



Our Story

To Dream Despite HHT

By Lauren Linhard

“I am an overcomer. I am determined. I will not be beaten by HHT. I just won’t.”

It was a windy day when Austin Park climbed onto the edge of a bridge over the Amazon River. Strapped to the railing with only a harness, he looked out over the skyline, took a deep breath, and jumped.

As the crowds watched Austin fall to the river, no one suspected this brave, perhaps slightly crazy person, to be living with a genetic disease. But in fact, Austin had been diagnosed with HHT when he was little, having also undergone two heart valve replacements.

However, the last thing Austin would ever consider himself is sick.

“I wouldn’t say that my symptoms from HHT prevent me from living my life - Not entirely, at least,” Austin said. “But I don’t let that keep me from trying to do

the things I want to do. I am the only person that can stop me from becoming who I want to be.”

Austin credits his positive attitude to his mom Sandra Huizar, who also has HHT, as do the majority of his siblings. Like Austin, Sandra refuses to let her diagnoses control her life. Instead, she teaches yoga class and runs regularly.

Sandra completed her first 10K last year for her 50th birthday, a challenge she set for herself.

“I am an overcomer. I am determined,” said Sandra, who is recovering from a stroke that occurred in January. “I will not be beaten by HHT. I just won’t.”

Sandra said a lot of her drive comes from watching her mom waste away from HHT. A large part of her childhood was spent taking her mother to the hospital. Sandra’s mother eventually had part of her lung removed because of AVMs.

During the years Sandra spent raising her own five kids – Julia, Austin, Esther, Nichole and Caleb – she taught her children, all who have HHT but Nichole,

how to live their lives, but remain respectful of their bodies.

For semi-pro soccer player Caleb Park, that often meant taking a knee on the side of the field as a kid while his nose bled. But as soon as the bleeding slowed, he was back in the game, playing harder than ever to make up time.

“Whenever I played, and even now, I want to be the best on the field,” said Caleb, who is now playing for the Seattle Stars FC. “When I’m not the best, I try to watch and learn from the best on the pitch. I love it because it’s so unpredictable.”

One of the biggest tests of this family’s strength came when Julia, the eldest sibling, almost lost her life last year to a ruptured PAVM while pregnant. Thankfully, both Julia and her new baby survived and are healthy.

Julia said her brush with death has only reinforced her belief that life is short and it’s important to live it.

She continues to find comfort in her exercise routine of dance and running.



One of Julia’s younger sisters, Esther, admitted she didn’t really know how dangerous HHT could be before her sister’s PAVM experience. The majority of Esther’s HHT effects came in the form of headaches and nosebleeds, she said.

There were times, Esther recalled, when she would have to call out of work, stay home from school or cancel social events because her headaches had become so severe. However, she never felt that her life was in danger.



“I’ve been scanned and I’m not careless about it, but I won’t live my life in a bubble because

something bad *might* happen,”

Esther said.

“The last thing you’d want is to look back on your life with regret because you let fear get in the way of your dreams.”

