

Survive Your Cancer

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Chapter One:

Diagnosis—Cancer

"...Fear is a great accelerator of disease...Hope, faith, confidence and the will to live set an auspicious stage for...recovery."

—Norman Cousins, Former Editor, *Saturday Review of Literature*

Of all the words that can strike fear in the heart, none come close to the impact of

C A N C E R. You are gripped with fright. In one swift moment you are no longer who you were seconds ago; you have cancer. Your world has suddenly come to a standstill. Nothing will ever be the same again: not the way you see yourself, not the way others see you, not the risk for your children. It's a staggering blow that takes your breath away and sets your mind awirl with thoughts that race out of control.

You may try to put on a calm and composed exterior, if only for the sake of others around you. Yet, you pay dearly for the façade with inner rage and turmoil. You feel suddenly powerless, paralyzed with fear. You are angry. You feel hopeless, and your mind churns a torrent of questions that you are too scared to voice.

Ask most anyone what goes through their mind when they hear the word cancer, and the immediate response is *death*. It is the biggest hurdle to overcome after discovering you have cancer. For me, after the initial shock of learning that I had cancer, I became so caught up in the momentum of doing my own research, scheduling appointments, seeing doctors, and challenging the "system" that I stopped thinking of myself as having the disease. Instead, I focused on taking charge. I wanted to learn all I could about my illness, to see the doctors I wanted to see, to have the tests I wanted to have, and to plan my own calendar for surgery and follow up treatment. I was in a race against time to accelerate treatment and get past this episode in my life. Death was not an option.

Was I fearful? Yes. Did I have anxious moments? You bet. Each time I waited for test results I was apprehensive. One of my biggest fears was how to tell my children about my condition without alarming them. And the medical profession can be quite complicit. They use words like "mass" and "malignancy" and give your particular kind of cancer clinical terms. In fact, I don't think I ever heard the word "cancer" from any of my doctors, but the word was there, emblazoned over the door of the Lombardi Cancer Center, plain as day.

I had cancer, period. End of sentence.

The “Out of Body” Experience

Unlike some, after the initial shock, I was not afraid to face my cancer. Instead, I was more afraid of the consequences that might arise from having cancer and having it go undiagnosed and untreated. Waiting any period of time for lumps to grow, for additional symptoms to appear, or for the cancer to metastasize was out of the question. If I had cancer, then I wanted to know as soon as possible and I wanted the best treatment possible. Because I wasn't afraid to face up to my cancer, I could remain fairly objective about my diagnosis and treatment. This objectivity is what I call the “out of body” experience. This is not a form of denial, but a depersonalization of the disease that helps you to overcome the trap of embracing a victim mentality. It allows you to detach yourself from the disease growing inside your body and enables you to focus on your treatment. By taking a clinical approach, you are able to discuss your diagnosis, research your disease, and actively participate in your treatment.

For more of Survive Your Cancer please call or e-mail. I look forward to hearing from you.