



Martinez undergoing chemotherapy at MD Anderson in Katy

Throughout his battle with colorectal cancer, Joshua Martinez relied heavily on the support of his family and his faith to keep him upbeat and positive

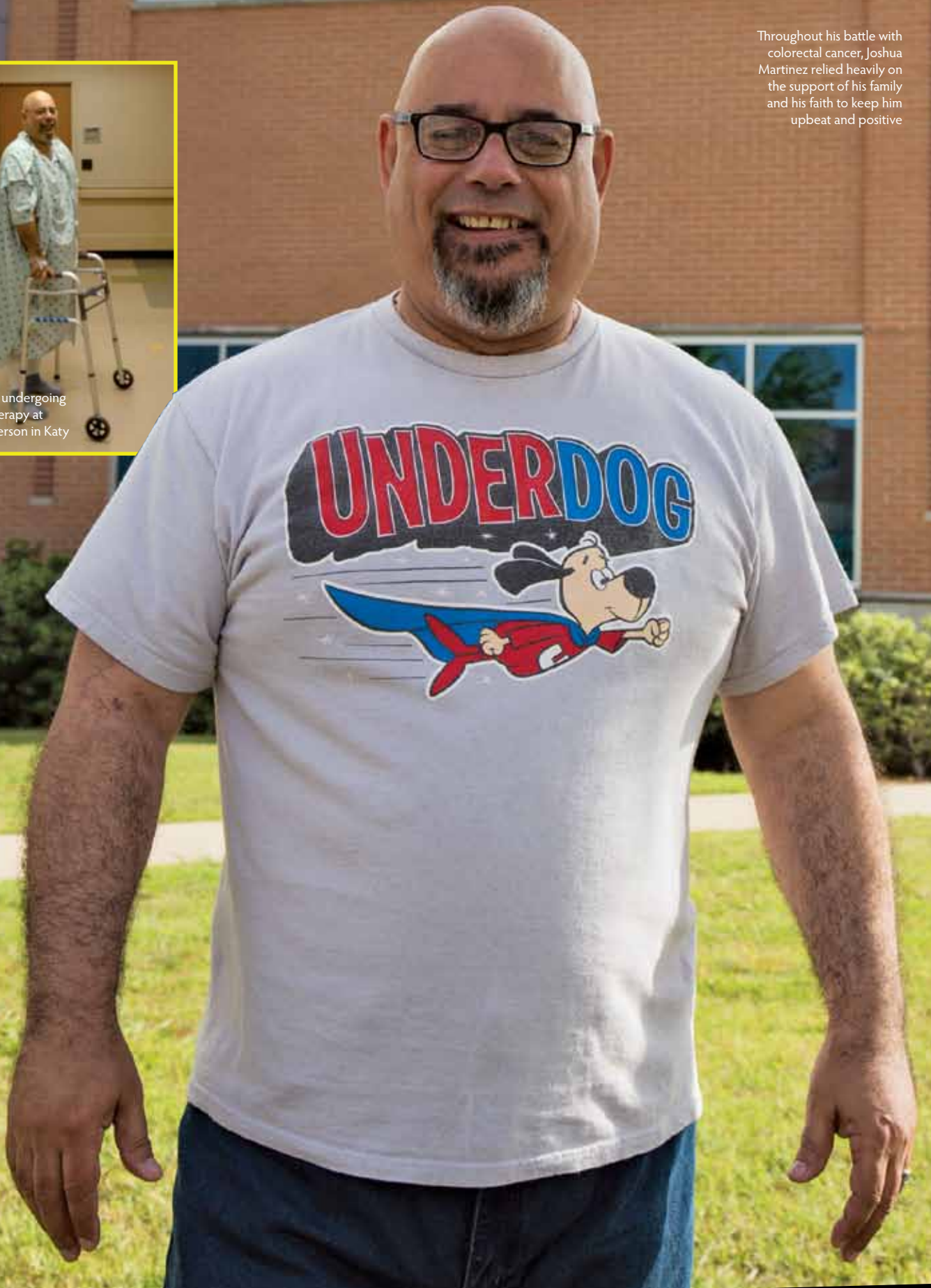


Photo by Annetrius Wallace

SUPERHERO SURVIVOR

Katyite Joshua Martinez shares the story of his battle with colorectal cancer

Written by Clare Jensen

People often take their lives and daily activities for granted, discrediting illness as too far removed to affect them. But then one day, they are taken by surprise, and the certainty of having a next breath becomes not quite so certain. This was the case for Katyite Joshua Martinez.

FROM COLONOSCOPY TO CANCER

Joshua Martinez, an elementary school assistant principal with a wife and four kids, had no symptoms of cancer in June 2012. His son Ian, a medical student, encouraged both his parents to have colonoscopy screenings since they were in their mid-fifties. Within a few weeks, Martinez was diagnosed with stage 3 colorectal cancer.

The entire family was both shocked and devastated. Roxanne, the Martinez's oldest daughter, describes her reaction to the news. "My worst nightmare: cancer hitting my family. My heart stopped. I cried. Later, I composed myself and realized we have to have a fighter's attitude toward it."

TOUGH TREATMENTS

Having incorporated faith into their daily lives prior to the cancer diagnosis helped Martinez and his family adjust to their new perspective. "The one constant throughout it was prayer. Whether individually or corporately as a family, we prayed often," Martinez says.

Following the diagnosis, treatment started almost immediately with chemotherapy, two surgeries, and hospitalizations. The side effects of chemotherapy were far beyond mere inconvenience or embarrassment. Besides nausea and exhaustion, Martinez suffered from numbness and tingling in his hands, depression, and complications with his ileostomy, which diverted his intestines to a removal bag. According to Martinez's oncologist, Dr. Sunil Patel with MD Anderson in Katy, "The treatment wasn't easy for him. He pushed through it because of the support system that was in place. If his experience would be a lesson for anyone, it would be to rely on that base of support that you have in times of need."

SUPERHERO SUPPORTERS

Martinez credits his wife Berta as his biggest supporter throughout the process. From his dietary cravings to his mood shifts, she tended as much as possible to both his physical and emotional needs. Dr. Patel admired the couple's strong relationship. "She was very concerned and asked a lot of questions to help him get through it when the initial diagnosis was hard for him. [She] was very positive, and he relied on [her] in a significant way."

His children also played instrumental roles in distracting their father from his cancer. His daughter Rhiannon knew how much her dad dreaded the chemotherapy treatments. In order to show her support, she decided to present him with a superhero shirt and themed gift every time he had a treatment. For example, an Ironman shirt was accompanied



Martinez's daughter Rhiannon surprised him with a different superhero t-shirt each time he had chemotherapy treatment



Martinez surrounded by his family after completing a round of treatment

Martinez's biggest supporter during his journey was his wife, Berta

by a “gadget,” a stand for Martinez’s iPad. “My dad grew up during a time of comic books and superheroes, something we’ve been able to share every time the latest superhero blockbuster came out. I wanted him to know how heroic a thing it was that he was doing, battling cancer.”

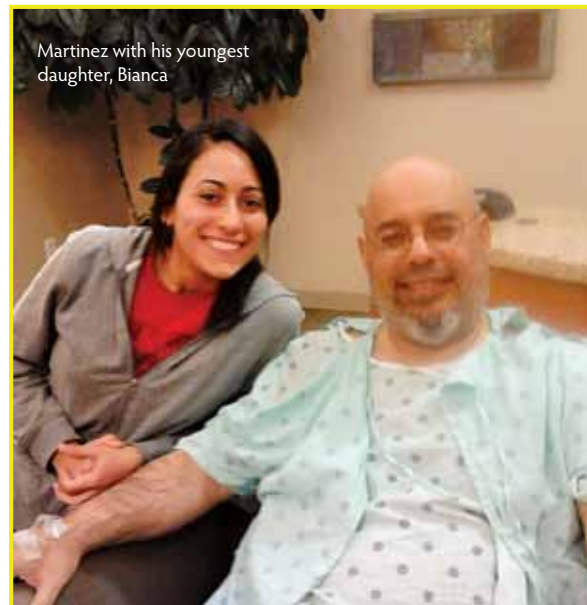
A MUSICAL MIRACLE

When he successfully completed treatment at MD Anderson in Katy, Martinez says, “We were elated and thankful to God for bringing us through this.” After a celebration dinner, his family surprised him with a mandolin, an instrument he had been interested in learning prior to his diagnosis. During his illness, his daughter Bianca would write songs of encouragement for him, and music often helped him out of depression. Now the mandolin, in addition to his guitar, represents both the victory over cancer and the love that surrounds him.

Currently, he is working to include the mandolin in a new song he is writing. “It’s dedicated to my wife as she inspired it by her Christ-like actions. Basically, it is about the spiritual struggle I went through and how she was able to help me out of the pit of despair.” The faith, music, and love that inspired the Martinez family throughout the chemotherapy and surgeries continue long after the treatments have vanished. Once Martinez reaches five years from his diagnosis, he will be considered a survivor. He says the cancer experience has changed him for the better. “There’s a reason for all we go through in life, and we’re not guaranteed our next breath, so we do the best we can with the opportunities given.” **KM**

CLARE JENSEN is a senior at Rice University majoring in English and history. She calls Katy her home, and enjoys keeping in touch with the community.

*Katy Magazine would love to hear your inspirational story!
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Martinez with his youngest daughter, Bianca

Get Screened

Experts recommend getting a colonoscopy or other colon cancer screening test when you turn 50. Depending on your results, you may only be advised to re-screen every 10 years. Some symptoms of colon cancer you shouldn't ignore include:

- ★ *Change in bowel habits*
- ★ *Constipation unrelated to recent meals*
- ★ *Unattributed weight loss*



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