



December 2007

Dear Miles for Myeloma Friends,

This is the third year I am writing to tell you about another amazing Miles for Myeloma journey. Our desire to fight multiple myeloma led to the creation of this huge adventure to raise awareness about the disease and funds for research. My patients, staff and I feel that our annual journey of suffering and companionship is an important movement.

This year's Miles for Myeloma honored Tom Scheer, an extraordinary friend and patient. All of us drew from our memory of Tom's strength to help us finish the long run between Indianapolis and Bloomington and the bike ride back the next day. Tom developed myeloma about six years ago. He was a great family man, community man and huge supporter of Miles for Myeloma. I remembered his struggle each mile of that 50+ mile jog. Tom's battle with myeloma was not for the faint of heart. His cancer roared many times, made him sick and landed him in the hospital on too many occasions. He needed many treatments, and some of them were harder than any giant could have tolerated. But Tom never complained or looked defeated. He was always hopeful, grateful and determined to overcome the ugliness of myeloma. Just a few hours before Tom passed away in September, there was a three-hour meeting with many bright people from the IU Simon Cancer Center. We were coming together to try to find new ways to study and cure myeloma. We had great discussions and a myeloma working group was born. In Tom's honor we are naming this working group the *Tom Scheer Myeloma Working Group at Indiana University*. Tom is the father of Miles for Myeloma, and this journey will continue until his missions are accomplished. Curing myeloma is one of them.

Miles for Myeloma is a movement by the patients and for the patients. It became a vehicle to generate support and friendship among patients and their caregivers. To see patients and their families at the planning committee meetings, the annual Miles for Myeloma dinner, at the start and the end of the journey and along the way is to witness love, determination and faith.

This year Miles for Myeloma started around midnight on November 3. My friends Brent, Charles, Chris and Michael joined me in downtown Indianapolis to start the run on a chilly autumn night. Michael was running in his mother's memory; she lost her battle to this ugly disease a couple of years ago. Michael had never in his life run more than a marathon distance. But he was determined to make the journey – and what a hero he was.

A few miles into the run, another friend of mine – who I call "Coach" and who has been a father figure in my life – joined us. At age 75, he is an avid marathoner and has completed 117 marathons, including one in each state. He wanted to see if he could run more than a marathon distance. His name is Tom Hathaway. Another Tom, another amazing man! Tom ran 46 miles

that night and never looked defeated. He was even as funny as my other Tom. He sure made the long journey quite pleasant. I have to admit that at times I was having a hard time keeping up with him.

While the runners helped me keep going, it was the patients who helped keep me safe. Several patients gave up a night of sleep to provide the support needed to make the journey. Bill and Joyce Lowder drove the RV that was our mobile aid station, stopping every 3-4 miles to help keep us hydrated and nourished. We also got on board to warm up for a couple minutes as the night grew colder and the wind chilled our bones. Linda and John Gibson drove behind us and kept Highway 37 bright so we could avoid the gravel and other road hazards. They also arranged for sheriff escorts throughout the night. We felt safe in the hands of our patients and we are grateful to the wonderful care they provided us.

When the sun rose, we had a sense of renewal, and the reddish sky gave a sense of the warmth we were missing all night long. As we approached Bloomington, many of our Miles for Myeloma friends were making their way to the IU vs. Ball State football game, cheering us along the way by honking their horns or yelling out encouragement – and sometimes telling me to stop walking and start running! Although some of the “walk breaks” were planned, some were forced by the sheer exhaustion I experienced after running all those miles at night without any sleep for more than 24 hours.

The IU Athletics department gave us an incredible gift by allowing us to finish on the football field just before that start of the game, set for noon time. As we arrived at the stadium, more than 500 patients, family and friends formed a human tunnel on the field. My fellow runners let me lead the way through the tunnel, and after running 50 miles, I suddenly felt as fresh as ever. Seeing all these people out on the field to support Miles for Myeloma gave me hope, courage and determination to sprint to the finish line. We were greeted by IU President Michael McRobbie and his wife and IU Senior Associate Athletic Director Tim Fitzpatrick. By now, the sun was warm and the sky was blue. As the Father of Miles for Myeloma, our beloved Tom delivered another wonderful gift: perfect weather for a hard journey.

The two superstars of the run were Tom Hathaway and Michael. At 75, Tom ran close to 46 miles and looked like he could have run more. Prior to our event, his longest run was 31 miles – and that was more the 40 years ago! Michael was the other hero. He ran more than 52 miles and was full of energy and smiles the whole way. His mother Edna must have given him her strength and blessings that day. I remembered her gentle smile and inner strength as I watched her son perform like an iron man.

The next day we left on a chilly morning from the stadium around 9 am to head back to Indianapolis. This time we were joined by three patients and four family members of a dear patient we lost a couple of years ago. Linda would be very proud of her granddaughter Maria, a senior in high school who rode with us for the second year in a row and made some of us look like novice cyclists with her fearless biking. What is fascinating to me is that her father and uncles were never into physical activities until they joined the Miles for Myeloma movement. One of them even was a smoker – and what a life-changing event this has been for him! He was cruising at 20-23 miles per hour and looked like he was on a Sunday stroll.

The three patients who cycled with us – Myron, Steve, and Larry – were amazing and proved that life with myeloma can be fulfilling. They each had a huge smile every time we reached a rest stop, and they were able to keep going and climb every hill we faced that day – and, let me tell you, some of these hills were dandy ones! By 1 pm, we reached Indianapolis, and the skyline gave us a sense of relief that the journey was almost over. We rode our way through another

human tunnel back to the IU Simon Cancer Center. The crowd got us sprinting again with their cheers! Another wonderful, painful Miles for Myeloma journey ended with all the runners and cyclists getting the job done safely.

There you go, my friends. It was another wonderful year for the fight against myeloma and its cousin diseases amyloidosis and Waldenstrom's disease. Miles for Myeloma is an idea born and raised in Indiana. It has become a real movement. It is about people getting together to make a difference. It is about people supporting each other, about people digging deep into their inner souls and providing hope for a better future for those who are suffering. People gave up their sleep, their muscles, their joints, their time and their money to make the journey successful.

So how is success judged? On many fronts. The first is getting people to work together and support each other. We can check this one off. The second is to raise funds to find ways to better treat these diseases. We can put a small check mark next to this, as we are raising more funds than we could have imagined three years ago. So why am I not yet satisfied? Because you are not satisfied! Because our last measure of success is curing these nasty diseases, and we are not there yet.

No one hoping to reach the stars will be satisfied staying on Earth. We have put a man on the moon, so we can reach for the stars, and we can cure myeloma. As such my promise to you is that the journey will never stop until the goal is reached. So I thank you for your wonderful support and ask you to keep working with all of us on this. Together we shall prevail.

Peace to all,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rafat". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Rafat Abonour, MD

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