

RUNNING STRONG

Cancer survivor Jim Asker provides hope, one step at a time

BY CHUCK RAINEY



Jim Asker with fellow Team In Training member Sara Harvey, mile 20 of the Chicago Marathon in October, 2009. Asker's first marathon after his battle with lymphoma.

“It’s nothing short of a miracle,” says Jim Asker, as he recounts his tale of hardship, struggle and triumph over Stage 4 non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma (NHL), hoping his success story will inspire others. “Everyone is a survivor,” he says.

Jim Asker works as an editor for All Access Music Group in Nashville and has a passion for marathon running. Likewise, his desire to return to the simplicity of putting one foot in front of the other was a driving force in his recovery, and he’s truly excited to be running in this year’s Country Music Half-Marathon on April 24 as a member of Team In Training—The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society’s (LLS) ground-breaking charity sports training program. His goal is to raise \$15,000 for the cause by taking donations through the website pages. (teamintraining.org/tn/cmc10/jasker.)

Asker sat down with me about six weeks before the race to talk about his outstanding goals and what it takes to accomplish them.

How did you become involved with Team In Training? In 2007, I had begun running again. In the past, I’d always run solo, but now I felt very out of place, like I didn’t belong. In Phoenix, in November 2008, I forced myself out into the cold, feeling under the weather. The run was difficult for me; I was slow, cold and alone when I encountered the familiar purple shirts of Team In Training during the race.

I struck up a conversation with three runners from Nashville. They told me they’d see me at the finish line and ran ahead. When I finally arrived, not only were those three there, but there were

dozens of other purple shirts cheering me on. It was a life-changing moment. I kept in contact with them and eventually decided to run with Team In Training and get my story out to help motivate others.

Why is your team focused on the Country Music Marathon and what do you hope to accomplish? I was the top fundraiser last year, raising \$10,000 through the Country Music Marathon. Funds like those and support from groups like Team In Training are how I made it to the finish line against cancer. Support groups and inspiration from people along my journey through treatment and recovery are what made my miracle possible. I'd tell everyone to listen to the people who run through your life, hear their stories and share your own. Human connections become so much more important when you're fatigued and ready to give up. Let those around you be strong when you can't do it for yourself. Don't fear support groups. Life is like a marathon; some people fade and others step up. God sends people into your life daily, and you never know how you may inspire someone.

The finish line and beyond, what lies ahead? My personal goal for the half-marathon is 2:10. But, just finishing is really sweet. Previously, I enjoyed the solitude I got from running, but all of that has changed. I enjoy meeting other people and running for others through Team In Training. We run for those who can't, so the heroes out there battling cancer can get the same great care I received. If even one person touched by cancer sees my story and thinks that maybe they or their loved one can triumph too, I feel rewarded. Running has a spiritual feel now and is an outlet that gives me purpose and focus to help others.

Asker thinks a moment, and adds. "On April 24, as I cross the finish line I will be thinking what everyone else is ..." He laughs. "Where are the potato chips, pizza and beer? I'm *starving*." But, he adds "I will also know that we made a difference."