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## An angel on her shoulder

Cancer survivor honored for her courage

by Al Sullivan Sep 08, 2010 | 77 views | 0 | 0 | |

Reporter staff writer



With purple hair that looked blue and an outfit to match, Scarlett Margetanski went to a Tom Petty rock concert in mid-August, where she promptly got stopped by security because her radiation readings were more than five times higher than anyone else.

She had to explain she had just gone through radiation therapy for cancer, but loved Tom Petty too much to miss him when he came to town.

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"They asked if it was safe for me to be out," she said.

Not only did she get to see Tom Petty, but a day later doctors called to tell her the treatments had worked, and she was cancer free – defying a prediction last April that she would not live more than 30 days.

When interviewed on Aug. 25, Margetanski wore a wig of bright blue hair with complementary matching clothing.

"I wear bright things to make the world cheery around me, even if I don't feel very cheery at the time," she said.

Cancer has been a life long battle she has managed to continue to win against all odds, often at great pain which sometimes brought her to the edge of despair.

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"I wear bright things to make the world cheery around me." --  
Scarlett Margetanski

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But she credits her faith in providing her with miracle after miracle, as well as advancements in medicine. She said by holding out, she managed to get the drugs she needed in the nick of time.

During a trip to Lourdes, she says she heard the voice of the Virgin Mother telling her, "You will be alright."

"What she didn't say is that it would be easy," Margetanski said.

She washed her head with the water, and prayed for a miracle, and she has over the years received more than one. Drugs have been a mixed blessing, saving her life, but not without pain and side effects.

**Honored for giving back**

In August, Margetanski was honored by the Bayonne Community Action League's Partners in Progress Award for her involvement in charitable and community issues, as well as advocacy. She has also been instrumental in raising much needed awareness and financial support for the American Cancer Society through their Relay for Life event.

Nominated by Chrissy Andrascik, an event manager for the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life of Bayonne, Margetanski was chosen not only for her strength and resilience as a cancer survivor herself, but for being an inspiration to others through her commitment to raising awareness and support of cancer prevention, detection, and research.

"At this year's event, I had the pleasure of meeting Scarlett Margetanski," Andrascik said. "Scarlett is a cancer survivor. She called me asking if she could tell her story at our 2010 Relay event."

### A life long battle

Now 45 years old, Margetanski discovered she had cancer at 10 years old. She remembered her mother wanting to dress her in some homemade clothing she hated, but she said she would only agree if she could shave her underarms.

"I didn't think my mother would ever say yes, but she did, and lucky she did, because when I lifted up my arm, she saw the lump. We didn't shave my underarms, we went to the hospital."

She was diagnosed with a rare childhood cancer often referred to as PNET and treated with chemo and cobalt radiation and was put into remission – although it did stop her from having a child of her own. She and her husband, Daniel, later adopted a girl.

Then, her husband was diagnosed with testicular cancer and Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, which spread to his lungs and the spinal fluid surrounding his brain.

Margetanski said he was at death's door, but a new drug injected into his brain helped save his life.

### Breast cancer came next

In 1999, Scarlett was again diagnosed with cancer, this time bilateral breast cancer. She underwent a bilateral mastectomy with immediate reconstruction followed by a complete hysterectomy. Shortly after, she was experiencing blackouts. After an MRI of her brain, she was diagnosed with breast cancer metastasis to the spinal fluid in her brain. Last April, she was told she had 30 days to live. By late August, she was pronounced cancer free.

But some of the drugs she had to take to fight the cancer led to heart problems.

She knows she is terminal, and that she might have to go back on treatment in the future. But for now, she is determined to live her life, to remain positive and happy, wearing different colored wigs every day.

But she wants to help others and has thrown herself into the fight against cancer, starting her own Relay for Life team called "Scarlett Fever," as well as volunteering to tell her story at other cancer events. She set a goal to raise \$10,000 and has raised almost \$13,000 so far.

"Scarlett has many reasons to be bitter or angry or sad, and I'm sure she has her moments," said Andrascik. "But she has those moments and then gets past them and throws herself into another project. I am grateful that she chose the Relay for Life of Bayonne as one of her ways to fight back against this awful disease. I consider myself lucky to have met her and privileged to have worked with her. She was a phenomenal team captain and is a remarkable woman."

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