

by northwest7
on November 29, 2016
under In Focus
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CANCER DOESN'T STOP STUDENT'S DREAM OF NU

Posted: Wednesday, February 11, 2015 12:05 pm

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Photo by Luke Pamer



This fall freshman Jeffrey Hernandez fulfilled his dream of coming to Northwest University after three years of battling cancer. Graduating high school in 2011, Hernandez was scheduled to start at NU in the spring of 2012 after taking a semester off.

Hernandez's dream of coming to NU began after visiting campus before graduating high school.

"When I stepped on campus I knew I had to be here," Hernandez said. "I [was] already here. My heart [was] already here. It was the most peaceful experience I had ever gotten from God. Finally being on campus it was 100 percent peace and I had to be here."

However his dream of coming to NU was put on hold when Hernandez was diagnosed with pre-B cell acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) on Dec. 19, 2011. ALL is a cancer that starts from white blood cells in the bone marrow. If not treated ALL could be fatal within a few months.

After being diagnosed Hernandez began treatment, including chemotherapy and several surgeries. He has had three port-a-catheters placed in his chest in order to allow the chemotherapy a direct line to the veins in his heart. Hernandez went into remission at the end of January of 2012 and has been going through treatment ever since.

Due to the chemotherapy Hernandez has lost his hair twice. He said it came out in chunks when he ran his fingers through his hair.

"One morning I woke up and there was hair all over my pillow," Hernandez said. "It felt like I was dying. It felt like part of my life was literally in the pillow."

The chemotherapy also caused him to lose nearly 30 pounds of muscle. For the first year he was in the hospital for 76 days – the longest period being 28 days straight.

For the past two years Hernandez has taken some time off. He started working at a warehouse while playing drums in his band, Inertia.

"I had kind of lost the dream of school because of being sick," Hernandez said. "I was like, 'OK God if you didn't let it happen the first time, maybe I was wrong and you didn't want me to go there.'"

Hernandez began attending Pursuit and sat in on some classes in April 2014. While visiting a class the professor asked him, "Why don't you go here?" It was at that moment that he remembered his dream.

"Duh why don't I go here? That was my dream. What have I been doing? Do I not remember the peace that God gave me when I was here?" Hernandez said, remembering his thoughts in response to the professor's question. "It hit me and woke me up," he said.

Hernandez reapplied to NU and began attending this fall. He is currently majoring in music, but also has interests in psychology and pastoral ministries. He lives in the residence halls on Gray 600

"The attitude [Hernandez] exhibits despite the circumstances and trials of his life shows there is nothing that God can't handle," said Kevin Hanson, a floor mate and good friend of Hernandez. "Jeff's positivity inspires. Get to know him. Talk with him about Jesus, and you just may be refreshed in your faith," Hanson said.

Hernandez said, although his dream of coming to NU was deterred, "it helps [him] realize God really does have a plan and if you stick it out he'll still give you what he wants."

"If [God] shows you a glimpse of the plan be OK with knowing that the plan doesn't have to be fulfilled right now," Hernandez said.

Hernandez currently goes into treatment once a month on Fridays. The treatment he is receiving has some long-term effects.

"I did this thing. I went through it," Hernandez said "But it's actually not over, even when I'm done with treatment. Five years down the road I'll probably have health problems because of the treatment."

Hernandez is 21 years old, standing just over six feet tall. A full, auburn colored beard accompanies his big smile. His gauged ears peek out behind his long hair.

Hernandez's brown curly hair – which is usually in a ponytail – has yet to be cut since he lost it for the second time. He plans to cut his hair and possibly get a tattoo when he ends his treatment in April 2015.

"To me it's worth it that I got to go through pain if anyone gets closer to God through it," Hernandez said. "The time was obviously painful and obviously some stuff sucked, but honestly, if I can look back and be like 'one person came to God through me going through that pain?' Easy. Done. Worth it. Worth every second."

The facts contained in this article provided by www.cancer.org