



Nick Roma

BY CHRISTINE DARRAGH | PHOTOGRAPHED BY SARAH HANCOX

Nick Roma is just a typical teenager. Busily distracted by incoming texts and social updates, he has a ready laugh and chats intermittently about favourite musicians and his new dog. But there's a distinct contrast. Balancing an iPhone on his lap, he uses a Velcro strap securing a wand to one of his amputated limbs, tapping messages back with surprising speed and nimbleness.

The progress he's making is nothing short of remarkable, and he's considered a bona fide miracle by the medical community. At their rural home near St. David's, Nick shares inside jokes with his younger brother Jamie, while his mother talks openly about the harrowing journey they've been on over the last year and a half.

"He's always been like this," his mother Karen offers as an explanation for her son's incredible determination. "When something comes up in life, he deals with it and moves forward."

Endlessly optimistic, after a Christmas 2011 diagnosis of Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia initially sidelined the musically gifted bass player, he was undergoing aggressive treatment and making the best of things. Then July 2012 suddenly made life much more complicated. One month following high school graduation and six months into chemotherapy, renegade infection started shutting down his organs and he fell into a coma for six weeks. Lacking blood flow to hands and feet, urgent amputation of all four was the only life-saving choice to stem the deadly development of septic shock; a brain aneurism also compounded matters and he suffered two strokes during the ordeal.

He and his girlfriend of almost four years, Kara Brown, have just bought a puppy together named Lennon. "Kara has been so great through all of this," Nick says as he proudly shows the latest picture of their canine addition.

Having now resumed the necessary 25 months of weekly chemo, he's determined to focus on what he can do, not what he can't. He hopes to be fitted for advanced 'i-limb ultra' prosthetics, which can better control fine motor skills, adjusting to specific items at hand by mobile app. Having this specialized capability might be key for once again playing the music he loves.

His favourite musician, St. Catharines' Dallas Green who performs under the name City and Colour, is a local hero whom he has met several times when Green showed encouragement for Nick's situation. And keeping the shoutout's rolling, indie punk-rock icons Sum 41 recently posted news about Nick on their website to promote awareness.

Midway to their \$500,000 goal, the family hopes to soon begin in-home modifications, making life easier for Nick's mobility and freedom. This, coupled with the high cost of prostheses, where each limb can be \$60,000 or more, prompted the Stay Strong Nick Roma fundraising campaign and inspiring website, buoying spirits and providing a window to both struggles and achievements.

It's been said strength of character is a virtue, but staying strong when your fortitude is ruthlessly tested, that's a challenge few could bear with enduring grace and resiliency. As Nick and the many who care about him continue to confront various trials, they intend to carry on, one step at a time. staystrongnickroma.com. NM

10 THINGS I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT

1. MUSIC: I'm a musician (bass player) so music is very important. I like songs with lyrics that have meaning.

2. MY DOG LENNON: My dog (a six-month-old Coton poo) is always happy to see me.

3. CELLPHONE: I have an iPhone 5.

4. PROSTHETICS: My prosthetics allow me to walk around and be more independent.

6. LAPTOP. My laptop allows me to keep in contact with everyone.

7. NONNA'S PASTA: Delicious! Great comfort food!

8. CUFF: My cuff goes around my arm and I can put my stylus in it to text, a pen in it to write and a fork in it to eat. I feel more independent with my cuff.

9. STYLUS: Without my stylus I wouldn't be able to text!

9. FAMILY AND FRIENDS: My family and friends are always there for me: helping me, making me laugh, getting me through the tough times.

10. HOPE: Without hope there is only despair.



Brothers Nick and Jamie Roma