

Spotlight

Yale
NewHaven
Health
Yale New Haven
Hospital

THANK YOU for giving
Mike a second chance

Dangerous seizures were a constant threat

Mike is seizure-free today, thanks to your help, and doing so well he's training for television's *American Ninja Warrior*. Shown here, at his gym.

Until you helped change his life

Mike Funaro remembers exactly how he felt six years ago as he waited in pre-op for the surgery that would remove part of his brain.

"For the very first time," he says, "I was excited for what the future was going to bring me." He was 19.

Epilepsy, a neurological disorder marked by seizures, had dominated Mike's life since he was five years old. One of his earliest seizures was so serious that he had to be transported to the hospital by helicopter for emergency treatment.

(continued inside) 



Part of his life, every single day

After that, the fear that he'd have a seizure overshadowed his childhood. His doctor tried to control his epilepsy with one medication after another. Sometimes they worked for a little while, and his mother, Nancy, would feel a spark of hope.

But eventually, each medication stopped working. "Whenever I thought I was in the clear," Mike says, "a seizure would break through, and I'd be right back at square one."

His seizures were usually mild, but they became more frequent in his teen years. Mike felt different from the other kids. He wasn't allowed to drive. Contact sports were off-limits because impact can trigger a seizure. There always had to be an adult around who knew what to do if he had a seizure.

"I hated taking medication every day," Mike says. "It was embarrassing being shuttled around. I felt like I was a burden." And always, there was that fear of a really serious seizure, with a risk of injury or brain damage—or even death.

Finally, a glimmer of hope

When Mike was about 16, his doctor suggested consulting with an epilepsy expert in the Yale Comprehensive Center at Yale New Haven Hospital. That's when Mike and his family met Richard Mattson, MD.

"Dr. Mattson said, 'I think we can help you,'" says Nancy. "I'll

never forget those words—they were a glimmer of hope for all of us."

Mike began more than a year's worth of testing—MRIs, an EEG, a PET scan, a neurological evaluation, and intensive monitoring of his brain function.

"About one-third of those with epilepsy can't be controlled with medications," explains Dr. Mattson. "Of those, a certain number will have the epilepsy coming from an area in the brain that can be safely removed without leaving unacceptable after-effects."

Fortunately, the tests showed that Mike was one of the lucky patients. His epilepsy originated in his right temporal lobe. "That's one of the less important areas," says Dr. Mattson. "When people have epilepsy, that part isn't working normally—so removing it leaves little or no after-effect."

Mike's parents couldn't help being anxious though. The surgery had risks, and there was no guarantee it would work. But they were comforted knowing that Mike's surgeon, Dennis Spencer, MD, a neurology expert who pioneered major advances in the treatment of epilepsy at YNH, had decades of experience doing this kind of operation.

As for Michael, he couldn't wait for his surgery. "He was so excited about the possibility of not having seizures," says Nancy, "he would have done anything."

♥

**"Donations change lives.
They give people back
their freedom."
NANCY FUNARO, MIKE'S MOM**

Ten hours, 36 staples, and six years later

Mike's life has been transformed.

He hasn't had a single seizure since the surgery. He completed college and received two degrees—one in biology and the other in occupational therapy. He has a job he loves, working in a therapeutic group home for adolescents.

And he has big plans—the kinds of plans he never dared dream of before the surgery.

He's training to be selected to compete on *American Ninja Warrior* on television, as an advocate for epilepsy. "I want to change the way people think about the disorder."

Doesn't that sound like a miracle? Thank you, donors, for helping make it possible! ♥

**Will you help
give someone
like Mike a
second chance?**

**Make your donation
today! givetoynhh.org
/epilepsyfund**



Generous donor/sailors posing after a beautiful day on the water

Donors raise funds for families in need to honor a beloved husband, father, and sailor

ANNE PETERLIN REMEMBERS sitting in the waiting room each time she accompanied her husband, Dennis, to Smilow Cancer Hospital for treatment for his sarcoma.

"One of the first questions we'd ask the other patients was, 'Where are you from?'" Anne and Dennis were just 20 minutes away, in Stratford.

That's why they were surprised to find that many patients travel long distances—from all over the world—to be treated at Smilow.

"So many patients don't live locally and face an extra burden of traveling and being away from their families during treatment," she says. "We felt lucky after a long day of treatment—we could get home quickly, and Dennis could sleep in his own bed."

Tragically, Dennis lost his battle with cancer in 2013.

When Anne and her two young daughters wanted to honor Dennis and raise funds in his memory, they came up with an idea that was a perfect fit.

"Lots of people do a 5K or a bike ride in someone's memory," says Anne. "We wanted to do something different, and because Dennis loved sailing, we decided to do a regatta—a sailing race—at the Housatonic Boat Club. That's where our family spent lots of time sailing and being with friends each summer."

The first "HOPE Regatta" in 2014 was a small gathering where Dennis's friends and family got together to celebrate his life. Since then, it has grown into a yearly event with 14 boats and over 200 participants, a happy hour, dinner, and a band. It's a wonderful way to spend a summer day, and everyone is welcome.

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Remembering Dennis's empathy for those who travel long distances to get to Smilow, **Anne and her daughters decided to donate the funds they raised to patients and families who struggle to afford a place to stay nearby** when they come for treatment.

The Suites at Yale New Haven Hospital, just two blocks away from the hospital, offers discounted accommodations for patients and their families. But many families can't afford the cost of staying in a hotel. The Peterlins created the "Suites—Patient and Family Support Fund" to help them. To date, the fund has helped more than 150 families pay for rooms at The Suites.

And last year, every guest that had to spend Thanksgiving at The Suites—17, to be exact—received a complimentary stay from this fund!

"We hope to reduce the burden and hardship of someone going through the same struggle Dennis did—to make their day a little bit better," says Anne. ♥

The Suites
AT YALE NEW HAVEN

Dear Donors,
It's heartwarming to know that someone cares enough to brighten the lives of strangers who are walking through a challenging journey. Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to our benefactors—their kindness means so very much to us! We can't thank you enough!
Emily S.

What a difference you can make!

Take a look at this note sent by a guest who stayed at The Suites—**thanks to our donors!**

For information about next year's Regatta, or to donate to the Suites—Patient and Family Support Fund, visit givetoynhh.org/suitesatynhh.



Closer to Free
September 7, 2019

There's still time to sign up!

Join the heroes who raise funds for cancer care and research.

Register now at
rideclosertofree.org

