

PROFILES OF THE EIGHT YOUNG FLOAT RIDERS

(listed alphabetically)

Andrea Beltran

Hacienda Heights

As a cross country runner on her high school's league champion team, Andrea, 16, possesses determination and stamina. She displayed this early on, when, as a 5 year old, she had surgery to remove a three-inch diameter cancerous tumor (ovarian teratoma). Her terrified parents wept, fearing the worst, but Andrea never doubted that she would survive. She survived, which her mother views as "a miracle." Today, the warm and bubbly student maintains a 4.0 grade point average. Her doctor describes her as "always happy and inspirational to others around her." Andrea is active in her church and participates in various charities, including the annual Revlon Run/Walk for Women, which raises funds for the fight against women's cancers. Andrea's biggest inspiration is her father, whom she admires for his perseverance and love and "determination to achieve a better life for his family." Her 2010 new year resolution is to prepare for college. She aspires to study business at Pepperdine University.

Jimmy Daniel

South Los Angeles (Athens-area)

As an infant, Jimmy suffered from multiple health issues and crises due to his sickle cell disease, a chronic hereditary anemia, primarily affecting African Americans, in which oxygen-deficient blood cells assume a crescent shape. He endured severe joint pain, blood transfusions, removal of his gall bladder, and a lung collapse (when he was rushed to emergency care and almost died). But one of his nurses says "Jimmy was determined to live a normal life and was willing to do whatever it took to feel better." When he was five, he started a daily prescription drug regimen that he continues to this day, and his condition has improved markedly. The regimen was directed by Dr. Elaine Smith (now deceased) whom Jimmy credits with saving his life and views as one of his heroes. Today, Jimmy, 16, is earning a 3.6 grade point average, has already completed ten classes at a local junior college, and is aiming to become a pharmacist one day. He is an actor in school plays, is an elected member of student government, raises money for medical charities, and participates on a junior league bowling team.

D'rell Gist

San Diego (City Heights-area)

Nearly two years ago, D'rell, then 9, went through a medical crisis when he experienced flu-like symptoms, mysteriously lost 20 pounds, started vomiting, urinated excessively, and had difficulty breathing. His parents rushed him to urgent care, where his body went into shock. His doctors saved him, and he was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, a condition in which the body does not produce the hormone insulin that is needed to convert sugar into energy for daily life. Today, D'rell, 11, stoically manages his disease by regularly monitoring his blood sugar level and taking 6-8 insulin shots a day. He continues to enjoy hiking, sailing, camping, and soccer. He has trained himself to be a skilled magician, performs in front of audiences, and aspires to be a professional magician one day. With his parents -- whom he regards as his heroes -- D'rell participates in the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation's annual "Walk to Cure Diabetes," which honored them last year for their fundraising efforts. His 2010 new year resolution is to excel more in school.

Morgan Heflin

Los Angeles (Mid-City-area)

Morgan was rushed to an emergency room in August 2008 after feeling weak, suddenly losing a lot of weight, and finding a golf ball size lump on her neck. Doctors confirmed that she had Hodgkin's disease, a cancer of the lymphatic system, which is part of one's immune system. She underwent grueling chemotherapy, which caused her to lose all of her hair and eyelashes. By January 2009, the cancer was no longer detectable. While being treated, staff at the cancer clinic admired Morgan's positive spirit and warmth and noted that "she bonded with all the children, encouraging them to keep fighting." A fellow patient named Jenna, with whom she formed a deep friendship, died, affecting Morgan deeply. She is still close to the mother of the deceased young girl, comforting and assisting her in moving through her grief. Morgan's illness forced her to leave school, but Morgan is now enrolled in an independent learning program and is scheduled to earn a high school diploma in January of 2010. After graduation, Morgan, 18, plans to study to become a pediatric oncology nurse, inspired in large part by the outstanding and compassionate care that she received when ill. Today, she volunteers at the cancer clinic that treated her and also volunteers to raise funds for nonprofit organizations dedicated to cancer research. She enjoys babysitting her year-old nephew Cameron, reading mystery novels, and going on 30-minute daily walks. To embark on her college nursing studies and do well is Morgan's new year resolution.

Haley Ishimatsu

Seal Beach

It is incredible for any person to earn a spot on the U.S. Olympic Team. It is doubly incredible when that person suffers from asthma, a chronic lung disease that inflames and narrows the airways and for which there is no cure. Yet Haley, now 17, competed in the 2008 Beijing Olympics diving competitions, one of the few (perhaps only) U.S. Olympians in Beijing with asthma. Despite this adversity, Haley and her partner placed 5th in the women's synchronized 10-meter platform event. To reach the Olympics, Haley made great sacrifices, which included moving to Indianapolis, Indiana, in order to practice year-round at the national diving training facility there (her father also quit his job in Los Angeles to live with her in Indiana). Now back in Seal Beach, Haley continues to compete, attends high school online, and is a straight A student. The voracious reader likes listening to music and collecting rocks as hobbies. She is interested in becoming a physician. Her mother, Dr. Carol Ishimatsu, practices at Kaiser Permanente's Downey Medical Center.

Kirstie Quezada

Corona

When Kirstie was 3, her parents drove her to an urgent care center because she was in pain and had swollen nodes on her neck. She was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL), a cancer of the white blood cells, the cells in the body that normally fight infections. She endured two-and-a-half years of chemotherapy and is currently in remission. Now 14, she enjoys listening to music, playing her guitar, and writing songs. Befitting her tough inner spirit, Kirstie likes playing youth softball as a catcher. She regards her father, a police lieutenant, as a hero for his bravery in protecting others, and she aspires to emulate him by becoming a police officer too. She and her family have volunteered at American Cancer Society events for many years, raising more than \$25,000 cumulatively to fight the disease. Kirstie says she looks forward to riding on the Rose Parade float so she can "represent all her doctors and nurses and show them how well I am because of them." She also wants to inspire others facing medical challenges that "they and their loved ones have hope and that anything is possible."

Monica Trent
Simi Valley

Monica turned a negative into a positive and is poised to achieve even more. Her parents were devastated and cried when they learned in 2002 that their then 8-year-old daughter had a cancer of the white blood cells -- the cells in the body that normally fight infections -- known as acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). She bravely went through 26 months of chemotherapy and every girl's nightmare: losing all her hair. Her least-liked part of the treatment involved having needles inserted into her spine to inject chemo into her central nervous system. In these monthly spinal taps, Monica would have to lay with her head lower than the rest of her body for 20 minutes so the chemo would travel through her spine to her brain. With her beloved dog Camille providing unconditional love along the way, Monica survived. Through it all, she maintained a 4.0 grade point average, even though she was home schooled for a year. Now 15, Monica is back in full form, excelling in a wide range of activities. This includes running cross country track at school, where she was honored with "The Coach's Award" for her inspiring leadership. She and her family have given greatly to the anti-cancer effort. For example, since her diagnosis, they have raised over \$80,000 for the local chapter of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. Monica says her illness made her "a more sensitive and stronger person" and has deepened her desire to become a physician like her father, Dr. Christopher Trent, who practices at Kaiser Permanente's Panorama City Medical Center. This 2009 year marks the 5th year that she has been cancer-free, and Monica's message to others facing adversity is that "there is hope for all."

Daniel Udave
Los Angeles (Glassell Park-area)

Something was wrong in the summer of 2007 when Daniel had to make several visits to the hospital because he had trouble breathing, high fevers, itchy skin, and swollen neck nodes. An emergency room visit led to tests confirming that he had acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL), a cancer of the white blood cells, the cells in the body that normally fight infections. The cancer is no longer detectable in his body, although he continues chemotherapy with grace. One of his care providers says, "He always comes to clinic in a good mood and takes care of all the other children having treatment." In September of 2008, Daniel took the lead role in organizing a car wash in his community that raised over \$800 to purchase a Nintendo Wii video game set, which he donated to his clinic to bring joy to his fellow cancer patients during their hospitalization. He continues to excel at aquatics, a family love. Daniel, 14, plays on his high school's varsity water polo team. He regularly rides his bike with his dad and enjoys watching Dodger baseball games and horror movies. Daniel was trained as a junior lifeguard through Operation Splash, an annual summer aquatics partnership between Kaiser Permanente and the City of Los Angeles. He has been a junior lifeguard for three summers and would like to work full-time as a lifeguard after he finishes high school.

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