



Meet Kyle and David: Two Brothers Shining Light Through the Darkness

The Heroes Circle is grateful for Kyle, David and their family, and their willingness to share their story so we can help change more lives.

“Can anyone give me examples of light?” 10-year-old David Ianni poses this philosophical question to his fifth-grade classmates in a video taken by his teacher. David had just asked his teacher if he could present a breathing technique to the class. She was so impressed, she shared the video with the principal. The principal was so impressed, he shared it with the school. Now, every day as part of announcements, David teaches his schoolmates Power Breathing.

Power Breathing is the central breathing and meditative strategy David has learned over the years, alongside his brother Kyle, from the Heroes Circle, a non-profit organization that offers evidence based martial arts therapy to children. David is the oldest sibling in the Ianni family, comprised of Mom Tes, Dad Marcello, David, Kyle, Steven, and Summer. When Kyle was 5, Tes noticed some abnormalities on Kyle’s body. A biopsy revealed that he had B-Cell Lymphoblastic Lymphoma. For Kyle, life became a 3-year course of chemotherapy, hospital stays, and medical procedures. For David, life became lonelier and scarier as his brother went away for weeks at a time.

It’s obvious, even during a recent Zoom call, that the two brothers are close. They frequently wrap their arms around each other’s shoulders, and they’re all energy and smiles as they demonstrate the non-contact kicks and punches they’ve learned over the years in Heroes Circle classes. Yet just over four years ago, the Ianni family was struggling with Kyle’s cancer diagnosis. The close-knit family was often apart during Kyle’s treatment. Residents of Windsor, Ontario, the closest pediatric facility was 2 hours away in London, Ontario. Marcello and Kyle were frequently away for treatment, with Tes managing the other children at home. “David was hurt by it,” says Marcello of the time apart. “He would call me sometimes from the school and say he misses Kyle.”

Kyle was about a year into treatment when the Ianni family got involved with the Heroes Circle. They first heard about the program at the London hospital. Marcello had also heard the story about its founder Rabbi Elimelech Goldberg—Rabbi G—who



lost his daughter years ago to cancer. Unlike other martial arts classes, the Heroes Circle was non-contact, and allowed sibling participation. It was a great fit for the family, especially David and Kyle.

For Kyle, the Power Breathing he learned with the Heroes Circle helps manage the pain of his treatments. “I use my Power Breathing every time I have bloodwork tests. It helps me get rid of the pain when the needle goes in,” he says. “If you’re scared, you can use power breathing to be brave and not be scared anymore.” Marcello agrees, recounting how nurses are always amazed with Kyle’s composure during his bloodwork.

For David, Power Breathing is more about helping with mental and emotional stress. He realized this could be going on with his classmates as well, which is what motivated him to show that initial demonstration. “It will help them if their day is not going well, or they haven’t really slept much, or they’re mad about something that happened before coming to school, or they were sad about something that happened yesterday. It would help them calm down,” David says.

When David demonstrates Power Breathing, he includes, with his breathwork, examples of feelings, and how they can be both light and dark. As he inhales, he describes light as “positivity and joy,” and “happiness and excitement.” He describes darkness as “anger and frustration.”

This central image of lightness and darkness is an apt metaphor for the Ianni family’s journey. “I’ve come to realize cancer doesn’t choose who it will go to,” says Marcello. Since Kyle’s diagnosis, the Iannis have come to know several other families affected by childhood cancer. Marcello is amazed at how people will support one another. Still, in this time, the family has gone to four funerals. “It’s very painful to see children buried by their parents,” he says.

Marcello is awed by the resilience of the children, even through all their treatments, from procedures like blood transfusions and lumbar punctures. He gets emotional thinking of how Kyle has fought through his own treatments with positivity. “He’s changed our lives completely.”

Meanwhile, Kyle and David grasp the central philosophy of the Heroes Circle. “Our purpose is to teach the world,” says David. Watching the brothers hug and support each other, it’s easy to see how, despite cancer’s challenges, the Iannis can see the light. Says Marcello, “We live with hope.”

