

WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

When fitness expert and equipment supplier **Michael Garvey** moved to the South Bay in the 1980s, he had no idea his greatest health battle was yet to come.

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With an immense passion for exercise and helping people, Boston native Michael “Garv” Garvey landed his first job in California coaching high school sports in Palos Verdes. He later worked as a fitness trainer and manager at the Sports Center (now Spectrum) in Redondo Beach and went on to sell exercise equipment.

Jobless in 1990 after the company he was working for relocated, he ventured out on his own. “I started my business selling equipment to gyms from an apartment in Hermosa Beach with a typewriter and a two-line phone. I created a superhero image for my logo that I knew people wouldn’t forget—and with tongue in cheek named my company ‘The Dumbbell Man.’”

By 1995 Garvey had hired a small staff and set up shop in an office in Torrance. His business was flourishing, and he was living the California dream—until his health began to rapidly deteriorate.

“One day I was as healthy as ever, jogging 10 miles on The Strand. Then suddenly I had no stamina, and my body was disappearing. I had no idea that my immune system was shutting down and that catching the flu could have killed me then.”

Ironically, on the 5-year anniversary of his business, Garvey was rushed to Little Company of Mary Medical Center in Torrance and was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia. His body had stopped making blood, and he had a 50/50 chance to live. “Everyone knew I was dying, but I naively thought of blackjack and figured those were really good odds!” he recalls.

With eternal optimism and an unwavering sense of humor, Garvey faced cancer head-on and began a treatment program that lasted eight months. Chemotherapy and radiation scrubbed the leukemia cells from his body, and healthy cells were taken from his own blood and infused back in.

He lost his appetite and shed 50 pounds, while primarily intravenous fluids sustained him. He fought on to beat the odds. In 2000 doctors officially confirmed he was cancer-free.

Twenty years have passed since Garvey’s cancer diagnosis, and he is thriving personally and professionally. Though his immune system and stamina are weakened, his contagious optimism trumps that and any card he is dealt.

“I always tell people that attitude is the most important thing in life. The day I was diagnosed I cried and wondered, ‘Why me?’ But from the next day on, all I could think was, ‘I am going to just power through this!’”

While he was fighting for his life, his brother David kept The Dumbbell Man business going. It has since expanded exponentially from selling a few products to small gyms to designing, supplying and servicing gyms and fitness centers for private residences and businesses—including Fortune 500 companies, police and fire departments, professional sports teams (including the LA Kings and Clippers), schools and even Cirque du Soleil.

“I really enjoy spending time with people who are going to use the equipment and teaching them about how it will help them, which is the best part of the job,” says Garvey.

As for life post-cancer, Garvey says it opened his eyes to the importance of giving back. “I learned the theory of doing well by doing good.”

He has volunteered for City of Hope, Cancer Support Community and other charities and raises money annually for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. Through his philanthropy work he met his wife, Andrea, who was a bone marrow donor for her sister (also a cancer survivor).

Spirited Garvey is a superhero in his own right. Reflecting on his cancer victory, he says with a smile, “I’m like a cat. Flip me around, and I will land on my paws!”

Cancer 0, Garvey 1.

