



# Saving Lives: Including His Own

Excerpted from an interview by  
Pamela J. Wood '81



You can learn more about the  
foundation and its events at [PJAF.org](http://PJAF.org).

PJ Aldridge '89 was diagnosed with lung cancer early in 2010 during a trip to Costa Rica. Upon returning to the states and visiting the oncologists at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore, Aldridge is so far tumor-free and the cancer hasn't spread. During this time, he has founded the PJ Aldridge Foundation, whose mission is to save lives by providing funding for research of lung cancer, to educate people of all ages about the disease, and improve awareness of the nation's current leading cause of cancer. The foundation provides funding for ingenious and cutting-edge lung cancer research programs. His goal is to raise \$1 million for the University of Maryland Medical Center for lung cancer research. To date, they have raised \$100,000. To honor his work, he was recently invited to *The Oprah Winfrey Show* for her "favorite things" episode—the proceeds from which he is using for the foundation. Fellow Sea Gull Pam Wood '81 took some time this winter to talk with PJ about his journey as a cancer survivor.

*Looking back, can you identify any symptoms leading up to your health event in Costa Rica?*

Until the time of my diagnosis, I was always fairly active and in okay shape—no symptoms whatsoever until four days before I was diagnosed with cancer. I was surfing in Costa Rica and got winded paddling out. At the time, I thought, "Wow, that's weird." I still surfed for four hours that day. The next day was worse, but the waves were better, so I surfed for four

more hours. Sunday I was wiped out. I wanted to surf, but I was physically unable.

I was scheduled to fly to San Jose on Monday and could not wait to get on the plane to get to a great hospital. Little did I know, my left lung would collapse on the flight—it was all I could do to make it from the airport to the hospital under my own power. Once I made it there, they figured out my lung was collapsed, and I had a tremendous amount of fluid in my chest (from the tumor) that had to be removed.

Initially the doctor told me he did not think I had cancer or pneumonia. Of course I was very happy, but as time went on, he was running out of options and said we needed to do a CT Scan, and that is where he saw something he didn't like. He said he would do a biopsy, and that is when we found out how bad the cancer really was. His initial diagnosis was not good at all. He said I could be dead within three months, and I had a few thoughts of my own about that! No way, not happening, can't happen. My family, my friends, I can't let them down and the list goes on.

*Describe the emotions you have experienced.*

My emotions have been all over the place. They have gone from "there is no way in the world this disease will beat me" to "I don't know if I can do this anymore" and everywhere in between. Physically, I feel like I can handle absolutely anything the doctors can throw at me. Emotionally, that's a different story. The toughest part of this battle is definitely the emotional and mental part. I tell everyone I am the luckiest man on the planet because I have been blessed with the best friends and family that anyone could ever ask for. If it wasn't for them, I definitely would not be here today.

My outlook is much better than my prognosis. With the type of lung cancer that I have, the goal of the doctors is to keep me alive year to year in hopes of a new drug or cure coming out. My outlook is that with the right attitude and through everyone's thoughts and prayers, I can be around a lot longer than the doctors ever thought possible.

*Tell us about your foundation.*

We have some very lofty goals this year! We are hoping to raise a couple of million dollars with all of the wonderful gifts that Oprah was kind enough to give to the foundation. We are going to have two separate raffles giving all of her gifts away! It should be fun, and it will be an inexpensive way for everyone to have a chance to win her prizes. We also will be having the second annual PJ Aldridge Foundation Golf Tournament in September 2011 at the Ocean City Golf and Yacht Club. We will be having a 5K walk/run in Ocean City too. Check out our Web site, [PJAF.org](http://PJAF.org), for updates.