

The background is an abstract, textured composition. It features a central, somewhat obscured image of a man's face, looking slightly to the right. The face is rendered in warm, earthy tones of brown, orange, and red. Surrounding the face are various splatters and washes of color, including deep reds, blues, and greys, giving it a painterly or watercolor-like appearance. The overall mood is somber yet resilient.

C H A P T E R S O F
COURAGE

KNOWLEDGE & RESILIENCE IN LEUKEMIA

Volume 2:
Connor's story

**FINDING
STRENGTH IN
EVERY STEP**

MEET CONNOR

Connor (30) is **bravely living life as an acute myelogenous leukemia (AML) survivor**. While he dealt with some challenges and difficult emotions early on, Connor learned to be his own best advocate. He shares his story to inspire others to take charge of their journey too.



“Pay attention to your labs and keep track of them, because you’re your best advocate. You’re the person that’s going to catch things faster than anyone else.”

Learn how to advocate for yourself

Ask your care team what support and resources the institution offers, and explore tools to help you build self-advocacy skills:

Stupid Cancer



FACING EARLY CHALLENGES

When Connor was first diagnosed with AML, he started his care journey at his local community hospital. After a few difficult setbacks, he felt it was the right time to try something different. **Connor realized that to move forward, he needed to take ownership of his care and advocate for himself.** He decided it was time to try a research hospital, so he transferred to an academic center that offered new opinions and approaches for his care.

It was a hard choice to make. He lived close to home, and the community hospital was much more convenient. But given his type of AML, he wanted

to see whether he might be better suited to a research hospital—one that may be more equipped with advanced technology and specialized expertise to handle more complex cases like his own. The transfer wasn’t easy, but fortunately his insurance helped cover some of the logistical burden, including the ambulance ride.

When he arrived, he was happy to meet his care team. His doctor walked him through his diagnosis step by step and even shared his email address for quick questions. Connor felt well supported, with a care plan tailored to his specific disease.

“Do what you can to get comfortable advocating for yourself. There are people and resources to support you if you ask.”

BEING HIS OWN ADVOCATE

Connor leaned into self-advocacy. Determined to understand his disease, **he asked questions, took notes, and even worked with his doctor on a whiteboard** to map out the gene mutation driving his cancer as well as care options. This proactive approach opened the door to a clinical trial studying an investigational medicine targeting his leukemia's mutation.

Not sure what questions to ask your doctor?

Try Connor's questions:

- *What mutations does my disease have?*
- *How does my leukemia's mutation affect my care plan?*
- *What do I need to know about this trial?*

“Ask your questions. Write them down and talk to your doctor. If you ask, they will answer.”

Initially, Connor had doubts about the trial: there were only a small number of people enrolled at the time and they were all older than him. But despite his doubts, **after thoughtful and detailed discussions with his care team, he decided to move forward with the clinical trial** and was happy that he decided to go in that direction. For Connor, this experience highlighted that being an engaged, informed patient can make a big difference.

Thinking about a clinical trial but don't know where to start?

You can find guidance at:



American Cancer Society



Blood Cancer United Hotline

“My thought is, why not try a clinical trial? What do you have to lose? It may be your best option long term.”

DRAWING STRENGTH FROM OTHERS

Connor's strength didn't come from self-advocacy alone. His mother moved closer to him to be his caregiver, standing beside him every step of the way. **His friends and the broader community also rallied to support him**—raising funds, donating housing, and offering encouragement when he needed it most. At the hospital, his care team offered support through celebrating his milestones and even his birthday. He also found help among fellow patients—one friend in particular went above and beyond, speaking to management at the free housing facility and helping Connor secure a place quickly. That friendship became one of his greatest sources of support. **For Connor, it wasn't about having just one person in his corner, but an entire team to inspire hope and resilience.**

Connor also built personal pillars of strength through **exercise, nutrition, and creating space for honest conversations about cancer.** He made it a point to walk at least 10,000 steps a day—so much that his doctor couldn't help but joke he should slow down—using each step as a way to stay strong and centered.

Peer mentors helped carry Connor through—and you can find yours too.

Explore these peer-to-peer mentorship programs:

[Cancer Hope Network](#)



Are you a caregiver?

[Get tips](#) on how to have open and honest communication with your loved one.



But, beyond the physical, Connor approached his diagnosis with intentional reflection, working to understand the full breadth of what it meant—including the realities of mortality. He made space to feel, question, and process on his own terms, finding ways to cope that were both intentional and deeply personal. **That emotional self-awareness, although a quiet force, became one of his most powerful strengths.**

“Maybe it’s just me... but you want to at least mentally know that you’re prepared to face whatever you’re facing. I think it’s important to think about it.”

Body and mind

Learn how to manage the long-term effects of AML care and find ways to support your emotional and physical well-being.

[Explore the guide:](#)



Join *Light the Night* and walk united against blood cancer



[Sign up here](#)

LOOKING AHEAD

These days, Connor is back at work as an electrician, **balancing his career while keeping his health a priority**. He's even begun fishing again, slowly finding his rhythm between recovery and the life he loves. He remains deeply grateful—for the care he received, the clinical trial that offered him another chance, and the community that carried him through. **His story is a reminder that strength comes not only from within but also from the people and resources around us.**

Connor's journey inspires others to take charge of their own experience. His lessons include:

Take an active role in understanding your diagnosis – ask questions, request visual aids, and make sure you know your care options

Build a strong support network – rely on caregivers, friends, and community resources to help navigate emotional and logistical challenges

Use practical tools to empower discussions with your care team – whiteboards, notes, or other visual aids can make complex conversations easier and ensure your concerns are addressed

Find strength in what grounds you – build a routine or activity that helps you stay centered and hopeful, as Connor did through his daily walks

Connor emphasizes that being informed, proactive, and connected can make a profound difference in the cancer journey.

“I hope to inspire and encourage other people who are struggling in similar situations.”

–Your friend, Connor

