



Photo by Tuan Minh Nguyen

Brandon Choy shows off his keyboard collection at the conference room in the apartment he lives in Toronto. Choy started collecting keyboards five years ago. He used to have 10 keyboard sets, including a keyboard set worth nearly \$1,000. Some of the keyboards he owns are custom-made. In addition, he also owns many keycap sets.

## Keyboards a collector's passion

By Tuan Minh Nguyen

"I used to have 10 keyboards."

That's the story behind Brandon Choy, a well-known collector of computer keyboards in the keyboard enthusiast community in Toronto.

Choy is currently in the real estate business, but his income also comes from fixing and building computer keyboards for people in need.

"I think I started learning about keyboards around five years ago. One day, I broke my Razer keyboard. It's a gaming keyboard. I went online to find a way to replace a few broken things. When I

finished fixing it, I tinkered with it and wanted to add some things to make my keyboard cooler. Then, I have been immersed in the world of keyboards," shared Choy.

In his small apartment on the top floor of a Toronto apartment block, Choy's living room is filled with keyboard repair equipment. He has a large shelf next to the TV, which displays the six keyboards he owns.

"This one is the most expensive, almost \$1,000. The other is about \$700. The rest are about \$300 - \$500," said Choy, pointing to each keyboard on the shelf. "This keyboard is the first one I built all

by myself. It has a base made of steel, so it is very heavy, probably more than 1kg. I also ordered the keycap set of this keyboard separately. The buffer of this keyboard is also the best, so it is very quiet when pressed and has a clattering sound like the first generation keyboards."

Among the keyboards that Choy owns, there is a pair of striking pink painted keyboards designed in an analog style.

"These two keyboards are mine and my girlfriend's. I order according to my own design wishes. I had to wait more than a year to get my hands on this key-

board set," Choy shared. I am very satisfied with this keyboard set. The highlight of these two keyboards is that they have the Esc key designed specifically for this version."

In Choy's computer keyboard collection, there is also an IBM keyboard from the 1990s. It was a gift that friends gave Choy on his birthday. The keyboard is still working fine until now. Choy also built a special adapter to connect the keyboard to his laptop.

In addition to the keyboard collection, Choy also has several keycap collections. The keycaps that he collects have different shapes and colours and are carefully

stored in trays with glass surfaces.

"Most of the keyboard accessories and components are ordered by me from China. In China, they have a large community of keyboard and related collectors. There are many processing factories there, so it is very cheap to order components and accessories."

In addition to his regular job, Choy also has many customers who come to him to build keyboards according to their design needs. Choy has different rates, ranging from \$50 to \$300, depending on the volume of the job. Usually it takes about one week for him to build a complete set of keyboards for customers.

## Cancer survivor celebrates milestone

By Heather Waldron

In keeping with her wry sense of humour, Donna Dagher, 31, celebrated her five years of cancer remission with a classic, spooky Halloween bash.

From mummy-shaped sausage rolls to gory deviled eggs, Dagher spent hours preparing for the booze-filled Halloween night at her apartment in Montreal. Synthetic spider webs lined the ceiling, bloody footprints decorated the floors and dim red lights filled each room. Dagher wanted the party to be perfect. She had dreamt of hosting a Halloween party for as long as she could remember.

The event invitation read: "On October 13th (2017), I went to my last oncology follow-up. Meaning I officially hit five years of remission! And if you know me well, you know Halloween is my favourite time of year. So, I'm throwing a combo party! Let's dress up and celebrate not dying!"

Asked about life after chemo for leukemia, Dagher said, "The change is underwhelming and very slow progress. It's not as I would say instant and gratifying as people would make it sound when you finish your treatments."

Dagher learned, in December of 2016, one year into cancer treatment for leukemia, that she had developed avascular necrosis, or AVN, in her hips. AVN is the death of bone tissue caused by a lack of blood supply. In Dagher's case, the condition was caused by the steroid medications she received during treatments. It was only two weeks before her final chemotherapy treatment, in October 2017, that her hips collapsed causing her to need surgery. This meant that her healing journey would not be over. Dagher went into surgery for one hip replacement in 2018 and then the other in 2019.



Photo by Heather Waldron

Donna Dagher, 32, celebrates five years of being cancer free recently in Montreal, Quebec. Dagher held a Halloween/remission party with all her closest friends and family to celebrate the big milestone.

Physiotherapy was long, hard and grueling. The inability to walk long distances triggered feelings of insecurity and a lack of autonomy. However, Dagher pressed on.

Cannabis played an immense role in Dagher's ability to persevere through the pain when she thought she wanted to give up.

"It would make me less stressed about

the process because I had just finished surgery and I was overthinking every single movement. If I smoked a little bit before, I was like, 'I could do this, this is fine. Everything is fine.' I really needed that because every moment felt like a disaster," said Dagher.

When Dagher was diagnosed, her brother brought her cannabis oil tea as an alternative to the morphine that doc-

tors were pumping her with. Dagher was experiencing terrible stomach pains for almost three days and had little to no appetite. The morphine made her sleepy and uncomfortable, but did nothing for the pain. The night that she consumed the cannabis oil, Dagher was no longer in pain, she regained her appetite and finally managed to get some sleep.

Not only did she no longer require

morphine, she said, but the cannabis enabled her to quit four different medications: one for anxiety, one for inducing appetite, one for sleeping and another for relieving constipation caused by the other medications. She was angry that other patients in her situation did not have access and were not informed about the benefits of the life-changing substance.

"I started feeling really, really good. And then I started crying a lot because I felt a lot of relief. And I also felt a lot of sadness for myself and anyone else who avoided it because of whatever taboo they had heard. If only this was a normal thing, more people would have access to it to help with pain or nausea or insomnia or all the friggin' symptoms and side effects that I had from the treatments themselves," said Dagher.

Dagher's boyfriend, Joe Pinta Bona, was an immense support for her during her years of healing. Pinta Bona would cook, clean and drive her anywhere. The couple moved in together shortly after Dagher was diagnosed. The move was unplanned but happened naturally given the circumstances.

"He did a lot. I can't even tell you how involved he was. And he was also going to school at the same time and working part time," said Dagher.

"I think Donna handled it as well as she could. You don't really get a lot of choices to make along the way. She took what they threw at her and never gave up," said Pinta Bona.

"For me, honestly, the experience was a blur. Everything kind of felt like one very long day. It was obviously very tough emotionally and even physically at times, especially when her hips collapsed. For the most part, I didn't think there was much I could do other than be there. The rest was really up to her and the doctors."