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PROFILES IN LAW

'Let the World Enjoy My Bald Head:' A Lawyer Fights Cancer

Samantha Joseph, *Daily Business Review*

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While his friends from law school were battling hangovers, David Podein had all the same symptoms, but without the parties, minus the fun. Instead, he spent full days in a chair at a medical clinic receiving chemotherapy. He'd then get the weekends off, have a rest day on Mondays and return on Tuesdays for a treatment so harsh it ravaged his body and required a full week of recovery. When he threw up, it wasn't because of a night of drinking.



David Podein, partner at Haber Slade in Miami

"That was one cycle. I did approximately three cycles of that," said Podein, now a partner practicing real estate and construction law at Haber Slade in Miami. "It's the toughest thing I've ever experienced in terms of physical and mental pain. It feels like the worst hangover you've ever had, times a thousand."

That fight transformed him.

When he met his would-be employer, now his current law partner David Haber, for a job interview three years later,

Podein had a quiet air about him. "He was serious—not your average 24, 25-year-old kid,"

Haber said. "I didn't know why he was that way at the time. I thought it was because he was a Midwesterner, but it went deeper than that. It had to do with what he had been through."

At 23, Podein had graduated with a degree in political science from the University of Michigan and won an academic scholarship to study law at the University of Miami. In August 2006, he had just returned from a study-abroad stint in London that had allowed him to travel through Western Europe. He was getting ready to settle into his second year of law school, when a cancer diagnosis after a routine medical checkup derailed all plans.

One of his first calls had been to the dean of students and other administrators to arrange a leave of absence. He then returned home to Michigan to move back in with his parents and get medical care.

"I still remember at my physically weakest point, it was really difficult to get up from bed, walk downstairs and go check the mail," he said. "That was the task for the day from my mom, and I couldn't even make it down the driveway to the mailbox."

When he finished chemo in 2006, Podein was restless. He'd get news about his classmates' successes, their on-campus interviews, their summer jobs.

"Although I was not physically or mentally ready, I felt that life was passing me by," he said. "I was a little stir-crazy."

In January 2007, less than 30 days after the last treatment, he re-enrolled in law school. Along with the quiet strength Haber would later see during their first encounter, Podein had also brought a new sense of determination. He had missed the fall semester but set a goal to graduate with his cohort. By that summer, he'd caught up to his classmates. When he graduated, it was with high honors.

"It was a huge challenge, but when I got back I decided I was going to outlive my diagnosis. I was not going to be afraid of it," he said. "I was totally bald with no eyebrows. I had a gigantic face from steroids and medication. I certainly had a unique look I never had. But I decided I was not going to wear a baseball hat. Let the world enjoy my bald head."

During law school, Podein was a judicial intern for former Miami Circuit Judge Gill Freeman, who recommended him to Haber for the then-fledgling real estate firm. He celebrated a birthday during his first week at the new job in the middle of a bankruptcy adversary proceeding.

"He spent his entire birthday, all day, all night, through to the next morning in the office working on the trial," Haber said. "The key thing I remember is he never complained. He didn't whine. He knew it needed to be done and he did it."

Podein joined Haber Slade in 2009 and became a partner seven years later. His practice focuses on representing condominium associations at high-end developments and serving as outside general counsel to South Florida companies. He participates in multiple charities working to fight cancer and support patients and their families.

"I've been very very lucky to have gone through this experience and come out on the other side," he said. "It's really helped me frame how I approach problems."

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