

Om's Story

10-year-old Om came home from school with a headache every day for a week. During the weekend though, his headache became so intense that his parents, Ketul and Krupa, called the paramedics to their home in New Jersey. After a CT scan and MRI, the family learned the terrible news: Om had a rare brain tumor called oligodendroglioma.

"My doctor said it was a rare brain tumor in kids," Om said. "It was a little scary. It's very rare, but I'm the one that got it."

Doctors at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia worked to develop a customized treatment plan for Om that would combine chemotherapy and proton radiation therapy. Once Om's radiation therapy and chemotherapy were completed, an MRI showed that his tumor appeared to be gone. His family celebrated by taking Om's Make-a-Wish trip to visit his grandfather's home in India.

During the trip, the family visited a shrine high up in the Himalayas and Ketul recalls how amazed he was at his son's endless strength. "Om had to walk three miles up a hill," Ketul says, "and he had no problem."

Months after the trip, the family learned that Om's tumor was back. It was a huge setback, but Om was fearless.

Ketul remembered his son's reaction: "The first thing he told the doctor was, 'I beat it one time, I'm going to go beat it again. I'm going to be a two-time cancer survivor.'"

But Om admitted how difficult that time was. "That was really emotional for me. It was hard to learn that it came back."

Om started a new chemotherapy treatment — an intense combination of three drugs. This was harder on him than his earlier treatments, but, his first MRI during this new chemotherapy regime showed that his tumor was shrinking.

He was doing very well until a call from CHOP on September 6, 2017 changed everything. It was Om's first day of 8th grade.

"The doctors told us that his tumor grew back and we have to come up with another plan for Om's treatment," says Krupa. They placed him on an immunotherapy drug and scheduled a biopsy for October 4, just one week after Om would be serving as an ambassador for the CHOP Parkway Run & Walk in Philadelphia. At the walk, Om held the hand of a 2-year-old patient, who was scared to go on stage without his mother and won the hearts of over 10,000 attendees by talking about how everyone must unite in the fight against cancer.

Immediately following the surgery, Om was still the same strong and happy boy, even when he had 23 staples in his head. He was even released from the hospital earlier than expected because he was doing so well and he was so determined to go home.

Two weeks after surgery, however, Om started having problems with his vision and balance, and eventually he became unable to speak and stay awake. The once-lively boy now slept all day. In November, doctors told his family that there was no hope left, but Om kept fighting and his courage never wavered.

After everything Om went through and the toll treatment took on his body, his dad says, "he was always just as original" as before the tumor diagnosis. He was smart as a whip, took responsibility to understand his disease and treatment, and helped others every chance he got.

Om passed away on February 7, 2018, but the impact he left on so many lives is proof that he is still a winner in the fight against cancer.

Om Memorial Fund

A cancer diagnosis comes with dozens of questions but only one definite answer: that you will never have all the answers. As a family, this answer is frustrating and heartbreaking, but all the same motivating to try and eliminate this uncertainty and doubt.

Om's unpredictable rollercoaster journey since his initial diagnosis brought along multiple biopsies, surgeries, radiation, chemotherapy, side effects, and even a return of his tumor. The experience has been life shattering for the entire family, filled with a feeling of helplessness yet hope at the same time. It is our responsibility to help other families going through the same tough experiences and prevent any child in the future from enduring the same pain and difficulties.

We never could have imagined that a happy, healthy boy like Om would have to fight this battle. After all, there was no history of cancer in either side of his family tree. It is easy to think that you will never face an obstacle such as cancer because we tend to take our good fortune and good health for granted, but cancer can strike anyone at any time because science has not yet found a way to prevent it. This is why awareness, involvement, and contributions to the battle against cancer are so important; we need to do whatever we can to eliminate this menace and make even more progress in the battle against cancer. Any donation is a step towards more certainty, more reassurance, more efficient treatment options and eventually, eradicating cancer altogether.

The **Om Memorial Fund** will support programs and initiatives that bring smiles, positive attitudes, and the power of perseverance to school age children.

Om Memorial Fund will also provide financial and other assistance to children fighting cancer, as well as support education and research that help prevent or terminate childhood cancer. OMF will also establish a scholarship for the Monroe Township High School Class of 2022.

A positive attitude gives you power over your circumstances instead of your circumstances having power over you.