

ASHLEY FUTO

2018 Courage Award Winner

I grew up as a very active and athletic person. I ran track, cross country, and played soccer. I have always worked out at the gym and loved every minute of it. I was as healthy as can be and going to Hiram College to get a Pre-Veterinarian Degree. That all changed in 2009 when I began having debilitating migraines. So bad, I had to leave Hiram and my athletic career to go home and figure out what was going on.

My family doctor suggested I get an MRI, which showed a large tumor in my brain. Next, I went to University Hospital in Cleveland to meet with a neurologist and surgery was set for two weeks later. The tumor was cancerous but even though it was located in a tough spot, I chose to have the surgery. After the 2nd brain surgery, and seven weeks of radiation treatment, there was partial vision loss but more importantly, I am now cancer free. I beat cancer!

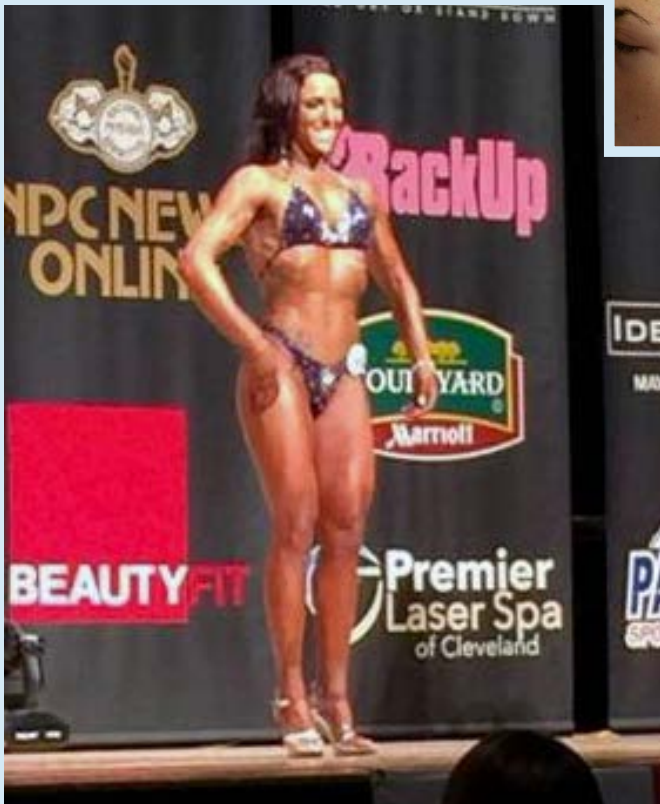
It was a tough battle, and a battle that would continue. Three days after my last surgery I began having hundreds of small Epilepsy seizures daily and even Gran Mal seizures. Another two years in and out of the hospital, led to a third brain surgery to attach leads directly to my brain. After monitoring

me in an attempt to figure out where the seizure activity was coming from, the leads were removed, and a final brain surgery to completely remove my temporal lobe was done. I almost lost my life after the surgery, and I lost much of my memory. But through it all, one thing remained. My love for fitness and for helping others.

Over the past ten years I have grown up quickly and learned the importance of love, life, and happiness. I know I went through what I did, to show others that we can do what we put our minds to. We can get through whatever life throws our way. From the start of this journey I have always counted on a dumbbell to pick me up and keep me going. In 2015, only one year after the last surgery, I competed in a bodybuilding show. I felt like that was the proof that ANYTHING is possible. Accomplishing our goals is more mental than anything, and I hoped that if others could see me make it through my illnesses and surgeries and compete in a bodybuilding show, others might feel that even when they are going through tough times in life, they can get through it, endure it, persevere and overcome it! If beating cancer and Epilepsy has helped just one person, I feel I fulfilled my purpose in life.



“Cancer is tough, but we can be tougher!”



Each morning, with my head wrapped in a scarf, burnt to a crisp from the radiation, I would go to the gym, and lift. That was my time to forget about everything else in my life and focus on what made me happy. My doctors have told me that it is part of the reason I am still alive today. Working out has kept me motivated and a strong fighter. It is not just about how you look, or how much weight you can lift or squat; it is about how it makes you feel. For me, it makes me feel successful. I can do anything, and so can anyone else!

Winning this contest would be ABSOLUTELY life changing for me. Fitness has saved my life over and over, and helped shape me into the competitive, driven, motivated person that I am today. I would never be who I am without it and I want others to know just how great it is and how much it can help anyone get through situations we face in life. Cancer is tough, but we can be tougher!