

Perseverance chronicles the true stories of 20 young adults who were diagnosed with childhood cancer.

HOPE EVERYWHERE

By Danielle Quintero



Carolyn with her dog Lila Rose

CAROLYN RUBENSTEIN, 24, has done more with her life than most people twice her age. An early encounter with children affected by cancer set her on a path that not only changed her life, but has improved the quality of life for countless young people. A South Florida native, Carolyn started her own non-profit organization, Carolyn's Compassionate

Children, when she was just 14 years old. She is the author of the book *Perseverance: True Voices of Cancer Survivors* (Forge Books, \$24.99), which chronicles the true stories of 20 young adults who were diagnosed with childhood cancer.

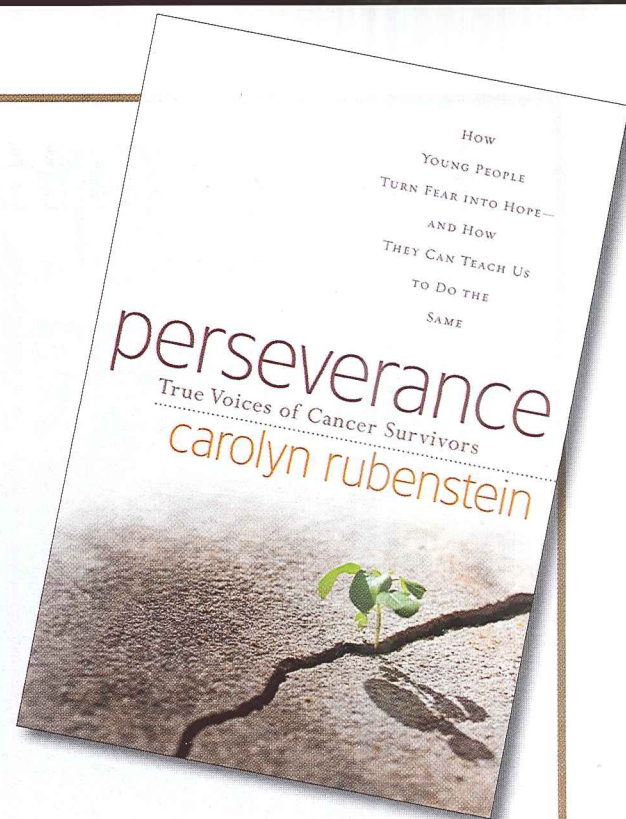
WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO WRITE THE BOOK?

It is a journey that started when I was 6 years old. My parents friends were running a camp for children going through cancer, Camp Sunshine in Maine. I went with them to visit and it sparked a passion in me. When I was 13, I returned to the camp and spent a week with the children, forming friendships. After that week, I knew I wanted to do something different with my life. It started simply- writing pen pal letters to kids. They were kind of isolated and these letters were helping their lives. My organization began to grow as more people began to write letters, eventually becoming focused on offering scholarships to cancer survivors. The journey led me to *Perseverance*, which I began writing 4 years ago.

MANY PEOPLE DON'T KNOW HOW TO REACT WHEN SOMEONE THEY KNOW IS DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER. IS THERE ANY ADVICE YOU CAN OFFER PEOPLE WHO MAY WANT TO BE THERE FOR A LOVED ONE OR FRIEND BUT AREN'T SURE WHAT TO SAY?

Each person in every situation is different. To the person wanting to offer support it is nerve wracking, but it's the same for the person dealing with cancer- they don't know what to say either- there is no protocol!

The main thing I've learned is that the only thing you can do is be there, that is the biggest sign of support, whether it is holding someone's hand, or simply reading a magazine...they are not looking for specific words, just the support of someone being there. Not being there can also make a huge



impact- it can be incredibly hard for people going through the disease, they feel alone and isolated. So in making that decision, you want to make sure to choose well and be there to support those you love!

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS A GREAT MISCONCEPTION ABOUT CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER?

When you think about cancer, especially in kids or young people, well, most people don't want to think about it, see it or hear about it. They try to ignore it and hope it never impacts them.

The biggest misconception is that cancer is the most negative thing that can occur in these children's lives, yet cancer doesn't define them as individuals. When I ask children if they would redo their lives if given a choice, not one person has said yes, even kids who were at the end of their lives. And if you think about it, it makes sense. Although the cancer is taking something away, it is also giving children and young adults something very positive and they are gaining so much wisdom.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE GREATEST LESSON OR MOST SIGNIFICANT UNDERSTANDING THAT YOU HAVE GAINED IN YOUR INTERACTIONS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS WITH CANCER?

The biggest lesson I've learned is not to put things off or wait. All we have control over is the right now. It is my guidepost in life and I think that is why I have done things so much earlier in my life. What I have learned from these individuals is to live in the moment...we only have today and we need to live it to the fullest.

WHAT MESSAGE DO YOU HOPE READERS OF YOUR BOOK CARRY WITH THEM?

It is a message I hope readers carry with them each day... that even in our times of struggle or our darkest times, there is hope in every situation and hope can be found everywhere. *CR*