

101 WISHES

A B E N E F I T F O R M A X

MAX'S STORY

Cleveland native and creative, Max Radenkov, son of artist and craftsman Zivko Radenkov, has been battling a severe form of refractory Crohn's Disease and Inflammatory Arthritis for over fifteen years.

After an acute onset of symptoms, hospital stays, failure to treat, and misdiagnosis in the months before, Max, now 23, was diagnosed at the age of 7. Finding some relief and hope in an accurate diagnosis, Max's medical team and loved ones decided to start him on a host of treatments including potent steroids, immune suppressants, and anti-inflammatories. Within the following weeks, Max's health began to stabilize, and in time he was able to begin the 4th grade. Along with conventional therapies, his family advocated the addition of wholistic lifestyle approaches such as nutritional and environmental changes, which also greatly improved his health.

Although Max's health had improved, the medications were inducing serious side effects. The short term treatments which induced near remission were not sustainable and eventually had to be discontinued. Long term immunosuppression therapies were then implemented by his doctors and family.

In the years of juggling health and sickness, Max's disease was progressing and more therapies were rendered useless. In 2011, Max had large portions of his intestines surgically removed. The following year, Max had additional semi-successful surgeries, one resulting in another chronic complication of his condition. In Max's words, "the only thing consistent in my lifestyle and well-being is inconsistency itself."

Throughout high school, the flare ups of Max's disease became more frequent and severe. Despite the best efforts of his family, medical team, and himself, Max was unable to attend a full year of high school on campus, and turned to homeschooling to finish.

Not only were the severity of Max's symptoms progressing and recurring, so were his treatments. They now included months in the hospital, chemo-therapies, antibiotics, steroids, IV-nutrition, liquid diets, and a lot of movies.

During the summer before his junior year, Max began a biologic immune suppressant in conjunction with a chemo-therapy medication. Together, they induced full remission within four months of starting. Feeling better than he had in years, Max was then able to attend Lakewood High School for a handful of weeks. Sadly, the new medications began failing, sending Max down into yet another spiral of the same issues. Newer chemo related immune

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suppressants at higher doses were then used to prevent Max's severe flare ups, but unfortunately still left him dealing with many symptoms.

In September of 2019, routine blood work indicated that Max had been exposed to tuberculosis, a potentially fatal infection, especially for people taking immunosuppressant drugs. Max was required to cease all medications related to his Crohn's and arthritis. After, he began a course of high dose antibiotics for twelve weeks in effort to treat any potential latency. Paradoxically, these steps treating the tuberculosis induced a flare up of his Crohn's conditions which was worse than ever before.

After finishing the courses of antibiotics, Max has remained off most medications, apart from a failed course of steroids taken while participating in a 2021 clinical trial. While the trial saw some success, he still battles with numerous aspects of his health. Through the pandemic, health complications, and financial hardships, Max has maintained hope and worked with great diligence to gain control of his condition. With the help of his loving father, family, and team at the Cleveland Clinic, he looks toward his future.

With new medical advances being made every day, Max is hopeful that his condition can continue to improve. Promising new treatments are becoming available, however expense is an increasingly significant barrier. With proper funding, Max will have access to new treatments and can expand his team to include more professionals in the field.