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September 10, 2017  
Lincoln Park

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SEA  
Stories

*A Personal Experience from  
Thomas Braun,  
Runner and Survivor*

### **Can you tell us about your diagnosis and treatment?**

I made an appointment with my primary care physician on March 23, 2016 as I was having problems urinating. He took a blood sample for a PSA and performed a digital rectal exam. He thought he felt something abnormal and was a little concerned, but wanted to wait for the results of the PSA. My PSA came back at 1.98, which I understand is low. The fact that he felt something encouraged me to visit a urologist. In the exam the urologist also felt something, so he had me schedule a biopsy. One day soon after, I got home from work and there were three or four calls, with no messages, from the doctor. I knew this was not good news. I called the doctor back and he told me that 4 of the 12 samples came back with cancer. While I was prepared for these results, I was still a little shocked.

As everyone knows, it takes time to heal from a biopsy, so surgery to remove my prostate was scheduled for June 24. This gave me a lot of time to think of alternative treatments: radiation, seeds, or my favorite, "wait and see what happens." Nobody liked the third option except for me. Since my urologist was also a surgeon, I went for a second opinion from an oncologist. He agreed because of my age (63), the type of cancer, and my scores, surgery was determined to be the best option for me. Surgery was scheduled and performed on June 24th.

### **Do you have any experience participating in a support group?**

Not a support group, per se, but I definitely had a support system in place. My first source of support was my family. My wife was with me from the beginning but telling my grown son and daughter was difficult. Knowing that they were by my side was important. My second source of support was a friend from church. He was going through treatment for bladder cancer and had a much harder treatment than I did. Knowing that he and my entire church were praying for me made the treatment much easier to accept. My third source of support was the group of people I train with. We had just started training for the 2016 marathon season. I had to tell them that I would be taking this season off. I missed the entire training season but I was out there walking the weekend after my surgery, catheter and all.

### **You mentioned in an earlier conversation that you had surgery in June of 2016. This year you will be running a marathon, exactly one year later, in June 2017! Please tell us more about this, how you made this happen, and what you have had to overcome.**

From the beginning, the doctor knew I was a runner and I wanted to run again. He told me I could not run for two months after my surgery. On one of my follow-up visits we talked about when I could run again. He said 8 weeks would be OK. Seeing as things were going my way I told him that I was going on vacation that week and would really like to begin running again on Monday of that week. He told me it was fine but if I felt any pain I should stop running. I did not feel any pain in my first run or my other two runs that week. I did have a lump in my throat and a tear in my eye when finishing my first run. My official comeback race was the 2016 SEA Blue Chicago Prostate Cancer Walk & Run. I thought that was a very appropriate comeback race. I completed the race pushing my grandson in a stroller, another lump in my throat.

Knowing that I wanted to run another marathon as soon as I was trained, I picked Grandma's Marathon in Duluth, Minnesota, 51 weeks to the day after my surgery. The race did not go as well as I had planned as it was very warm and humid. This was my 21st marathon and I have never needed to visit the medical tent before this. I received some cold fluids, put a cold towel around my neck, and was able to finish the marathon. I WAS NOT GOING TO LET CANCER BEAT ME! It was not my best time, it was probably my worst, but I finished and celebrated!

**When invited to participate in SEA Stories, you answered with the following: "I would be happy to share my story. Anything to encourage other men and their families that there is life to live after prostate cancer. I would not have said that a year ago." That is an extremely powerful statement. Can you elaborate more on that?**

Of course when the diagnosis of cancer was confirmed, my first thought was "why me?" After a few days and weeks of having a "pity party" I began talking to my friend from church. I like to think I am a good Christian and know that God had a plan for me. I had a friend from my running group who died of brain cancer, two sisters battling breast cancer, and my friend from church with bladder cancer. I realized that my own situation wasn't so bad. Yes, it was a shock to me and other people I would tell. They would all say "but you are so healthy." Prostate cancer is one of the cancers that cannot be prevented by exercise. You need to get over the "pity party" and get on with your life. There are many people out there that are much worse off than you.

**What would you tell someone else that has been recently diagnosed with prostate cancer?**

I have actually talked to two men about prostate cancer and my experience. The husband of a woman I run with was diagnosed with prostate cancer last September. I had just started running again when she told me at a race we were both running. I had many conversations with him and told him about my recovery. I encouraged him to get a second opinion, which he did. I also encouraged him to begin walking as soon as he was cleared from his doctor. I understand he is doing well. A man I run with was diagnosed last month. He is having a hard time dealing with this. It took him about a week to tell his two sons about it, and he has yet to tell the running group. I think it is very therapeutic to talk to people about this problem. It helped me to get over feeling sorry for myself.

**What would you tell yourself, if you could visit yourself the moment you were diagnosed?**

God has a plan for you. This is just a little bump in the road. He never gives you more than you can handle.

**Tell us about your SEA Blue team "Running for Pops"...**

None of the team members are runners, but they ran last year and will be running again this September. My wife Lynne, a nurse, was there every step of the way. She came to most of my appointments and the doctor would wait to talk to me until she was in the office. My son, Erik, daughter-in-law, Gina, and grandson, Anden, are also on the team. Erik has already told his doctor about my diagnosis so he will be followed carefully in a few years. As an added benefit and challenge, I pushed Anden in a stroller during the 2016 race and will do so again in September. The final members of the team are my daughter, Kristin, and her fiancé, Kevin. Kristin, also a nurse, insisted that she be present when I was released from the hospital after surgery. She wanted to be sure that I had the correct medications, bandages, and catheter materials to use once I got home. She did her job well and I had everything I needed.

**Thank you for sharing your experience with us.**

For more information on SEA Blue, to donate, or to register, visit [www.seablueprostatewalk.org](http://www.seablueprostatewalk.org).

