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WEARETHESOLUTION

UNITED TO PREVENT
(WATSUP!)

KICKING-CANCER CHRONICLE

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SUPPORTING THOSE WHO HAVE FOUGHT, OR ARE FIGHTING,
THE GOOD FIGHT AGAINST CANCER.

EDUCATING PEOPLE ON HOW TO LIVE AN ANTI-CANCER
LIFESTYLE BY EATING REAL FOOD AND DOING SOME MOVEMENT.

“I CAN’T RETIRE?”

BY STEPHANIE SCHMIDT-WEBB (Oct. HONOREE)



My cancer journey began in November 2019. I had worked many years for Costco Wholesale and I was thinking about retiring. I wanted to take advantage of my insurance benefits before I left the company. I had all of my yearly medical appointments scheduled. As soon as all of my results came back I was going to give my 2 week notice. The doctor’s office called and said they would like to do an ultrasound because they saw something on my mammogram they would like to check into further. I wasn’t worried at all because breast cancer didn’t run in my

family. When doing the ultrasound they suggested a biopsy. It was scheduled quite quickly because I had big plans on retiring. A couple days later the doctor’s office wanted to go over the results.

My husband wanted to go with me, but again I wasn’t worried. Well the 3 words came out that I thought I would never hear. “YOU HAVE CANCER” I looked at my husband and said I have to continue working? On February 3, 2020 I went in for surgery and had a double mastectomy. I’m so glad I decided to have a double because after seeing the pathology report I had cancer on the other side. Everything seems to be closing up around me, as COVID was really hitting hard. Shortly after this I started radiation, every single day for 5 weeks straight. I had to go to every appointment alone! Because of COVID my family couldn’t go into the hospital. It was a very lonely feeling. I continued to work while I healed from the surgery and radiation. May 2021 I had a clean bill of health and was able to retire after working for Costco for 37 years. It’s funny how you think you have a life plan and in an instant everything changes. I have always relied on God and wasn’t worried with the outcome.

After 2 years later I got bored with retirement and went looking for a job where I can make a difference in someone’s life. I am working with a company that allows me to encourage, support and show women that someone cares for them. I am proud of their success becoming clean and sober. On August 22, 2023 I had my final reconstruction surgery and am finally living my best life.

(Editor’s note: I worked with Stephanie in November 2019 as KickinCancer was in it’s first year as an origination.)

“NO CANCER IS THE BEST”

BY JASON SELF (Sept HONOREE)

My cancer journey began in February 2020, but I didn’t listen to signs my body was giving me before that. I just assumed it was what I called “old man bladder”. My Dad had prostate cancer about 10 years previously, and has been in remission since his surgery. So, I had a PSA

test to give me a baseline. Test results showed numbers were where they should be. Then, a few years later, I started feeling sluggish and not as engaged. I went to the doctor for a test and found out I had low testosterone, and started receiving testosterone shots. Now they do say when you get them, that it could cause cancer. What they do not tell you is that prostate cancer feeds on testosterone. If you go for the shots make sure you get PSA tests. I believe those shots were like throwing gas on a fire for me.

On my follow-up appointment I was told that I most likely had cancer, but if I was going to get one, this was the best one to get, as it was the most treatable. A couple of my thoughts on this. One, no cancer is the best. Two, as much as my doctor was being clinical, there are no guarantees. From there I was referred to an urologist. Even though I had a high PSA, 10.65, he did not feel any tumors, so we tried antibiotics and some other treatments. No changes, except for my PSA, which kept going up. So at that point they did a biopsy. The results were expected, and with an extra kick my doctor said, “You got a nasty one”. I didn’t even know there were different kinds you could get. I was told I was Stage3C with a Gleason score of 9/10. My doctor told me at this stage, radiation was not a viable option, in his opinion. That was May, 2020 and he wanted me on the table ASAP. To add to this, because of the stage and type, found out I wouldn’t be getting robotic surgery. He would be opening me up from my belly button, to just above my privates. As he said it, “I need to get my hands in there to make sure I get everything”.

June 2020 was the next opening for surgery. It was the most scared I have ever been in my life. If it hadn’t been for my wife, I might have walked out after the shave. When I woke up from surgery, I was in extreme pain to say the least, but that was not the worst of it. I found out that my prostate had fused to my colon. So when removed, my colon tore. My doctor never even discussed this as an option. Doctor said in over 800 of these I was only the 3rd one it has happened to. The solution was sew up my colon, then cut open in a higher part of my intestines and attach a bag. Five months later it was reversed, which has caused some other long term effects.

At this point, I was referred to see an oncologist for radiation treatment and started on hormones. The hormones would reduce my T-Level to 0. Which puts the cancer into a hibernation, sort of. Then they will radiate my prostate bed, which should kill, the remaining cancer. Radiation is simple and not terrible, but takes a toll on the body. This was not chemo, for which I am thankful. Made it a year and a half in remission, then it returned. Luckily modern medicine had advanced enough to be able to scan to find where it had moved to. A year prior, my only option would have been to just go back on hormones. It had moved to my lymph nodes in my upper pelvic region. Once again I am on hormones and have just completed radiation a couple weeks ago.



“CULTURE FORMS THE FOUNDATION”

A FOLLOW UP STORY FROM REBECCA SMITH (GoTeam Q.3 2020)



My name is Rebecca. I have multiple health issues, and lost my husband during a really hard time. I was going through some treatments for high white cell disease, aka a form of leukemia during the COVID era when my husband had a major heart attack and passed. During his heart attack we found out he had colon cancer, which we were not aware of. Over the last 3 years, going on 4 now, I have been cell free and treatment free, so far, and doing well. The grieving was a challenge for a few years. A loss is hard enough, but health issues on top of it, is like grieving for multiple reasons at once.

Today I'm stronger, working a full time job again, and learning to live life in a different way. I've found myself for the first time in my life, and doing things I enjoy doing. I've learned through all of this not to let my health define who I am. My motto has been "Every second counts and be the light!" You have to find that tiny light at the end of every little dark one and push to make that light brighter each day as we are worth it. My cancer team has been nothing short of absolutely amazing. They have been there in my darkest and now I'm my light. The work they do is hard and overwhelming for them, and yet everyday here they are striving to help everyone else. This KickinCancer team is the light for many and I only hope I can help give a little back to people like they have for me. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I appreciate you all.

“DECIDED TO LIVE”

BY KAREN WHEEL (submitted from Sardinia, Italy)

My cancer journey starts in December 2008 at 44 years of age. I was living in Italy, but was back in the US visiting with my Italian fiancé. I woke up in the middle of the night with a sharp pain near the rib cage under my right breast and when feeling around I found a small lump that was sensitive. We went back to Sardinia, Italy to a local gynecologist for a check-up and opinion on the lump. She referred me to get a mammogram and ultrasound to see what the lump looked like. I got into the nearby hospital for the mammogram the next week and after a few of the first images were taken, the doctor asked me if I would mind staying longer and having the ultrasound as he didn't like what he was finding. I was scared. I could see the mass. It looked like a ragged arrowhead triangle shape with no clean edges. The doctor told me to go immediately to an oncologist, and that in his opinion I would need to have surgery. He explained that he saw these images every day and this mass did not look good at all. After looking at my exam results and images, the oncologist immediately scheduled me for a biopsy later that week.

It was carcinoma cancer – stage 1. I had a 1/4 mastectomy and 3 lymph nodes taken to check for cancer. I had clear margins on the tumor, and clear lymph. When the actual tumor results came back about 30 days later my oncologist called me back in. She said, "You MUST do treatment", pointing to the words on the results paperwork HER2+++.

I was like, "No way. I had clear margins. No cancer in the lymph nodes. NO CHEMO!" She went on to explain that I didn't understand. The type of cancer found in the tumor was bad news. Her2+++.

The Her2 itself is bad but the + signs are allocated on the severity of the expression of the Her2. I had 3+++! It is one of the most aggressive types of Breast Cancer and many women do not survive. My oncologist Elena knew I was really against any cancer drugs, and didn't want to do any chemo, but after finding out I had Her2, she was blunt. "You MUST do chemo to get the Herceptin to save your life". I kept finding that women with Her2 diagnosis have low life expectancy. So, I took all the advice of my oncologist and started a

year of treatment including chemo, Herceptin and radiation. Herceptin is not chemo but was invented specifically to fight Her2 breast cancer with very encouraging results. I did 18 treatments of Herceptin over the year of therapy.

One of the most positive points with living in Italy is the medicine, the health care, and it is all free!!!! I have a Permission to live in Italy, and with this I have free healthcare. In total, with all my tests, bone scans, radiation, Chemo, Herceptin, I have spent less than 100 euros. On top of this, because I was not working, the state reimbursed me for my gas to drive to my appointments and therapy in Cagliari - as I live about 50 minutes to an hour from the hospital. I also took a healthy approach to fighting cancer.

4 years later, in 2012, I found out that I had cancer again for the second time. While doing a regularly scheduled exam they found something they didn't like in the right breast that was operated on before. I was like, "Hey, I did radiation. It should have sterilized that zone. AND I did chemo with Herceptin. I'm sure it is just scar tissue." But the doctors pushed back and thought to have more tests. The mammogram showed nothing. The ultrasound showed nothing. But the doctor thought he could feel a lump, so he pushed me to have an MRI and meet with the surgeon who had done the first surgery. I went for an urgent MRI and that immediately showed 2 tumors both over 2 cm on either side of the breast. At this point, I went to Dr. Paolo Veronasi, who agreed with my oncologist in Sardinia that I should have a mastectomy and that they would do the reconstruction in the same surgery. The plan for my surgery was a bit more complicated because I had done radiation. The effects of radiation make it very difficult to rebuild the breast as the skin is so fragile it tends to almost degenerate. They decided since I was healthy and a non-smoker they would do a very complicated surgery of a Diep-flap. Basically cut out a large portion of the front of my abdomen from hip to hip, and use the tissue and the skin to rebuild the breast. Replacing the bottom half of the breast with the skin from the flap, where the skin was damaged from radiation 4 years earlier. I checked into the mega cancer hospital the day before surgery in February, 2013. Surgery was 10.5 hours. The surgery was intense as they had to basically rebuild a DD breast with tissue and then reattach the main blood to the tissue they were transplanting in microscopic surgery on the veins and artery. They then did a slight reduction of the left breast to make it "match" the newly built breast. Finally, they had to stretch all the skin back over the flap they cut out and sew me back up from hip to hip. Then the long road to recovery, 18 more Herceptin treatments over the next year. After the mastectomy, and after getting cancer the second time, I decided to LIVE.

Fast forward to 2023, I am now 10 years cancer free. I think that every cancer survivor will probably say the same thing. That you never really get over the trauma of that "C" word diagnosis. I think we all stress out with every follow-up control exam, and you wonder anytime you get a strange lagging pain. You panic a little inside and think, "Is the cancer back?" I just turned 59, which at the time of my first cancer diagnosis in 2009, at age 44, I would have never dreamed I would see 50. Let alone 59! Sun and saltwater therapy are my now therapy.



(Editor's note: I went graduated from Hermiston High School with Karen. She was a cowgirl from Eastern Oregon, now a sailor in the Mediterranean. I say, "Cancer took a Cowgirl and made a Sailor")