

Dear Travis, Lauren, Virginia, Scott, Jen, Sarah and Doug,

As I write this note, I wonder how my favorite four days of 2017 came and passed so quickly. SDTC is not only the “Best Day in Tri”, but it is also the best weekend of the year!

My life has changed in so many wonderful ways since my first CAF exposure through Sarah Reinertsen. In 2012, I was diagnosed with osteosarcoma and my left leg was amputated that November. In order to cure the cancer I had 10 months of chemo that took a real toll on my body and my spirit. Sarah was (and is) the most outstanding role model I could have ever had, and she was also the first amputee I had ever met. During a skype call in 2013, when I was afraid to even try on my prosthesis, Sarah gave me a virtual tour of the different legs in her closet and told me about all of the things she could do with each one of them. She also mentioned a Mobility Clinic that was coming up in June in NYC. I finished Chemo in May and a few weeks later I showed up (bald, chubby and on crutches) to my first CAF event. Travis greeted me warmly and promptly told me that if my leg wasn't hurting, I didn't need to use them. With confidence in my new mentor, I put those crutches down, and haven't used them to walk ever since.

During a running clinic in Boston later that fall, Travis introduced me to someone who would become one of my best friends. Breezy Bochenek was just about a year out of chemo when we met in Boston, and gave me exactly the push I needed to enter the world of adaptive sports. I was learning to run on my walking leg and Breezy and I raced each other during the obstacle course for the first time. (She, of course, completely owned me in her running leg.) Back then, Breezy was the only other osteosarcoma survivor I knew who was my age. She and I had so much in common that very few others could truly understand. We had already overcome so many obstacles, but, we were ready to take on any that lay ahead.

My first SDTC in October, 2013 was absolutely fantastic. I had come to just check it out, and my family ended up participating in the 5K and Tour De Cove. (The TDC has since become one of my favorite parts of SDTC.) I met so many other amazing athletes and left feeling incredibly inspired.

Four years later, CAF has given me so many opportunities to learn and grow and some of the best moments of my life. At the 2017 SDTC mobility clinic, Breezy and I went head to head again. This time, we both wore our running feet and the winner is up for interpretation! (It depends on who you ask.) The “Osteo bond” Breezy and I share has extended far beyond a cancer diagnosis to a group of six other young osteosarcoma survivors, to teens/young adults who have recovered from severe injury, and to our other friends with a wide variety of physical challenges. I cannot tell you how happy it makes me to see our CAF “family” of overcomers thrive and grow as we welcome new athletes every year.

This year at SDTC, I biked on stage at the Tour De Cove. I was so happy and grateful to see how far CAF has taken me in those five, short, but incredibly long, years. On Monday, I left La Jolla more inspired than ever before. I intend to use that inspiration and motivation to reach as high as I possibly can and make the most of every muscle cell in my body.

Thank you truly, deeply, and fully for this incredibly special and amazing weekend. CAF has given me the gift of the closest friendships and strongest bonds I could have ever hoped for. It has shown me that together, we are “Unbreakable”. My CAF family has become one of the strongest support systems in my life, despite only seeing them a handful of times a year. The positive feelings I have after SDTC carry me through everyday challenges: with CAF, I know I am never alone. Over the past four and a half years, I’ve learned that challenges are simply opportunities for us prove our strength, worth, grit, and determination. CAF has taught me to make opportunity out of my “challenge”. I also want to thank you for everything you do to help with grants. Watching my new friend Sam’s face light up when she was surprised with her running leg was one of the most beautiful moments of the entire weekend. Sam Bodger is one of the kindest people I have ever met and I am so grateful to have the opportunity to see her develop into the amazing athlete we all know she will be. If there is anything I can do to help CAF in any way, please let me know.

Thank you times infinity,

Kelly Ray

