You helped Amanda beat 5 different cancers before age 30...

But she’ll always need YNHH

“A’m just hilarious,” Amanda says, referring to her love of snappy conversation and clever quips.

Not what you’d expect from someone who had five different cancer diagnoses before the age of 30.

So much sickness in one person’s life doesn’t seem possible, but Amanda has a rare genetic disorder that puts her at a high risk for developing a range of cancers—and she’ll face that terrifying risk for the rest of her life.

But thanks to your generosity, at age 33 Amanda is living an incredibly full and meaningful life. She’s an avid athlete—a hand-cycling marathoner, rock climber, and yoga enthusiast. She loves reading, cooking with her boyfriend, watching movies, and her cat, Bronx (because she’s a huge Yankees fan).

And she has a profoundly important job that she loves (more on that later).

One shocking blow after another

Her first cancer diagnosis came at age 11, when she discovered a lump in her left leg. She was treated with chemo and radiation. She lost her hair, her eyelashes, and her energy. She missed so much school she had to repeat seventh grade.
But her leg couldn’t be saved. It was amputated just above the knee when Amanda was only 13.

That experience alone is a more-than-ample dose of illness for a lifetime, but over the next 15 years, there were four more cancer diagnoses. And a seemingly endless succession of harsh treatments and surgeries.

Throughout it all, Amanda received medical care at Yale New Haven Hospital and Smilow Cancer Hospital. She credits her doctors with saving her life, time after time. “No stone was ever left unturned for me and my family,” she says. “It’s so evident that these doctors truly care about making sure I have the best possible quality of life.”

“I’ve been healthy now for six years—the longest I’ve gone without cancer in the last 22 years... knock on wood!”

Do you believe in silver linings?

It’s hard to believe, but something wonderful actually came out of Amanda’s illnesses. Her experiences led her to pursue a master’s degree in social work. Today, she is a licensed social worker and the coordinator of the Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology Program at Yale New Haven Children’s Hospital. She helps teens and young adults with cancer cope with the psychosocial and emotional challenges they face.

She brings an incredible empathy to her job as a result of her own medical history—and her patients are grateful to have someone to talk to who really understands them.

“I feel so lucky that I get to do what I do,” she says. “I feel this is what I’m meant to do, this is my purpose.”

It’s not just Amanda’s professional life that is bound to YNHH. Her future health and survival are too.

Her rare genetic syndrome means that her health must be closely monitored. “I get bloodwork every three months, an annual full-body MRI from brain to toes, a gynecologic check every four months, annual kidney screenings and dermatology checks, and a yearly abdominal ultrasound,” she says.

“I will always need the hospital and I will always need my doctors to care for me. Yale New Haven has been a true constant—a rock in the medically crazy life I’ve had.”

Smilow celebrates 10 years!

There would be no Smilow Cancer Hospital without YOU.

TO ALL OUR AMAZING DONORS:

THANK YOU for a decade of hope, healing, love, and outstanding cancer care.

We appreciate you more than we can say.
When you meet Lauren Telesz, it’s hard to believe she’s battled cancer. She’s happy, healthy, full of energy, and excited about her future after she graduates from Yale next month.

But at age 15, she received the terrifying diagnosis of Stage IV Hodgkin’s lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system. Instead of starting her sophomore year of high school, she spent three months in and out of Smilow and Yale New Haven Children’s Hospital (YNHCH), receiving course after course of intensive chemotherapy.

It was an awful time. She only made it to school for 14 days over those three months. Her beautiful brown hair fell out. She missed homecoming. She felt like her friends couldn’t relate to what she was going through.

“I felt very alone,” she says. “I felt like the only teen in the world with cancer.”

Lauren is incredibly grateful for the wonderful medical care she received here. But looking back on her experience, she feels that her cancer journey might have been easier to bear if there had been a supportive, age-appropriate hospital environment for teens with cancer, like her.

Feeling like life is passing you by

“As a teen with cancer, you end up isolated in your room the entire time,” she says. “It’s so important to get out and talk to kids your age who are going through what you’re going through. But the only common room was designed for little kids, with Elmo and Dora the Explorer. As a teen, that was the last place on earth you wanted to be.”

Once her treatment was completed and she got the “all-clear,” Lauren couldn’t stop thinking about the
Yes! I want to help teens fighting cancer—like Lauren—feel hope, love, and belonging.

Here is my gift to help support the Lauren Telesz/Smilow Teen Center

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feelings of loneliness and isolation she experienced in the hospital. She made it her mission to make things better for teens who would be there in the future.

Lauren mobilized her high school friends, families, and teachers to raise $10,000—and the idea took off. Soon, Joel Smilow—the benefactor of Smilow Cancer Hospital, Teen Cancer America, and several other donors added their support.

Last November, the Lauren Telesz/Smilow Teen Center opened on the seventh floor at YNHCH. With Lauren lending her insight and advice, the architects created a bright, welcoming space for teens and young adults.

“There’s comfy furniture where kids can sit and chat, and a mini-amphitheater for watching movies together,” Lauren says. “There are computers and iPads for keeping up with schoolwork and connecting with friends.”

Amanda Garbatini (see cover story), coordinator of the Adolescent and Young Adult (AYA) Oncology Program, says the center is a game changer. “It’s a safe place where they can go and feel like themselves, where they can be the teens or young adults they are.”

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