



Timaree Marston, center, had her head shaved and advocated cancer research to lawmakers in Washington, D.C., along with fellow 46 Mommas members Alyson Weissman, far left, Sabrina Jeffers, second from right, and Maureen Philips, far right.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TIMAREE MARSTON

Moms against cancer

Posters in the UCSF Children's Hospital pictured bald parents alongside their bald children, **Timaree Marston** remembers. The posters were for St. Baldrick's Foundation, a nonprofit supporting childhood cancer research through sponsored head shavings.

At the time, in 2012, Marston asked her 3-year-old son Caemon if she should shave her hair. "Absolutely not," he replied—he didn't want his mother to change. He had been diagnosed with juvenile myelomonocytic leukemia, a rare form of the blood cancer that is difficult to treat and has a high rate of recurrence. After treatment, a bone marrow transplant and five-and-a-half months living with the diagnosis, Caemon died.

Marston, an English teacher who has lived all around Northern California, found a home with St. Baldrick's along with an affiliated fundraising group of mothers of cancer patients known as 46 Mommas. She has been fundraising, advocating and organizing to stop childhood cancer ever since—including a recent head-shaving trip to Washington, D.C., to seek research funding from lawmakers. SN&R spoke to Marston about her journey, her work and Caemon.

Does carrying on your son's legacy motivate a lot of what you do now?

It does, but I have a 4-year-old daughter now, and I teach. I teach at area community colleges; I teach English. And so I do have this professional life, and I have a life as a parent again, but this is the way I parent my son. I don't get to parent my son in everyday activities, I don't get to make him brush his teeth or help him learn to read. I instead show his picture and help ensure that other kids from other families don't have to endure what we did.

How has all of this changed you?

There are a lot of parents who endure the loss of a child and they sink, and the trauma of going through cancer treatments, and the trauma of enduring the loss of a child to cancer is something that lives with a person forever. ... There is nothing like a bone marrow transplant, when you see your child as close to death as they can get without dying. And just some parents do fold under that; I folded and I rose. I grew from this. And as horrible as it sometimes feels to say, I wouldn't be as strong as I am today had it not been for Caemon's cancer.

Is there a tendency for people to look away from topics like childhood cancer?

Oh, sure. There is a wide assumption that children don't get cancer. There is also just the fact that it's very difficult to look at. It's difficult to see children who are sick, to talk about children who are sick, to talk about children dying. And I know there were people in my life, they just couldn't handle that anymore. They needed to move on. And I think it's important to help them along with that—because it is part of our existence, and it's becoming more prevalent.

How many times have you shaved your head for this?

This was the third time I've shaved.

What does shaving your head mean to you, and does that change over time?

It does. It is a little bit different each time. The first time I did it, I was very much joining this group, and our focus at that point was exclusively on the shave and raising money—and so the first time, there was a sense of shedding some of the trauma, there was a sense of renewal in it. I think all of those sort of cliché ideas about shaving one's head, they exist, and once that hair starts to come off, it's pretty impactful. But it has changed—this time, I think this time was probably the last time I will shave my head. □

For more information about St. Baldrick's and 46 Mommas, visit stbaldricks.org/campaigns/46mommas.

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