

Through Adversity, Making a Life-Changing Difference

How did a tumor named Clod lead a teenager to develop a life mission dedicated “to helping create kinder communities, more compassionate nations, and a better world for all?” and how did it lead him to the IMF?

Allow us to explain.

Jeffrey Owen Hanson, now 15 years old, was born with neurofibromatosis, a genetic disorder that causes tumors on the central nervous system throughout life. In the fall of 2005, Jeff was preparing to receive chemotherapy for a tumor on his optic nerve that was greatly affecting his vision.

“I nicknamed it ‘Clod’ because it sounded dumb and nerdy, and seemed perfect for a brain tumor,” Jeff says. “I wanted to laugh at this tumor, not be afraid of it.”

But Clod continued to cause trouble and Jeff’s vision continued to fail. It was time to hit Clod with radiation. Once again, Jeff showed his panache for life. He greeted his 28th and final round of radiation by wearing a tuxedo for the occasion.

Recovery from his battle with Clod meant Jeff had to remain relatively isolated. But as a driven teenager, he also wanted to stay busy. He started painting in earnest, creating work on small note cards.

“I’ve always liked painting,” Jeff says. “And then it became this fun thing that could cheer me up.” The painting continued, and continued. When friends and family would come visit they’d paint with him.

This past December Jeff created his first-ever calendar. Titled *Generous HeART*, the calendar features 12 reprints of Jeff’s original art with its proceeds to benefit 12 different charities, including the IMF, all hand-selected by him.

It was while choosing those charities that Jeff’s thoughts turned to Karl Vollstedt, a close family friend who was diagnosed with multiple myeloma in 2004. Jeff knew the IMF was vitally important to Karl; it therefore became important to him.

In addition to the calendar, Jeff has also created a special series of note cards entitled *A Cure For Karl*. They feature six of Jeff’s prints. Because of Jeff’s generosity, all proceeds benefit the IMF.

“I am so honored that Jeff has chosen to support the IMF with his extraordinary artwork,” Karl says. “Jeff is a fantastic person and friend. He’s also an excellent example of people who ‘learn to live’ with medical diagnoses that will affect their lives – every day.”

Jeff’s charitable contributions started back in 2006 when he created *Jeff’s Bistro*, a modern-day take on the driveway lemonade stand. *Jeff’s Bistro* was initially conceived in order to help Jeff buy a special chair for his bedroom. Jeff sold beverages, his mother’s baked goods. . . and the original note cards amassed from his recovery time spent painting. Neighbors immediately sensed that Jeff’s artwork was special.

Jeff’s Bistro raised \$15,000 that summer – far, far more than the price of Jeff’s coveted bedroom chair. He donated his proceeds to the Children’s Tumor Foundation.

When summer was over, demand for Jeff’s art didn’t fade. His parents’ unfinished basement in Overland Park, Kansas officially became Jeff’s studio. And after his battle with Clod, Jeff’s vision had stabilized to 20/150. With glasses, he can now read the big “E” on the eye chart.

“My health is perfect,” Jeff says.

Jeff acknowledges that his visual impairment has affected his artistic aesthetic. “My art has large, colorful shapes with blurred margins,” he says. “I see things best in high contrast, and my art reflects this. I do not see straight, sharp lines. I really cannot draw or paint anything concrete. You will not find me at the State Fair sketching caricatures.”

Where you will find Jeff is the halls of Kansas State School for the Blind, where he is currently a freshman. You will also find Jeff meeting with potential clients and buyers, and sometimes even hobnobbing backstage with music legend Sir Elton John.

Jeff met Elton John in October 2007 through Make-A-Wish Foundation. After the pop superstar’s concert, the two shared thoughts with each other about their philanthropic goals. They found they had a lot in common, and have supported each other’s work ever since. In late 2008, Jeff gifted 12 of his original canvases to the Elton John AIDS Foundation Baphumelele Children’s Home in Khayelitsha, South Africa.

Just as the IMF encourages its members to live their lives to the fullest, Jeff continues to live his the very same way. In addition to his enormous charitable donations, Jeff now also sells his work commercially to private clients. “It allows me to invest in my future,” he says.

But that future will always include a devotion to philanthropy, and using his talent – found through adversity – to support the people he loves and causes that matter, like the IMF.

With the same charm that drove him to name his tumor Clod and attend radiation in a tuxedo, Jeff continues to view all of life’s obstacles in a positive light: “Take the problem you have, be open to others about it, and use it to your advantage,” he advises. “No one is perfect. You need to openly attack your problem so that you can joyfully move on.”

“Keep your eyes open for the ‘ungiven,’” he says. “Art is around us everywhere.”

To purchase Jeffrey Owen Hanson’s inspirational work on behalf of the IMF, please visit our web site: www.myeloma.org. More information about Jeff and his work is also available at www.jeffreyowenhanson.com.