

# Strokes Of Survival

Junior’s passion for art helps support the cause for cancer

by staff reporter  
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Multi-colored ribbons hang from the walls as a sea of students in orange walk the halls. Amongst them junior Kiara Torres wears her bright orange painted shirt. She looks at all the people raising awareness for cancer, and thinks back to her own painful days in the hospital. A smile crosses her face as she proudly calls herself, “survivor.”

“I’m very casual about it,” Torres said. “When you’re battling such a big disease, you don’t know what to do anymore, and sometimes you don’t know who to talk to because you feel alone. I make many shirts and props to raise awareness, not just for me, but to let others who are currently fighting know that they are not alone.”

Keeping her own story in mind, Torres competes in several art competitions, such as VASE. She uses her artistic skills to support those who are currently fighting cancer by auctioning off her pieces for awareness raising organizations and talking to children who feel alone. Her goal is to be an art therapist and help all those who feel isolated achieve solace through art, as she once did.

“It’s a different environment when you’re surrounded by people who understand,” Torres said. “You can’t put a kid in a room full of kids who have never experienced what they’re going through. I can always get close to kids who have been through the same, you just click together.”

As a former cancer patient, Torres goes in for annual checkups, blood work and Echocardiograms. Her goal is not only to avoid being diagnosed again, but to raise awareness for those who are going through or have fought cancer.

“You see people with their hair and you see people outside and you feel it,” Torres said. “I couldn’t go outside and play or run because I bruise easily, and I couldn’t be out in the sun because it would harm my skin. I would just stay inside and draw.”

After visiting the pediatrician twice and being diagnosed with a common virus, Torres’ mother took her to The Miami Children’s Hospital Emergency Room.

“We were in the moving process when she first

got sick,” Torres’s mother Yanisbel Torres said. They said the virus would go away, but Kiara got worse.”

The doctors kept Torres under observation and ran several blood tests on. On May 21, 2010, at the age of 3, Torres was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoid Leukemia in her bone marrow.

“The moment the doctor came in to tell us, I blocked him, until the last sentence that he told me, ‘She has Leukemia,’” Mrs. Torres said. “That moment I came back, it felt like an out of the body experience. That moment, my life changed. My only child had cancer.”

Torres was immediately admitted for Intrathecal Chemotherapy. She underwent bone marrow aspiration with portacaths surgically placed twice. The procedural plan was for three years.

“Sometimes if I wear a dress or something you can see the marks,” Torres said. “My mom started taking precautions like not heating up plastic, and nothing with sodium nitrate, limitation on sugar and no soda. Even this day we have precautions to make sure it never comes back.”

With six months of therapy left, Torres’ cancer relapsed. The spinal test showed the cancerous cells spreading to the Central Nervous System. After being placed under another series of tests, Torres was moved to a more difficult procedure.

“I was almost five, going through various surgeries, implants and procedures,” Torres said. “I had to go through all the pain because they never sedated me with the spine ports and huge needles. They would have to hold me down like a ball so I wouldn’t scream out of pain.”

Once again, Torres had ports placed up and down her spinal cord and shoulders. She underwent stronger chemotherapy. She began to thin and lose her hair due to the brain radiation procedure.

“I was 24/7 at the hospital,” Torres said. “We were all stuck in hospital beds, eating garbage food or not eating at all because of all the chemotherapy. I tried to ignore my fears because you never know what will happen next.”

Mrs. Torres, who was 22 at the time, began spending days in the hospital. She had recently given birth to another daughter who was nearly three-months-old, and would often leave



photos courtesy of Kiara Torres

**The journey of junior Kiara Torres:** From her first day at chemotherapy to her brain radiation procedure, despite her health issues, Torres never lost her passion for art. In fact, she dedicated the above two pieces, titled of surrealism and Tim Burton to art competitions and cancer societies.

her newborn with her grandma so she could personally watch over Torres during her tests and therapy.

“I did not understand why,” Mrs. Torres said. “I even questioned God, I asked him why Kiara? Why did she have to go through this again and with less chance of survival. But, at the same time, as I watched her become friends with people who didn’t make it, I would pray and ask him to protect my daughter.”

As time passed, Torres’ only wish was to go to public school and learn to read and write. She began to spend holidays in the hospital surrounded by her new family which consisted of nurses, patients and families of patients.

“I didn’t really have friends outside the hospital,” Torres said. “It felt terrible, it is terrible. Imagine your best friend lying on a bed all the time, unable to move, unable to do anything, losing their hair, thin, pale, it’s even hard to eat.”

When she reached the age, Torres’ mother tried to have Torres join a school. However,

because of her inability to read or write, she was unable to pass the second grade.

“She had to put in extra work because being homebound was not enough quality teaching,” Mrs. Torres said. “Kiara would get sick and, at times, she would stay home for 21-45 days at a time. This journey was extremely nerve wrecking.”

Mrs. Torres kept her daughter inside to keep her from sustaining injuries and she began teaching her how to read and write. Torres attended public school and restarted the second grade. She was unable to go outside and play with other kids, so she concentrated on art. She worked hard to get her education on track, however her passion for art did not drop.

“I never showed her any type of weakness because we were going to fight this monster and we did,” Mrs. Torres said. “We have a special bond that I do not have with my other daughters. Kiara is a miracle, she beat cancer twice. She is my hero.”