

MINI-PROFILE

Jennifer Goodman Linn '93, cycling for a cure

Jennifer Goodman Linn's paid job in Nickelodeon's marketing department is to make others want to adopt the cartoon character SpongeBob SquarePants as their favorite superhero. But it's her volunteer job that could make Linn a superhero—and might just save her own life.

Linn encourages people to adopt a passion for curing "orphan" cancers. The term describes a cancer that affects fewer than 200,000 people annually. Though rare individually, orphan cancers collectively account for 35 percent of all cancer deaths each year.

Linn's personal odyssey with a rare cancer began with a discomfort she experienced whenever she went running, and eventually evolved into flu-like systems that wouldn't go away.

She had some blood work done and a CAT scan that revealed a football-sized tumor in her abdomen. Diagnosis: malignant fibrous histiocytoma sarcoma, a rare soft-tissue cancer that affects fewer than six in one million.

Linn, just thirty-three at the time, was in for the ride of her life. Since the discovery of her tumor in 2004, Linn has had four relapses requiring three major surgeries and a combined twenty-four months of chemo. In February 2009, monitoring of her cancer suggested she'd need another surgery this year—and more chemotherapy.

The quest for a cure for her condition quickly developed into an



Photos courtesy Jennifer Goodman Linn

international fundraising effort for rare cancers of all stripes. Realizing how "spinning," or stationary cycling, had helped her during her initial recovery, Linn and her husband, David, created a fundraiser built around teams that collect sponsors and come together for a day of cycling.

In a short time, Cycle for Survival has raised close to \$2 million for the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. The ride is always scheduled for the week before the Super Bowl; cyclists are already gearing up for the next event, slated for January 31, 2010. Though most of the day's activities happen at New York's Equinox fitness center, teams have begun popping up at health clubs in San

Francisco, Austin, Seattle, and even Jamaica.

"I call our event the 'Lazy Man's Triathlon,'" Linn explains. "The cycling can be low or high impact, depending on how you feel. We try to lower the barriers to entry."

Linn's professional marketing experience contributes to the non-profit's early success. At Duke she studied psychology with a bent toward understanding the forces that influence consumer decision-making. After graduation, a stint with an advertising agency was followed by a Harvard M.B.A. and an internship with Coca-Cola. Now at Nickelodeon, she is head of the company's consumer marketing group.

Her doctor has informed her that half of those with her type of cancer don't survive it. "But he also said, 'Jen, you're not a statistic.'" Linn listens to her body, too, and feels pretty good. She also knows the cycle event has funded research for treatments—treatments her doctors are using currently to heal her.

—Eric Larson

Larson '93 is president and CEO of Zoom Factor Inc.