



When I think of this journey, from the beginning to where I am at today, I guess the biggest question is how one can get past that initial point of knowing you have cancer, could die from it, may not get to see your grandkids grow up, and on and on. The fears of the unknown, and the sinking depression and sadness begin to eat into your soul. Now today, three years later, the transformation has occurred that has taken my worst liability, cancer and death, and transformed it into the most valuable asset that I have. *Appreciation for life*, using my cancer experience as a tool that can help others walk the path. This is a journey that is unfathomable at the beginning.

The most difficult part of being diagnosed with cancer was getting through my own denial - "It couldn't happen to me, this crap only happens to other people. I'm sure that they made a mistake. I need more tests," I would tell myself. So I went to three different urologists, proton therapy clinic, radiology clinic, HIFU clinics, and anybody else that would listen to me clinic. And this was just to get me to a point where I would agree to have a biopsy. Finally I got a biopsy and the denial of cancer being in my system was impossible to continue. I got to that place where I believed it was true. The majority of the doctors I saw all seem to agree that it was contained and that I should have surgery. Proton was not an option as my Gleason was 7 which was too high for them and I was too high of a risk. I finally agreed to do the surgery. The doctor I selected was very good at surgery although he had no bedside manner, but I didn't hire him to talk nice. He was able to save half of my nerves, which was great, and my incontinence issue was minimal. But he told me that the cancer had progressed beyond the prostate and that it was in the lymph nodes as well as the seminal vesicles. This is when the real depression and fear set in. My blood tests came back non-detectable for about six months. My PSA was not moving. I had hoped that they had got it all. My PSA, then, slowly started to creep up. The doctors suggested that I start on a hormone therapy which was extremely emotional for me. As I knew that it would begin to take away what was left of my manhood, it was very difficult and emotional to receive the first injection. It got easier, as it has been two years since I started hormone therapy. Amazingly, the "manhood thing" is still doable but extremely difficult. Doctors are amazed that I have any function at all. My PSA went back to zero and the doctors recommended that I do radiation on the prostate bed and lymph nodes in the area. Again, another blow to your manhood as they radiate the nerves that are left. But, again, the side effects of radiation were less than the surgery and the hormone therapy. They were uncomfortable and sometimes inconvenient, but somewhat normal functions have returned to my body. Again I feel blessed. As I went through all three of these treatment processes the concerns were similar: "how bad will it be, will it hurt, how long will last, will I ever get back to normal?" Some have been answered and others I'm still waiting for the answers. But I have learned to accept the moment. This is my "new normal" today. And I can live with it.

How did I get past fear and depression? How do I get to a place of acceptance? At the beginning I began to search out support groups. I found them far away and difficult to connect with on an emotional level. I wasn't sure what to do as a depression got deeper. Coincidentally, if you believe in such things, my employee's father George had recently experienced prostate cancer and we connected. George connected me to a church, and in the church I found more men with the same affliction. Three of us got together at my office and began sharing. This was pre-surgery. They both had many years of experience with their prostate cancer and appeared to be doing fine. I suggested that we meet every two weeks. They agreed and within a few more weeks we found a few more guys. We began to create a small group of men with prostate cancer and developed a little ritual of sharing to inspire each other. They helped me walk through my fears. There were Don, Dennis, George, Mike, and myself. More were to follow, many more, as our group began to grow. Each of them offered hope

and their experiences. There were many times where their words lifted me from gloom and doom. I was constantly thinking about how to die, where to die, even writing my own eulogy and visualizing my own memorial service, and I was obsessed with the end of life. Then, one day, there was one quick, simple thing that Don said to me, just at the right time for me to actually hear it, it was: "Dave, quit thinking about how you are going to die, and start thinking about how you are going to live!" How simple, but it was the truth I needed at the perfect time. It worked. I will always be grateful for those simple words that have helped me to smile so many more times and, for the first time in my life, I have really have begun to understand and appreciate how to truly live "one day at a time."

I still had to go through radiation therapy and hormone therapy, but as I did, I had all of these men in our group look at me and hold me up. They repeatedly told me that they love me and that I was not dying today; that my granddaughter needs me, that there are lots of people who need me and that I have a purpose. I have a purpose? I began to believe them, and I begin to live again. I must say that through my wife's love and their love that the sunlight was beginning to show. I just had to open my eyes, see the light and feel the warmth. It was always there, but it took the love from people to get me to the place I could feel it.

I also know that I could not have done it without my spouse, my wonderful wife, who went with me to every treatment, every doctor appointment and held my hand and never abandoned me, never ... even in my worst depression. She fed me healthy food, encouraged me to stay active and do what we call "walk walk walk, and just keep walking" and don't stop. It was through her strength that I also begin to flourish. This cancer stuff is so extremely tough on our loved ones, they suffer as much, or more, I believe, than most men do. Joanne started a support group for the women of our men's group, and she still supports and works with other women who were put in the situation. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate her to this day, we cried together, we talked about cancer and life openly, and now we laugh and love each day. Some better than others. The journey has changed from what seemed to be "hell on earth" to "heaven, God I love my wife!"

What used to kill me, cancer, now encourages me to live. I donate my time to anyone who asks for my experiences. I have begun another cancer support group in Homer, Alaska. Our little group is struggling to get people involved, but it's not always about getting other members. It is the action to be available, the searching for ways to be of service, to never be ashamed of prostate cancer and the side effects. To always be an open book, to encourage others to live each day. It is through this, this action, that magically, the quality of life, for me, and just as importantly, for all that are around me, has been elevated to the level of bliss.

I don't know how long I will be on this planet, but what a shame if I wasted this day!

In closing, I would just like to say that there is a hill, 1,500 feet or so that I trained on, to climb my Rainer. It is near my home. Since cancer arrived, I have looked at that hill, from my porch, wondering if I could ever make it to the top again. It has been a difficult journey and I really didn't know how it would go, but I reached the top yesterday! With my wife and dog at my side. *It took a long time to get up to the top, but what a feeling ... to live. Walk walk walk... no matter what.*

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