's wish is that her story brings comfort, hope, and of course, joy.

"Here's to more moments of joy."

–Love, Sarah

Syndax