

Five Alive

Happy New Year 2003

Who would have thought that a simple lump found in January 2003 would lead to cancer five times in 8 years? Certainly not me as I was healthy and took only vitamins. Being ill and seeing the doctor was for others. Well I got a surprise when in January 2003, when the diagnosis went from 'it could be' to 'you got it', cancer!

The Lord, who was on my team from the beginning, came into play early as a much needed source of strength. I was to have a needle biopsy to see what kind of cancer I had. The three radiologists at Farrell backed off – too tough for them. A specialist, who had a degree beyond basic radiology, was called in from another hospital to use his advanced training in this situation. It didn't dawn on me the seriousness of having a needle biopsy until 1 hr and 10 min into the biopsy when the specialist announced he couldn't find a hold to get a biopsy of the tumor as the large intestine was in the road. I literally cried out, "Lord, I can't take any more of this. Please send the Great Physician to help this guy." No soon said than done. The guy stepped out of the booth to announce he found a hole leading to the tumor he needed, and we'd be done in 10 minutes. PTL Never again a biopsy other than at Shady Side in Pittsburgh where four other such procedures took 45-50 minutes each. (What a professional staff and facility they have there, plus the Great Physician is chief of staff there also.)

By the first week in February 2003, Dr Velocian and staff were delivering chemo to me, CHOP and Retuxin. I had always said if I got cancer, I'd go to Pittsburgh; however this MD's credential were from Hannaman Medical center in Philadelphia, top notch, so I went with him. He promised after 6 chemos my nonhodgkins lymphoma would be gone.

There was a VCR in the chemo room, and I got permission to show videos to pass the time of 5-7 hours of each chemo. Comedies were the videos shown. Our son, Rhett, went out and bought many of the old comedies that I loved along with

some present day movies. They were enjoyed by my fellow patients, so much so I was finished my chemo before "My Big Fat Greek Wedding," was over, and the nurses asked my wife, Gail, to delay coming to pick me up as the movie hadn't reached the "zits" yet.

After chemo 4, a real problem arose, not with the tumor, which was now 2/3 reduced as planned. UPMC had transferred my oncologist to Johnstown. WHAT! I had a check list of two new oncologists, one Dr. Wu, who said he would continue the same chemo formula, was my new oncologist. After the final two chemos, Dr. Wu was at a loss as to what to do next. What do you mean what do we do next? He's an oncologist, but I didn't know his credentials to practice! He thought radiation etc.? We balked at all his suggestions. A mental recall, from an earlier conversation with him, provided the solution. Dr. Wu had mentioned a Dr. Jacobs at Hillman Cancer Center in Pittsburgh who was using a radioactive iodine drug which killed cancer cells on contact. With that, Dr. Wu was history, and an appointment was made with Dr. Jacobs.

Dr. Jacobs was an oncologist blessed by the Great Physician. He was aghast at the thought of radiation for the cancer at this time, and he ordered a PET Scan to see the status of my small football sized tumor after the 6 treatments. An hour after the PET Scan, he announced that the cancer was dead, and it had been reduced to scar tissue. PTL. Our prayers and the prayers of others had been answered. The cancer was gone, and we had found our way to Pittsburgh which we had always planned.

We had learned a lot on the road to being cured of cancer No. 1. When you're told to rest, rest. After my first chemo I was buzzing around the house getting dinner, and all was well, I thought. All of a sudden I hit an invisible wall and had to sit down in the first chair before I collapsed. Dinner was good, but within hours, it came back up. The nausea pills eventually worked, but after the fact. Reviewing the situation, I started to take the nausea pills 6 hours before bedtime and when I got sick, which was lessening, after each new chemo treatment. I tossed my cookies as the nausea pill wore off, but it was before bedtime, and

when I took the next nausea pill, I slept all night without interruption. I learned when to rest and when to take the pills.

One other problem during chemo was steroids. For five days I took steroid pills, which kept me awake half the night. I watched Arthur Ashe beat Jimmy Connors at Wimbledon to fill in the time before I could sleep. I talked to my pharmacist about this problem, and she suggested I buy some turkey from the deli case. Turkey has an ingredient which causes drowsiness, like Thanksgiving, and this should help you sleep. She was right. The turkey worked.

Cancer Free

Being cancer free, life returned to normal except that I was weak and tired. In the mail, I got an announcement that the YMCA was starting a new exercise program for seniors, called ***Silver Sneakers***. Best of all a good friend was starting the program, so I decided to check it out. What a great decision, ***Silver Sneakers*** was just the exercise program that I needed, and the fellowship which resulted was great. Things progressed at the YMCA and a ***Silver Sneakers II*** program was started for a more challenging exercise. I loved it, and I was no longer tired and weak.

At a regular check up with my oncologist, which included a PET Scan, a second cancer tumor was found. This was totally unexpected as we thought I was finished with cancer. Not to be.

My oncologist asked me if I'd like to enter a cancer experimental program using the new drug, Zevalin, which is designed to kill cancer cells on contact. I did not hesitate to sign up for the group study. A bone marrow was taken as well as blood samples for testing. By the draw, I wound up in Group A which got Retuxin in large doses. Groups B got the Retuxin and Zevalin. After six treatments of Retuxin, no change occurred in tumor No. 2. Not all was lost. I was not eligible to have an injection of Zevalin. Just what I wanted!

I had a pre-Zevalin injection test run to see if my body would accept the new drug. I passed the pre-test. The Zevalin was administered with no problems. I had to avoid contact with people any way as my body fluids were radioactive. I promised

my Amish son, Levi, that if he had a dark spot in his home, I'd come out and light it up for him as I told him that I would glow in the dark!

I told a long time friend about Zevalin to which she replied, "I don't care about your glowing in the dark, I just want you to get better!" With friends like that, as well as the Great Physician, I knew I would beat cancer No. 2. The prayer support was phenomenal again this second time as well.

To beat No. 2, Dr. Jacobs decided on radiation; enter Dr. Melvin Deutsch, who turned out to be quite a radiological oncologist. Dr. Deutsch mapped out a plan for a 20 radiation treatments after he viewed the scan locating No. 2. With Dr. Jacobs, we discussed books we had read during each visit. With Dr. Deutsch, politics was his interest, and we became friends quickly. It turned out that the sense of humor of the two of us matched perfectly.

The treatment meant a four week- five days a week of 140 miles round trip each day to Pittsburgh for this radiation. The weather in February and March is the worst weather all year, except this year, 2005. The weather was clear and sunny except for one day which had snow. The snow at home was ahead of the snow which hit Pittsburgh that day. So we arrived in Pittsburgh with clear weather, with the snow beginning as we left, and by the time we neared home territory, the roads were cleared of snow. During my radiation treatments many friends took me down to Pittsburgh and waited while I had my treatments so my wife, Gail, did not have to drive down every day. Again the Lord has been good to us and we are thankful for that.

The first 20 treatments passed quickly as the radiology staff was gifted and ready to give me a treatment close to my appointment time. Dr. Deutsch asked to see me after the 20 treatments were completed. (I told you that Dr. Deutsch and I had a similar sense of humor.) As he and I walked to the examination room he said that he'd like me to have 5 more treatments! I asked if he expected me to start with the extra five treatments tomorrow. He said yes, he would. To which I replied, "Well for you I'll do it!" We both laughed and walked away.

After the five extra treatments, a PET Scan was administered three weeks later. Cancer No. 2 was history! PTL. Praise also Dr. Deutsch and his radiation staff for their care and dedication.

Life without cancer was good. Time for family and friends was now possible without interruption. I was able to see my grandsons play soccer and enjoy their birthday parties. I was able to travel with Gail, and be the husband, father, and grandfather which I dearly loved to be. Then, a local campus of Penn State needed my services again to teach economics. How I enjoyed the opportunity to teach again for alma mater. Two semesters passed by quickly and I was prepared to teach again in the fall of 2007. There was just one glitch, cancer No. 3 made its unwelcomed presence known following a routine PET Scan.

This time the cancer was in a more threatening area. It was poised outside the large intestine, the spleen and the liver. The cancer had not spread into these organs so it was found in time. The Great Physician had made known this new cancer, and He was ready to work with my medical team to win battle No. 3.

Dr. Jacobs prescribed RICE and Retuxin as the chemo formula this time. It was to be much more difficult than the first chemo. Three days in a row for RICE and Retuxin, which took 7-8 hours each day? However, knowing that the Holy Spirit was indwelling and the Great Physician had everything prepared. Day one went well as the nurse found a friendly vein to begin the chemo. All went well.

However, day 2 was a problem. I awoke in the hotel where we stayed with things in a whirl. Large letters and animals were moving about in a circular motion. I couldn't get up. I told Gail that I was refusing to go for the treatment. She convinced me to rest for a while and go because we had to make the appointment and get the treatment if I was going to be cancer free. Finally I converted the letters into USA and PSU. My nausea pills were too strong. I rested another half hour before arriving at the hospital on time for chemo. The day was just beginning.

The nurse had a difficult time finding a vein in my hand to use. It took ten tries to find a vein in my hand by four different oncology nurses. What!! Dr. Jacobs

arrived an hour later and tossed my nausea pills which had caused the circular moving about. I got a better nausea pill.

Day 3 went better. Not by chance, Dr. Jacobs's chief oncology nurse, Joseph, appeared in the hall as we were leaving. I expressed my concern for using the hand only to administer the chemo. I wondered why the other veins in my arms would not work just as well. Joseph promised to look into it.

When I appeared to begin the second series of chemo, I had a new oncology nurse, Ellen. She smiled and said, "Did you know that you had great veins in your arm for chemo?" I smiled and said, "We're going to get along famously." Joseph, with the guidance from the Great Physician, had answered my concern and prayers for a better chemo experience.

Ellen and I got along famously. During the three day sessions, she would wrap the needle securely so that we would not have to seek out a new vein each day; it worked like a charm.

During one of these chemo sessions, I happened to be alone for some reason. There were no other chemo patients in the room. My wife was looking for coffee. Ellen was giving another person chemo. However, I was not alone. A voice sang out, whose voice I don't know, the old camp song, "Have You Seen Jesus my Lord?" A line of that song goes..."He's here in plain view." He was there as the song said. I was never alone during the whole time of chemo treatments. He was with me! What a blessing.

After three chemo treatments, my oncologist wanted one more treatment for good measure. This was fine, but I would have to make a change in my future as I had an obligation for September. I was signed up to teach Macroeconomics for Penn State Shenango which I dearly loved to do. However, first things first, chemo #4 won out.

P.S. Ray never got to finish his story or his fight against cancer. Cancer #5 came and again there was radiation and chemo. However, Dr. Jacobs decided to go into pure research and Ray was given a new drug called Revlimid which had been known to destroy some cancers but not the kind he had. However, Ray again was willing to be the experimentation because he always said it might help his family and friends later on. However, it could not fight the new aggressive cancer that he had. Cancer #5 was almost defeated, and then in a sudden rash the scans showed #6-9, and then #10-12. Up until that time he had them all numbered and Ray was sure that the Great Physician would help him defeat this also. His last three months were full of pain and numerous transfusion, and even surgery. However, the Great Physician had a greater calling for Ray. Ray had led a full life and had served his Great Physician in every day of his life, family life, teaching, being with friends and neighbors. Everyone who knew Ray knew his faith in his Great Physician and his faith lives on in those he touched and told about the Great Physician's amazing grace. Ray was a very strong supporter of cancer research. He gave 100's of bracelets away, and he flanked the front of the church with daffodils on Daffodil Sunday and then gave them all away to people who had been touched by cancer through the death of a loved one, or a personal fight with cancer.

On October 21, 2011, his Great Physician called him home to be with him. As his wife of over 50 years, I know that he is with his Great Physician now. I miss him terribly and his great faith has always been a lesson to me, but I know he had plans that never got carried through to teach Stephen Ministry, a passion of his, but he can now sing, be cancer and pain free, and see his Great Physician. PTL