

My name is Tina (45yrs young) and I would like to share my story about a fundraiser for my son, my battle with Stage 3 breast cancer, and now becoming a not-for-profit organization. Initially, we created the I'M JUST ME MOVEMENT to help raise money for my son with learning disabilities, so that he could attend a post-grad program that would provide him with an extra year of development to prepare him for college. (Not covered by financial aid) It also became a project for me to focus on while I was fighting breast cancer. Being out of work was so hard for me because I had never had been unable to work due to sickness (employed for 22 years in the deli at a local grocery store).

When Rze (RJ) was a junior in high school my husband and I knew that after graduation he would need an extra year of development, so his guidance counselor suggested that he attend a post-grad program. The post grad would allow him to use his accommodations from his special learning plan for students with disabilities (IEP-Individual Education Plan). He has struggled with his learning disabilities since he was six but did always dream of attending college and to play college basketball. Although he would've loved to go to a four-year college straight out of high school, he knew that he needed an extra year of development both academically and physically. I was dedicated to advocating for my son and wanted to do everything that I could to help him be in the best possible situation for success, so I started saving years before graduation. THEN CANCER SHOWED ITS UGLY HEAD!!!

The week of graduation my son did something very out of character when he decided that he wasn’t

going to hide his secret struggles any longer. He was tired of using just three-word answers when

responding to questions because he didn’t want his disability discovered. He also calculated every sentence because he stuttered a lot. Most people just assumed that he was shy because he was quiet. He now wants people to know that it is okay to be different and that he is not only a local basketball star, but there is more to him, including his disabilities. This is something that he had been trying very hard to hide SINCE HE WAS SIX years old, so I was shocked that he wanted to contact our local television station that had been covering him for the last four years for sports-related coverage and did an interview with them about his disability. They were surprised too because they had no idea. Many people reached out to him and thanked him for having the courage to share his struggle on TV.

He wants people to know they shouldn't waste twelve years of their lives, as he did, trying to hide who they are. That it is okay to be different. Before this interview, ONLY family, close friends, school staff and his teammates knew his secret. Everyone else just thought that he was very quiet, laid back, and a great basketball player. Rze has a big heart and has been involved with several community events. The one event that he prides himself on the most is a basketball clinic that we held to raise money, it involved him being able to talk with a group of youth at GRAFTON which is a residential setting(these youth live away from their families to prepare to re-introduce them back with their families after therapy and sometimes medication stabilization) He spoke about overcoming struggles, especially focusing on those individuals that have emotional and learning disabilities as well.

February 27, 2013, my doctor found three cancerous lumps in my left breast. She told me that I would have to start a series of procedures as well as 15 months of chemotherapy to increase my survival rate. Over the last few years I’ve had both breasts removed, and complete hysterectomy, 45 treatments of radiation, kidney failure, and blood clots in my lungs, and actually 24 months of chemotherapy! All of this sounds horrible, but I was able to focus on the fundraiser project that we started for my son’s post- grad helped me feel that I had a purpose. During my chemo and hospital stays I kept busy by

maintaining and managing the I’M JUST MOVEMENT. We were able to raise $6,000 of the $18,000

needed, and we made monthly payments on the remaining balance. I knew that I couldn’t stop paying for my chemo treatments and possibly die trying to put my son through school, so I was so grateful that my community of Winchester Virginia knew our stories and supported the fundraiser.

We named the fundraiser the I'M JUST ME MOVEMENT because my son felt it was very important for him and others to be proud of who they are. He chose to do a t-shirt fundraiser so that everyone could also display Self Pride. My son’s speech therapist, at six, told him to always "BE YOURSELF" so since the whole "Keep Calm” thing was trending, he wanted to do a t-shirt fundraiser with his message, KEEP CALM AND BE YOURSELF. 500 People in Winchester Virginia are showing off their shirts that they received for a $12 donation. (Rze's basketball jersey was number 12 at the time) Almost 1,000 people are spreading the message with their shirts Nationwide! We also organized car washes as well to raise money. We often smile, as we are reminded that the “Movement” is still ongoing when we randomly see people wearing their shirts.

Now, we have satisfied our financial obligation to Rze’s school. I am back to work, and things are manageable with my health. We would like for all of our efforts to continue and refocus the principle of the I’m Just Me Movement to become and function as a Not-for–profit organization. We will help raise money for our new cause to help the students. We will continue to organize car washes and seek donations from businesses as well. When doing the fundraiser for my son, some businesses were

reluctant to donate because they said that they wouldn’t donate for the benefit of just one individual but WOULD donate if the donation was for a group that was in need. Managing the fundraiser for my son was very difficult to do with just eight family members, but we did it! Now for our new basis, I

believe that the I’m Just Me Movement as a non-profit organization will be easier to enlist others to help raise a lot of money to help the students. Many businesses would be more likely to support and donate because they could claim it on their taxes as well. This is where I would like to ask for your help in making this happen!

Rze has graduated from the University of Pikeville with his bachelor’s degree. He got a scholarship to play basketball & soccer. Thanks to all that supported us in this Journey because the Movement is not about us. It is about all those people who stand up for something better in life. Join the Movement!