

Overcoming Odds!

A 16-year-old girl diagnosed with rare form of brain cancer is among Wayne County Community College District's Class of 2017.

Her name is Omoyanjuola Ogunfiditimi, which when translated from her native Nigerian Yoruba language means to complete the wealth of a family. But she prefers to be called Yanju. She is an optimist and she responds to change and adversity with hope. The 16-year-old was diagnosed at age 13 with Pineal Parenchymal Tumor of Intermediate Differentiation (PPTID)—Grade III, a rare form of brain cancer.

Although there are many stories of cancer survivors; and stories that cut across ethnicity and age group, the story of Yanju and how she is coping with her ailment is heartwarming. She lives her life daily with hope for the future and determination to survive. She would often tell her friends and family that, “Although I have cancer, cancer does not have me.” This kind of approach to a rare form of cancer sums up her courage and determination to survive. “It was a devastating blow to the entire family, but we are dealing with it in a unique way,” said her mother, Omobonike Odegbami.

Yanju is currently in remission with some after-effects of chemotherapy and radiation, which affects her energy level and cognitive abilities. She runs 1-3 miles per day, five days a week. How does she get the energy to do that? “To me, anything is possible and I always approach life with optimism. I would love for people to know that anything is possible if you set your mind to it in spite of real or perceived limitations,” she said. “I want the grown-ups; including my parents to know that us kids will meet the expectation our parents set for us, and I

encourage parents to set the expectations for their children higher because we can meet those expectations.”

Her mother agrees. “Yanju’s energy is all in the family. I sometimes consider myself her role model in the kind of energy she has and the way she responds to life’s changes and adversity. We are not going to let cancer defeat her. She always sees the glass half full and we are with her every step of the way.”

Despite the challenges that life has thrown her way, Omoyanjuola Ogunfiditimi is pressing on and is energized daily to keep moving forward and keep surviving. She was among approximately 2,500 Wayne County Community College District (WCCCD’s) students in the Class of 2017 who walked across the stage during the District’s 48th Commencement Ceremony at Joe Louis Arena on June 10, 2017. She received her Associate of General Studies degree. She is expected to also receive her high school diploma from Northville High School in June 2018.

Dr. Randall Robinson, founder and president of TransAfrica, who spearheaded the movement to influence U.S. policies toward international black leadership, was the keynote speaker at the commencement ceremonies.

WCCCD continues to break down traditional age characteristics for graduates by awarding both young and senior students with degrees. Eugene Williams, who graduated with an associate in General Studies, was the oldest in the Class of 2017. He is 80 years old. Also in the 2017 class was Chelsea Caises, who, at age 16, received her Associate of Science degree. She will join 16 year-old Omoyanjuola Ogunfiditimi as the youngest graduates.

Yanju, who received a degree in General Studies, joined 53 other dual enrollment students representing Metro Detroit area school districts that graduated from WCCCD this year.

As she reflects on her dual enrollment journey, Yanju said, “This was the first time ever graduating from anything. I recall sleepless nights just to be able to submit assignments and meet the expectations of both my college and high school teachers. Now I can see the light at the end of the tunnel on the road to a better future now that I walked across the stage and joined my colleagues amidst all the cheers from my teachers, my parents and all the other families and friends that supported their graduates.”

Best of all, she credits her best friend, Emma, and especially her parents for their support when she needed it most. “My parents literally gave up everything to be by my side and I am appreciative for that. I know it is hard on them financially, physically, emotionally and spiritually, but we are all approaching this with strength and positive thinking. I am grateful.”

Yanju, who will be heading to University of Detroit-Mercy, said despite her ailment, she is prepared for a four-year college. “The knowledge I received from my dual enrollment classes will help me get acquainted with four-year college work. I am better prepared because, among other things, my dual enrollment classes have enabled me to experience college-level writing, and what the general college environment feels like. I am prepared.”