

Surviving Cancer, Creating Opportunity

ONE DELT'S MISSION TO GIVE BACK

BY KELSEA J. COSTELLO

PURSUIT OF A LIFE OF

excellence is a commitment all Delts make when taking their Oath. That mission is actualized in many ways as brothers mature, long beyond their college years. Craig Pollard (USC, 1991) is living a life of excellence by making a difference in the lives of thousands of college students nationwide through the non-profit he founded, Cancer for College, that provides scholarships to cancer survivors.



Pollard is a two-time cancer survivor himself. He was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease at age 15, during his sophomore year of high school. Pollard says he fought hard to stay in school while undergoing multiple surgeries, chemotherapy, and radiation for a year. As a junior, he was recruited by several universities to play baseball, including his dream school, the University of Southern California. Ultimately, he chose to become a Trojan.

"By the time my freshman year rolled around, I was playing on the varsity baseball team at USC and had pledged a fraternity. I had even met my girlfriend, who eventually became my wife. So, life was going very well. Then suddenly, through a routine blood test during the fall of my sophomore year, they found that my cancer had returned."

As a result of the cancer metastasizing and a low white blood cell count, Pollard moved out of school the following semester.

"At that time, there was only one chance for my survival, which was a bone marrow transplant. In the mid-80s, that was considered an experimental treatment. But with it being my only choice, we had to do it. Fortunately, I was able to find a hospital in Los Angeles called the City of Hope, where I was able to get my transplant in June 1988."

He adds that "part of the motivation for me while sitting in an ICU room in the hospital was to move back into the Delt house to be back around friends and have that social life that I missed."

But his eagerness to return to campus and fraternity life was accompanied by survivor's guilt. While he was in the hospital, he saw multiple other patients pass away getting their bone marrow transplants.

"I would think, why was I the lucky one that was spared? So, I kind of started getting this guilt and inspiration at the same time. I thought, OK, if I survive this, I need to do something to make a difference."

Pollard began to see the puzzle pieces come together after joining the entrepreneurship program at USC. As part of the program, he had to write a business plan. The following summer, as he was still trying to decide upon what to focus his business plan on, he volunteered as a camp counselor for low-income children dealing with cancer in Los Angeles.

"On one of the parent days, the parents were telling me how amazing it was that I was still able to go to college after going through the bone marrow transplant, and that many of the parents had to quit their jobs to be able to have their child treated at a certain place. I learned that with the medical debt they were building, they couldn't even think about putting money away for college. So that was kind of the 'aha' moment for me. I'm like, I can write a business plan on that."

While putting together his business plan, he says he realized he could turn this concept into a non-profit and decided to submit the necessary forms to earn the 501(c)(3) status. Shortly thereafter, Cancer for College held its

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first golf tournament in Pollard's backyard. The \$500 raised went to their first scholarship recipient, a student at the University of California – Santa Barbara.

Now, 32 years later, Cancer for College has awarded over \$8 million in scholarships to over 2,000 scholars nationwide. These scholarships make an impact on some of the more than 15,000 children who face a cancer diagnosis each year. According to Cancer for College, 98% of their scholars graduate, far exceeding the national average of 57%. Additionally, they make secondary education possible for one in three Cancer for College scholars who are the first in their family to attend college. But there's more than just a monetary award that comes with the scholarship.

Pollard says, "You get a family that's now behind you. In addition to your regular family, you get the Cancer for College family. It's behind you to support

and help you, and to provide a community where these kids can talk to other cancer survivors about their journeys. For many, they can't normally talk to other kids who haven't been through it. The whole award provides an incredible, positive environment for these kids."

Some board members, like Steve Short (USC, 1991), even serve as mentors. Short, co-author of "The Simple Road Toward Financial Freedom," helps to put on educational seminars for the scholars, teaching them things like putting together a resume or a budget. Pollard says the efforts of Delt brothers like Short and actor Will Ferrell (USC, 1990), who serves as a celebrity spokesman for the organization, were instrumental in the success of Cancer for College.

"The charity wouldn't be where it's at without Delt. I probably would never have met people like Will and Steve if not for Delt. Without Delt involvement, while I could've still had Cancer for College, it probably would've given out something like \$10,000 a year in scholarships instead of \$1 million. That truly is the impact of the brotherhood so many years later."

Short says the decision to help Pollard and support Cancer for College was a no-brainer.

"If you hear Craig's story, it's impossible not to root for the guy, with the journey he's been on. You get to know him and just see how positive he is and what an impact he's having. And you couple that with a weekend in San Diego seeing all your friends and raising money for a charity. It's the easiest excuse to come out and see everybody."

In addition to being a fantastic fundraiser for the organization, the annual Classy Golf Classic, held at the historic Coronado Golf Course in San Diego, also serves as a great way for USC Delts to stay connected.

"The cool part about it is, it brings the Delts of Delta Pi back together once a year. I really look forward to it, not only for what we're able to accomplish with the scholarships but also being able to see all these old friends," says Pollard. 🟡

This year, the Classy Golf Classic raised \$189,000. If you'd like to support Cancer for College, visit cancerforcollege.org for information on how to get involved or attend an event.