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COLUMNIST

Go Get 'em, Dawn

By Carl Golden | September 19, 2022, 1:41 pm | in **Columnist**
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I've never met Dawn Parkot (<https://www.insidernj.com/story-dawn-parkot/>). Nor do I live in Morris Township where she is a candidate for the Morris District Board of Education.

Win or lose, though — she lost in a bid last year — her candidacy alone is a triumph of indomitable individual will, an act that plumbs the depth of personal courage to live a fulfilling life in the face of an illness that would devastate most people and turn them into recluses.

She suffers from athetoid cerebral palsy, confined to a wheelchair and able to communicate only through a computer that converts written text to speech.

There is no cure. She will never leave her chair, never be able to use her voice to converse.

I am a cancer survivor, struck at random by a disease the mere mention of which strikes fear into those diagnosed with one of its myriad forms.

It does not compare with the severity of the affliction which has robbed Dawn Parkot of the everyday life of activity the healthy take for granted.

And, while it is lethal, cancer is also treatable and curable only in the sense that it can be driven into remission and kept at bay. For those whose life is owed to skilled surgeons and a regimen that involves chemically poisoning one's system to kill malignant cells, relapse is a reality of life to be accepted.

If that is a luxury, Dawn Parkot cannot indulge in it.

In a modest way, cancer survivors share an experience with Dawn.

Upon our diagnosis, we could retreat to a corner, brood, curse our bad luck and fall victim to the “why me?” syndrome. We can stare into the abyss of self pity and struggle to avoid falling in.

Or, we can reach an understanding that life — while jeopardized — is in our hands. Like the youngster whose father teaches him to swim by tossing him into the deep end of the pool, surrender is not an option.

For Dawn, her tenacity for life meant graduating from the University of Notre Dame, and earning a master's degree in computer science and engineering. She's skied in Colorado and is a member of the New Jersey Para-Olympic equestrian team.

Mine involved maintaining my work life, serving as press secretary to Gov. Christie Whitman after recovering from surgery and spending a year submitting to weekly intravenous chemotherapy treatments.

I do not presume to draw a singular comparison between my experience and Dawn's. Rather, it is to illustrate and focus as sharply as possible on what Dawn has accepted in her life and, with mental and physical courage, conquered.

She is challenging two incumbents, a fairly daunting task when seeking any public office. She's been defeated once before, but only at the ballot box.

So, Dawn, I don't know you and I can't vote for you. But, if I could, odds are I'd be first in line when the polls open to proudly put the “X” next to your name.

Until then, Go Get 'Em, Dawn!

Carl Golden is a senior contributing analyst with the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

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