

Cancer struggle is much different for young people

Continued from page 3B

The night of her diagnosis, Decoteau and her mom had tickets to a Boston Red Sox game at Fenway Park. Her mom insisted she go. As Decoteau walked

through the park's crowded catacombs lined with hot dog and beer vendors, she wondered if she looked different, if people who looked at her might know she had breast cancer.

"You walk around and I thought, I wonder if people know," she said.

"I felt like there must be something on me that says, 'I have breast cancer.'"

Teenage mom defies deadbeat stereotype by caring for daughter

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DES MOINES—Nate Watson was 16, and he was scared.

Watson had just learned his girlfriend was pregnant. Nearing the end of his sophomore year at North High School, he didn't know what to do. He thought about dropping out of school and getting a full-time job. He cried on his mother's shoulder. He went on long, soul-searching walks by himself.

The next nine months went by quickly, Watson said. He moved in with his girlfriend, Jessica Fattig, and waited on her every need. He cooked and cleaned and brought her buckets when she had to throw up. He endured her mood swings. He ran to the store to pick up foods she was craving.

Watson felt too young to be a father. But he saw plenty of young men around his neighborhood and in school who had children but didn't care for them. Being that sort of "deadbeat dad"—a term that spews from Watson's mouth with disdain—was the last thing he wanted to be.

Two days after Christmas 2004, Jessica started feeling contractions. They rushed to Broadlawn Medical Center. Watson held Jessica's hand as doctors performed a Caesarian section.

A baby girl, Jalia Lynnae Watson, arrived. "It was like I'd won the lottery," Watson, now 18, said of his first days as a father. "You just can't stop smiling. It was a responsibility I needed to take care of. I had to make sure, over everything there is, I have to be there for my daughter."

Even after he and Jessica broke up, he knew he wanted to be a parent, not a "baby daddy" who hardly sees his child.

"In this day and age it's a rarity," said Kittie Weston-Knauer, principal at Scavo Alternative High School, where Watson transferred after learning Jessica was pregnant. "He had to grow up whether he liked it or not. So he just said, 'I've got to do it and do it right.'"

Among black fathers in Iowa, Watson's decision is even more of an anomaly.

"That's the exception, but that's what he's supposed to do," said Jonathan Narcisse, a black community activist who in 2001 wrote the "State of Black Iowa" report, a 3,500-page comprehensive study on blacks in the state.

According to the State of Black Iowa report,

53 percent of black children in Iowa are raised by a single parent. (Thirty percent are raised in a two-parent home, and 17 percent are living in a home where both parents are absent.)

Nearly 90 percent of single black parents in Iowa raising their children are mothers, according to a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report.

The effect on a child of growing up in a fatherless home is astonishing. The National Fatherhood Initiative says more than poverty and race, fatherlessness is the highest predictor of juvenile violence. Fatherless teen girls are three times more likely to become chronic juvenile offenders; fatherless teen boys are 10 times more likely, according to the NFL.

Watson didn't want his baby's outlook to be that bleak.

"I know a lot of people who are just not ever there for their kid," Watson said. "They don't even know their child's name. That was the reason I kept with it. I didn't want to be a deadbeat. It seemed like everyone would say, 'He's a deadbeat, he's not going to be there for the baby.'"

Instead, Watson set out to prove everyone wrong.

Creeping up on 2 years, a rambunctious Lili eats everything he serves. She has curly black hair, grey eyes and a joyful, open-mouthed smile. She sometimes hits people, and Dad admits it's difficult to be tough on her. Her first words, Watson said, were, "Give me it now," when he took away a toy.

Watson's parents are astounded seeing the transformation of their son—from a struggling boy who didn't care about school to an ambitious young man who factors his daughter into every decision.

"All he thinks about is his daughter now," said Jeffrey Watson, Nate's dad. "He's just working hard and trying to support his daughter. Just stepping forward and being a man."

"My son ... buys diapers and milk and clothes and toys," Nate's mother, Jessie Burrage, said.

"For him, being an early dad means he doesn't run the streets. He does the father thing. He doesn't really go anywhere anymore. His friends have to come to him."

For Watson, being an active, involved father is just something he must do. Watson and his mother share custody with Lili's mother, Jessica, who says he is a good father.



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Your Hidden Power

Many times as we seek to achieve our dreams, we have a tendency to focus on the obstacles that we see standing in the way of what we want. For example, we may feel that we do not have enough financial resources to be successful. It may seem to us that we do not know enough people to help us reach our goals. We may look at the success of others and notice how outgoing they may be. When we see them we may conclude that we are just not good around people and therefore, we could never be successful.

Some of us may feel that some people are out to get us and will deliberately try to keep us from succeeding. We may be convinced that we will never be successful until these situations change or the people that we must deal with change.

What many of us may fail to realize is that in all of these situations, it is really up to us to determine how these conditions will affect our achieving the success that we want. Although we may not realize it, we all have a hidden power. It is a power of which many of us are not aware. What is this hidden power? It is the power to change.

But keep in mind, it is not the power to change others. It is the power to change ourselves.

So often we concentrate on trying to change those around us rather than ourselves. However, we only have the

power to change ourselves. We tend to underestimate our power to change ourselves, but overestimate our power to change others.

In all the situations I named earlier, if we change our perspectives, these perceived obstacles do not have to stand in the way of our success.

Although you may doubt that you have enough financial resources to go after your dream, you can seek places where they may be found. When you first get started in a business, you may not know very many people. However, you can always look for ways to meet new people and broaden your social or business network. You may indeed be less outgoing than others, but there are other ways to promote your cause. On the other hand, you could learn ways to stretch beyond your present comfort zone in order to meet new people. Even in situations where it may seem that others may be deliberately working against your success, you can decide if you will let them keep you from achieving your dreams or use these situations as stepping-stones to your success.

It is up to you. You have the power to decide what your future will be. Use that power to create the kind of life and success that you have always wanted!

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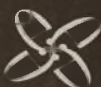
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