

Kevin Rhodes lives fearlessly despite his cancer challenges

BY RAQUEL GARCIA

When Curacao native Kevin Rhodes was 12 years old and still living on the island with his family, they took a car trip and he fell asleep in the back seat. Rhodes awakened a month later in the hospital and found out he had been in a coma. A drunk driver had hit the family vehicle and doctors incorrectly predicted he would never walk and talk again.

"I have had a lot happen to me in my life and I am not really afraid of anything," Rhodes said.

That courage and resilience have served the 26-year-old massage therapist well as he awaits his next surgery in Maryland to once again tackle the cancerous tumors in his lungs.

"I am not scared of death," he said. "If I have to go, I have to go, but I don't want to die. I'm fighting my best to stay alive, but if my time comes, my time comes; I cannot extend that."

Growing up in the islands, climbing the rugged mountainous terrain and swimming along the beaches of Curacao, Kevin was tough and resilient. Although the origin of his diagnosis may never be known conclusively,

at age 10 he was playing hide and seek with friends and twisted his ankle to such a degree that the pain never completely diminished.

While in class at massage school in 2010 a professor suggested he have it looked at. A sarcoma tumor was ultimately discovered and removed. However the tumor kept reappear-

ing. This active young man — who moved to Miami at age 13 — and drove a forklift for the family business loading 40-foot containers for international freight delivery, did not want to accept the doctor's recommendation of amputation.

"University of Miami said that we needed to take the foot off, but I didn't want to believe them; I was being hard-headed," Rhodes said. "The doctor in Texas told me the same thing. After I heard it from three different hospitals, I realized, if this has to be, let it be."

In late January 2011, his left leg was amputated right below the knee.

"Once they took the foot off, the cancer skipped my lymph nodes and went straight to my lungs. I had surgery in Texas on both of my lungs and the tumors they saw were removed. I just went back up two months ago for my three-month checkup CT scan and the tumors are growing in my lungs again. They said there is nothing they can do and recommended I go to Maryland."

As Rhodes waits clearance of paperwork for a promising treatment plan at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, he is busy celebrating his first wedding anniversary with his wife, Fabiola; his 27th birthday, and preparing for final massage school board exams.

"I just ran a 5K not too long ago and my energy is flowing at 100 percent."

Because Kevin and his wife are huge Miami Heat fans, he had his prosthetic leg custom designed with the Miami Heat 2012 Championship logo. He said his family "is cool" and taking their challenges in stride,



Kevin finds a way to promote his favorite basketball team — The Miami Heat.



Kevin Rhodes is about to step into one of his final massage school classes before taking board exams.

counting on their faith, and "not getting stressed out."

"You cannot really fight life," Rhodes said. "We all have a date set for when we will leave this world — old age, or a car accident, or a shoot-out the way the world is moving. I am still walking and still doing everything I was doing. Why give up, if you are still alive? I try to live life to my very best and not worry about it. In my mind I am cancer free, and my mind is powerful."