



## Feature: Why I Will Never Be The Same

Posted on [July 10, 2010](#) by [Harlem World](#) | [11 Comments](#)

*By Rodney L. Carroll*



From coaching the Harlem Little League, running for the City Council in 2005 to being a Cancer survivor. Rodney Carroll lives a wonderful life of family, friends and Frappe. Here the father, husband and Harlemite tells his story of survival, a family trip to Greece and the kindness of others.

It all started shortly after I began chemotherapy in early December 2009 at St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospital in Manhattan.

There was a lot going on during this stressful time. I had just had a port inserted into my chest for drugs to be pumped in. I had to go in for one of my treatments on Christmas day, the same day that my youngest son Emilio turned three. That is when I heard about the raffle for a trip to Greece through a program at the hospital called "Laura's Journeys".

Now, I am not the kind of person who often enters raffles. All of this was new to me, and I had nothing to lose, so I figured "What the heck!", and threw my name into the hat.

"Laura's Journeys" is a philanthropic program created by Bill Parness, of Aberdeen, NJ, in memory of his wife Laura Parness, who passed away at the age of 54 after a courageous battle with breast cancer.

Fast forward to February 12, 2010—I came into the hospital to get a pump disconnected that administered drugs for two days. I was told quietly by some of the nurses that I had won one of the prizes in the drawing. "What drawing?" I asked. I was then reminded of the raffle I had entered months earlier. I was excited by my unexpected win, and was just thinking that no matter what it was, it would be an excellent Valentine's Day present for my wife, Shirley.



I got home at around 6:30pm that evening, and received a call that changed everything. "You won the trip to Greece!" they told me. I was so excited that I picked up Emilio and danced around the house, amazed at my sudden luck. Shirley returned home from work around 8:00pm, exhausted from a long day at work. I excitedly told her that I won a trip from the hospital, and that we were going to Greece. The next day, she told me that this didn't really register with her until the next morning when I started to print out all the details. Happy Valentine's Day honey! The dark chocolates and other presents paled in comparison.



The next couple of months were a whirlwind. We paid for Emilio to join us, which involved getting him a passport (I didn't get mine until I was 20, and at three years old this kid is about to become a world traveler). Treatment went on, and I had good and bad days. However, I was looking forward to our trip, and wondering what it would have in store for me.

Soon after, I spoke with a woman in Greece named Natalie Ashley (below left), who had donated the apartment we would be staying in, and planned some activities for us. Each time I talked with her she sounded so excited. I told her I could not wait for her to meet my family.

Finally, the day came on May 24th, and we locked up our house to set out on a Carroll Family Adventure.

Natalie's husband met us at the airport in Athens, Greece when we arrived, and drove us to the apartment where we met Natalie.

It felt like we already knew each other through all of our correspondence. We also met Jane, her business partner who is also

a psychic reader and had agreed to give me a reading later. We settled in and after noting the important neighborhood places, Jane and I went for a reading.

What Jane was able to tell me in essence is that as much as I do and have done for others, I need to remember to take care of myself just as much. The community, family, and political activities that I'm involved with are all important, but I can only be a rock and a resource for others provided that I take care of my needs. In addition, Jane told me that Greece is a very spiritual place that takes and gives to those who believe. I was told to release a spiritual weight and I would receive a spiritual present in return.



I did just that on the Island of Delphi, which is not only beautiful but serene, and it ended up being the perfect place to reflect. Please understand that all of this spirituality is new to me; the kid who was born and raised in Harlem. But I am always willing to try something new, and it ended up helping me immensely.

Our trip involved plenty of family activities for us to enjoy. On the first day we went on a boat cruise to three islands. Much to the amusement of the other cruisers, Emilio (who didn't have a bathing suit) stripped and went swimming on these islands. Many of our fellow cruisers joined in (they did have bathing suits.) We also got to try fabulous traditional Greek food and Shirley and I fell in love with the fresh grilled octopus and squid. Emilio, the self-proclaimed vegetarian since the age of two, fell in love with baby squash, carrots, and rice with Parmesan cheese.

Most of the older Greek men loved rubbing Emilio's curly hair and all of the ladies loved him (he is going to be trouble for his mom one day). Shirley (below) and I were soon addicted to the traditional evening drink called Frappe, which is instant coffee, milk, sugar and ice, and is quite delicious. Emilio, on the other hand, had more gelato than most little kids could ever consume in seven days.

During this trip, I had a lot of time to reflect on the reasons that I was here. I began to understand why Bill Parness started "Laura's Journeys" in memory of his wife and why Natalie Ashley was inspired enough by the program to donate her business to the cause. It is so important to just be able to get away for a little while during the stressful daily battle with cancer, and the daily routine that comes with it.

Personally, I had long ago come to terms with having cancer. It was at first hard to believe that someone like me, a professed health and gym rat, could have been chosen to carry this torch (I refuse to give it the weight of calling it "a burden.") I consider this trip a re-enforcement of the peace I have made with my illness. I also believe that it allowed my wife to see that I am still the same old me. We sometimes get so wrapped up in the day-to-day affairs of running around and taking care of the kids that we forget to take a step back and appreciate the important things in life. We finally got the chance to relish in the important moments, such as watching the sunset while sipping a Frappe, playing with our three-year-old in the ocean, and just enjoying long meals at outdoor cafés.



It is my hope that I have gotten out of this trip what Bill and Laura would have wanted. Becoming an honorable ambassador for "Laura's Journeys" just proves how much I truly got out of this experience. I felt the impact of my experience the most on Sunday, June 13, 2010, during the Survivor's Day benefit at Beth Israel Medical Center, when I was asked to speak as a representative of both the hospital where I was treated, and of survivors everywhere.

Just being able to be my normal, upbeat, positive, humorous self and being so well received by the doctors and, most importantly, by my fellow survivors has given me a newfound strength and spirit that I firmly believe was my spiritual present from Greece. What do you think about Rodney's Journey?

If you're a cancer survivor, share your story with other cancer survivors at [HW Magazine Community](#).

Photos (l to r): Shirley, Emilio and Rodney; Greek temple; Natalie, Rodney and Jane; Greek landscape; Shirley posed; Rodney and Emilio.