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Survivor Helps Others Fight Back

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Twenty-year old Doug Ulman seems like an average guy. An upcoming junior at Brown University, he plays soccer on the varsity team and hits golf balls with his buddies. But he is worlds apart from his peers. While his classmates are planning the future and testing their independence from their parents. Ulman is leaning on his family more than ever.

Last August, doctors discovered a tumor on one of his ribs—a rare form of cancer called chondrosarcoma. Since then, this healthy athlete who had never been in the hospital in his life, has been diagnosed with melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer. "I see things in a different light," said Ulman, a graduate of Centennial High and former captain of the school's soccer team. "Soccer is not as important. Friendship and family have taken over." So has the desire to help others in the same situation. This spring he founded The Ulman Fund, a nonprofit group linked to The Wellness Community of Baltimore, a national charity that provides free support services to cancer patients and their families. He wants to raise money to help young adults with cancer deal with issues specific to their age. They include the difficulty in acquiring health and life insurance when parental coverage ends and making crucial decisions about which specialists to consult. "At age 18, you legally make your own decisions. If you've never had experience, it can be overwhelming," said Ulman's mom, Diana.

Ulman and his family have been muddling through it all firsthand. The first hint of trouble came last August after Doug and his brother, Ken, took a run. Doug ended up in the emergency room unable to breathe. It was attributed to an allergic reaction, but a chest X-ray was abnormal. A CAT scan revealed a golf ball-sized tumor on his rib near his spine. "It was removed with the belief that 98% were benign," Ulman said. Not this one. It was chondrosarcoma, a form of cancer that hits 500 males a year between the ages of 15 and 30, Ulman said. A slow-growing cancer, it will have to be checked every three months for signs of a recurrence - a 30% chance over a five-year period, Ulman said. There's a higher chance of finding more melanoma, Ulman said. The doctors will know more about the spread of the cancer after removing tissue from Ulman's arm. In October, Ulman saw an ABC Prime Time Live segment about cancer that featured Sam Donaldson, a cancer survivor. Donaldson made a plea for more cancer research and services for patients, inspiring Ulman to form his fund.

The living room of his parents' house has been transformed into a work room and mail station to plan two upcoming fund-raising events: a banquet and silent auction at Pimlico Race Course on June 17, and a soccer game on Aug. 1. Ulman plans to set up a Web site for young adults with cancer by the end of the summer. He also is writing cancer handbooks on issues faced by young adults. "It's a hard copy of something that can be given upon diagnosis," Ulman said. It will include questions to ask the doctor, 1-800 numbers for more information, and advice on how to deal with parents and family, and

make decision together. "We were never given anything like that," Ulman said. "It's a lot to handle for someone who has never been sick or in a hospital." Ulman has received hundreds of letters and phone calls from cancer patients his age, as well as from older survivors. "Eventually we would like to get enough people together to have a support group," he said. He also would like to set up one-day workshops. "It gives a purpose to the whole thing," Linda Ulman said. "It feels like you have some usefulness." Ulman plans to plug away at the project this summer. "I hope to do it full time when I graduate from college," he said. He has been studying history and education with plans to teach. "I've always likes working with people and running organizations. This is the perfect opportunity to do both," he said. "It's strange to be 19 and know what I want to do for the rest of my life," he added. "I can't imagine my life without all this happening. It put it into a different light."