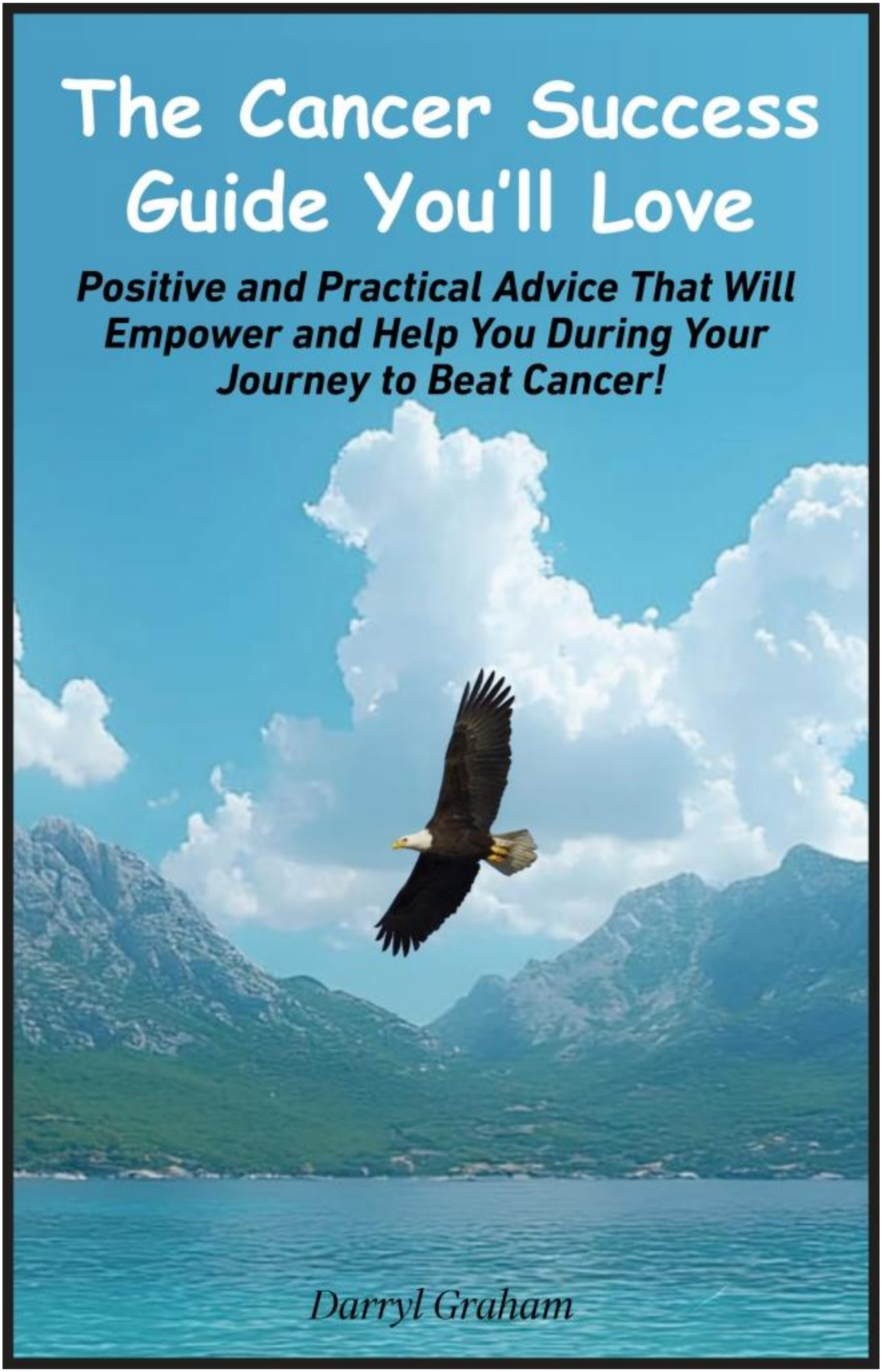
The Cancer Success Guide You'll Love

Positive and Practical Advice That Will Empower and Help You During Your Journey to Beat Cancer!



Darryl Graham

I wrote this book for:

- Those newly diagnosed with cancer.
- Family and friends of people who have cancer.
- Anyone who has had cancer or going through treatments now.
- Anyone dealing with other health issues and is just looking for other perspectives.

The suggestions and info are based on my experiences and will hopefully provide you a resource as you begin or continue your journey.

Stay positive and don't let cancer define who you are or how you live your life. You're going to win, one way or another.

Just take baby steps and keep moving forward. You will have setbacks and there will be difficult times, however you can overcome the setbacks and difficult times with laughter and positive thoughts.

Don't dwell on the cancer or be a "why me" person. Why you got cancer is totally irrelevant and too many people focus on why they got cancer instead of using their energy to fight what they have.

Here's an analogy for you: If you get your car stuck in the mud is it better to spend your time trying to figure out how you got stuck or is it better to use your time to find a way to get your car out of the mud?

Wasting your time with the why you got stuck does no good. Using your time to get unstuck is the only thing that's going to help you.

The same goes for your cancer. If you waste your time and energy trying to figure out why you got cancer, it does you absolutely no good because you have it. Using your time and energy to fight and conquer the cancer is the only way out.

We will be adding to this resource as we receive info from others who want to contribute their experiences to help others so please check back to ensure you have the latest copy. We will provide the latest update version and date at the link below.

This book will always be free to download from our site and we encourage you to share the link below to your social media pages, friends and family.

The link below is the same one you can post online and send to others and also check for the latest update of this book.

https://www.ImSoProudOf.com/survive

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A Little About Me:

My name is Darryl Graham and in May 2022, my life took an incredible change that nobody saw coming.

On May 23, 2022 I went for a physical at the request of my wife. I was 61 felt great was working 12+ hours a day helping people keep their homes up to date but my last physical was in 1978 when I was 17, so yeah I was about due.

I met with the doctor and everything physically was great but part of the physical was having a full blood workup done.

On May 25th, my doctor called and wanted some additional blood tests done as the original tests showed I was Anemic. I was told this was most likely a deficiency in B-12 or Iron.

On May 26th, my doctor called again and said I needed to see an Oncologist. That's definitely one type of doctor I was not expecting to hear so I corrected my doctor and told her an Oncologist was a cancer doctor so she needed to come up with something better.

My doctor who is awesome by the way said based on my labs, I probably had some kind of blood cancer and most likely Multiple Myeloma.

I had never heard of Multiple Myeloma but we talked a little about it and she explained the process based on her knowledge but there was no dread in her voice.

Over the next 2 weeks I got a crash course about Multiple Myeloma and while it was cancer and not a curable cancer, it was also not an instant death sentence as it had been only a few years ago.

My wife (Kathe) and I met with the first Oncologist on June 3rd who ironically had recently been treating Kathe's father for a different type of blood cancer. He had passed away just 2 months before.

She was a general blood cancer Oncologist, not a specialist on any one type and there are a lot of different blood cancers.

She agreed with my primary care doctor that I probably had Multiple Myeloma however in order to confirm this, they would need to do a variety of tests. These tests would include MRI's, Pet Scans, X-Rays, bone scans and more blood tests.

All the tests took from June 2022 to March 2023 and there were a total of 22 different tests and over 30 appointments for various reasons.

Our final meeting with the first Oncologist was on March 3rd because after a lot of research from Kathe, she decided it was better to have an Oncologist who specialized in Multiple Myeloma.

Fortunately we live in Fairfax County, Virginia and we had access to many hospitals and doctors. The doctor Kathe found was based at Georgetown Hospital in Washington DC. Not my preferred destination but Kathe wanted me to change doctors so that's what I did.

We met the new Oncologist on March 23rd and within 20 minutes we both knew she had made the right decision as we learned more about specific treatments and expectations in those 20 minutes then we had over the previous 9 months.

The treatments started fairly quickly and involved injections, infusions, medications and yes more testing.

Over this approximate 5 month timeframe my life became a roller coaster of ups and downs. There were multiple trips and nights spent in the emergency room from drug reactions and many days that I could not even get out of bed and a lot of not so pleasant times.

Everything we did up to this point was leading us to a stem cell transplant and Chemotherapy. All this would be done in Richmond, VA at VCU hospital and was scheduled to begin on September 6, 2023.

In preparation for the stem cell and chemo, there were a lot of tests that needed to be completed so the testing actually started on August 14. Most times we would drive to Richmond get the tests done and then drive back home, however there were some days I needed to stay overnight.

As difficult as things had sometimes been since my initial diagnosis, it could not hold a candle to what I would experience over the next 3 months.

I've always been a very positive and upbeat person but I'll freely admit there were days after Chemo and being stuck in the hospital on the 10th floor that pushed my ability to find the good to the limit.

The one constant I had in my life was my amazing wife and the support of my family and a few friends I had told about the cancer. But the difference maker was Kathe as she was with me every step of the way and without her my journey would have been 100 times more difficult.

To make a long story short, I survived everything life threw at me and now it's been over 2 years since the Chemo and I'm still in remission and living a pretty normal life.

My particular cancer cannot be cured but it can be treated but is considered a terminal cancer. Some people live 2 months and others have lived and are still living 20+ years.

I'm good with whatever happens as I've had a beyond amazing life. I always tell people that if I had to script the perfect life, it would be the one I've lived.

From my wife Kathe and son David to my family of origin (mom, dad, brother and sisters), friends and relatives, the pets I've had and all the things I've done, what I've seen and places I've gone. I simply could not ask for a better life.

The topics are not in any set order but you'll deal with everything at some point during your journey.

The Waiting is the Hardest Part

In my case it took almost 9 months to get a definite diagnosis. It was pretty evident after a couple of weeks that I had Multiple Myeloma however the tests they needed to do took many months.

I live in Northern Virginia, only 7 miles from Washington DC and there are multiple hospitals and medical facilities within 30 minutes of our home.

Even with all these facilities, it still takes time to see specialists and get certain tests done. For example, getting an MRI is a 4 to 6 week wait time and I had to get 8 of these done.

The only reason things did not take longer for me is because I scheduled 4 of them on the same day. Yeah that was a fun day!

Testing and medical procedures take time so be prepared for this. You might get one test done but you need to wait for the results before you can schedule the next test and that could take weeks or months.

One thing I found is some doctors have more pull than others so ask if they can help you get an appointment. This does not always work and don't get upset if they can't help as you're not the only one trying to get an appointment but it never hurts to ask. Just be very polite when you ask and don't make demands.

During the in between times, try and stay busy and always remember to focus on life, not the cancer.

This is going to be a little tedious, but you can do it.

Advocate for Yourself

This might sound strange but this is **YOUR** cancer, so **OWN** it.

There are tens of millions of people dealing with their own cancer and every single one of them wants the same thing: To be cured of their cancer or at least to go into remission.

What I mean here is that you need to take charge and get things done. You need to know your rights and stand up for yourself.

DO NOT be mean or nasty or act like you're more important than someone else as that will get you nowhere, but understand that nothing is going to happen until your make it happen.

My father always told me, "If it is to be, it is up to me."

You need to let people know what you expect and find out what they expect and come to an agreement that everyone is happy with. This includes doctors, nurses, support staff, friends and family.

You know your body and you know how you feel. If something does not feel right, let a medical professional know and don't just take what they say as the end all, be all.

One of the drugs I was put on was called Revlimid and one of the side effects was shortness of breath. They started me on a mildly high dose and my body was not happy about this at all.

I ended up in the emergency room and told everyone about the cancer and the Revlimid and side effects and all agreed I needed a couple of days to get better.

Except one young doctor who said I was having a heart attack despite all the initial heart tests coming back fine.

Yes, he was a doctor and I was not but I knew my body and I knew the drugs I was taking could cause heart attack symptoms and I also knew that most people even in the medical industry had never heard of Revlimid.

I argued with him for over 5 minutes until he finally got mad and left so another doctor could be put in charge. The new doctor reviewed all the data and did some research on Revlimid and even took the time to talk with my Oncologist at Georgetown and agreed that I was not having a heart attack and it was just the side effect of Revlimid.

What I found out later was the first doctor actually put in my chart that I was having a heart attack and it took me months to get that lie out of my records.

The point is if I had just rolled over and took his theory as correct is they would have done a bunch of unnecessary testing on me that would have shown I was not having a heart attack.

It’s YOUR cancer and YOUR body so OWN IT!

Keep a List of All Tests, Medicines and Meetings

You don’t need to write a lot but just a short overview on tests and results and what was discussed in meetings and who attended. Also make sure you write the date as well.

This will become invaluable to you as things progress as it gives you details you can look back on to refresh your memory.

You can do this in your calendar or some online app, hand-write it in a notebook or on your computer but make sure you keep it up to date and write something every day.

You might also want to write how you feel each day and what you did, what you ate, how much sleep you got etc.

This will help you throughout your journey and allow you to better control any issues that arise in the future.

The reason I can write all that I’m writing now after over two years is because I kept notes of everything that went on.

There have been days when I was sick for no reason and when I looked back over my notes where I had similar symptoms I could almost always find another day I had the same symptoms and what I did to get over it.

Plus as you’ll see at the end of this book, you might want to contribute something of your own to help others because this book is going to be an ever growing resource to help people deal with cancer.

Download and Use all Medical Apps

Technology is great when used properly and every hospital, doctor’s office and testing service has their own app.

That’s the good news. They don’t all use the same app and that’s the not so good news and they don’t share information between each other like they could and that’s the even worse not so good news.

This is another reason to keep a medical journal.

In my case I currently have 5 different apps that I use but a total of 9 I could use and none of them work in conjunction with the other. I can send details from one app to another but the details are limited and only done if I jump through hoops to authorize it.

This means none of my local doctors have access to anything that happened at VCU for the chemo and stem cell and all the tests performed.

My current Oncologist cannot access anything from my primary care doctor and vice versa.

Hopefully one day this will be fixed as it would make treatments faster and keep everyone on the same page.

However you'll still want to download and use all apps because you can use them to make appointments, send messages to doctors, request refill prescriptions and check test results and notes from your doctors and much more.

You'll find some apps are better than others but they are all excellent resources for you and worst case scenario you can share details from one app with a doctor when you're with them in person.

Get a Second or Even Third Opinion

Doctors are humans and can make mistakes or may not know all there is about your particular situation.

They are also extremely smart people and while this is usually a good thing, it can lead to some having big egos and not wanting to admit when they are wrong or that it might be time to see a specialist.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with getting a second or third opinion. I've done it multiple times and never had a doctor take offense to it. At least not to my face! They may be flipping me the bird as I walk out of their office but that's cool because my approach is if I don't see it, it never happened.

You don't even need to tell the doctor you're getting another opinion. It's your body and your cancer so you do what you feel is best.

When Kathe had me leave the first Oncologist and switch to a new one, it was mainly because she had a bad feeling about the first one. A woman's intuition is very powerful and I did not argue with her at all.

As it turned out, she was 100% right in having me get a second opinion and switch to a different Oncologist and this is probably one of the main reasons I'm doing so well today.

It's Okay to Question Your Doctor

Just as getting a second opinion is acceptable so too is questioning your doctor if something does not sound right.

Now I need to preface this statement by saying it is **NOT** okay to confront your doctor in a harsh way just to make a point.

What I mean is if the doctor says something you don't fully understand or feel comfortable with, by all means ask them to explain in terms you can understand.

You don't need to be aggressive in your pursuit of knowledge. Respect their time but respect your desire to know what's going on.

Don't be rushed because you're paying for their time and sacrificing your time for free. Don't hog their time at the expense of another patient having to wait for the doctor, but get the answers you need to feel comfortable about where things are going.

Be Polite to Doctors, Nurses, PA's and Support Staff

You might feel horrible when you go for an appointment or you might be a little down or just having a bad day. But don't take things out on the people trying to help you.

I have seen far too many people treat others horribly and there is just no reason for it. The people you see in the medical field did not give you cancer and are there to help and support you, so please treat them with respect and courtesy.

Remember they are dealing with hundreds of people every week who are sick so they already have a difficult job. We as patients do not need to make their jobs more difficult than they already are.

In my experience dealing with hundreds of doctors, nurses, admin and support staff, for the most part they have all been amazing—especially the nurses and PA's.

Yes you'll find the occasional person you might want to choke but my position is to kill them with kindness and 95% of the time they come around and become human again.

Plus if you're polite and kind to them and you need a special favor at some time, they will go out of their way to help you even more than they already do.

I only had one doctor that I saw on a regular basis that I could not get along with. I'm not counting the ER doctor as I only saw him once.

There was one doctor at VCU when I was going through Chemo that had a serious ego and no matter what I asked him, his response was the same, "It's the Chemo."

A typical conversation was like this: Doctor how come I get sick when I even see food? It's the Chemo. Doctor how come my hands are shaking? It's the Chemo. Doctor how come the sky is blue? It's the Chemo. Now the last one is a stretch but no matter what I asked, I got the same response.

Things finally came to a head when he told me if I did not do exactly what he said, he was not going to release me to go home.

That child scare tactic did not go over well with me so I told him I was either going out the front door on my scheduled leave day or out the window (I was on the 10th floor) but once I met the metrics they had set for me, I was out.

I'm surprised they did not put me on suicide watch and I could have handled it better but the nurses PA's and all other doctors there were amazing. He just had a big ego and after 3 weeks of doing everything right, I was not going to let someone talk down to me or treat me like a child.

So give everyone the benefit of the doubt, be polite and courteous and if you can't kill someone with kindness, then stand your ground---just be willing to accept the possible consequences if necessary.

You Are Not Alone

No matter what situation you find yourself in, you are not alone. There are many groups you can join to discuss your cancer, fears and feelings.

You'll also have the support of your friends and family---as long as you don't expect them to feel what you feel.

One thing you don't want to do is unload on your friends and family all the time about how sick you are and how you feel.

Nobody, not even other people dealing with cancer knows how you feel or what you're going through so don't look for constant sympathy.

Whenever anyone asked how I was feeling, I always told them I was good. If they asked specific questions, I might go into more detail but I never wanted sympathy from anyone because everyone has their own problems to deal with.

I was in my 60's and had an amazing life; my heart breaks for children who have cancer and have to deal with this disease!

So remember there are always people you can talk with to help you deal with your cancer, just don't look for sympathy all the time.

Stay Off Social Media

Only a handful of my friends knew I had cancer and that's the way I wanted it. Well, I guess that will change now once this book gets out, but I never saw the point of people who have cancer blasting it out to the world. Everyone has their own issues they are dealing with and I see no reason to add to them. Plus as I've said, I was never looking for or wanted sympathy of any kind.

I rarely go on Social Media but it always amazed me how people would unload about their troubles, cancer, etc.

The people who deserve sympathy are children with cancer. Talk about unfair and cruel situations.

Another reason to stay off Social Media is the misinformation spewed by too many people.

The more stuff you post, the more stuff you'll get from all the crackpots who see your post and will start sending you cures or false remedies you should try.

You do what you want but my suggestion is to keep your cancer private, don't look for sympathy and stay focused on living your best life.

Research but Don't Become a Google Doctor

I've always told my son that 90% of what you read online is a lie and the other 10% you can't believe.

Okay that's a bit of a stretch but it highlights the fact you need to be very careful what you read or find online about your cancer.

Anyone can put anything they want online without having anyone fact check them and even if they are fact checked, they just double down on their lies.

With this said, you'll definitely want to do your research about your particular cancer but don't believe everything you read.

The way I approached the research is when I found something and fact checked it as much as possible, I would discuss it with my Oncologist and get her opinion. She was always happy to answer my questions and set the record straight on what I found.

Remember no matter what you find online, positive or negative, you can find 10 other people who will tell you the exact opposite of what others say.

And one last piece of information, don't use the info you find online to tell your doctor how to treat you. Ask their opinion and then you can make a decision on whether or not what you found is correct or plain lies.

Doctors have spent years in school and there is no amount of AI or social lies that can replace their knowledge.

So research, but fact check everything and don’t try and tell your doctor how to treat you because someone sent you some magic drink or potion that will cure you.

You Are Not the Only Patient Your Doctor Has

Just as I wrote in overview 7 about respecting your doctor, you also need to respect their time and yes they should respect your time as well.

I’m not saying you should not ask questions or get the answers you need but you need to realize they are dealing with dozens to hundreds of patients going through what you are or something similar.

All the apps have ways to message your doctor, but don’t abuse these services and by respecting their time, they will in turn respect yours.

Now if your doctor is constantly late to appointments and let’s face it, many are, there is absolutely nothing wrong with discussing this with them but do it professionally and don’t get aggressive in your approach.

I had one doctor who was notoriously late and this was the main complaint in his reviews. The first time I saw him, he was late but only about 20 minutes which I can deal with.

The second time he was over 2 hours late for the appointment. There was no apology from anyone in the office including the doctor and it just seemed this was their normal approach to appointments.

He was a good doctor and a specialist but when he was preparing to tell me when to come back, I politely but firmly informed him that I would not be coming back.

I’m sure he knew why but when he asked me why I would not come back, I simply told him that keeping me or anyone waiting over 2 hours was not acceptable.

When I met the referring doctor again some weeks later, I told her I would not go back to the specialist she referred, she was very apologetic and said she wished there were other doctors locally she could refer me to who specialized in what he did.

I worked with my main doctor to come up with a work around and we found a way to get me the help I needed from a doctor a little further away but who respects their patient’s time.

The bottom line is this is a two way street. Respect your doctor’s time, but they also need to respect yours.

Don’t Worry About the How---Focus on the Win

There are hundreds of millions of people around the world dealing with cancer and this headline is to put your cancer in perspective.

Cancer has been around for a long time. The earliest evidence of cancer comes from human relatives who lived around 1.4 million years ago. Heck, for all we know the Dinosaurs had cancer tens of millions of years ago.

In my particular cancer, nobody can say for sure how I got it or why and I never focused on that. And by the way, you’ll get the question, “How did you get cancer?” asked a lot.

My response was to answer their question with a question, “Does it matter?” I did not say this in a mean way or to be nasty, but to me it never mattered how I got cancer and I never questioned why.

I have it and you or someone you know has it so don’t focus on the why or how and just focus on living your best life with this thing that’s living with you.

And speaking of this thing living with you…One thing I do find ironic is that cancer is pretty stupid. Yes, it’s going to kill me but in the process it’s going to also kill itself.

So while I’m going to lose the battle, I’m going to win the war and take it with me when I go. Remember that if your cancer is terminal, you’re going to win in the end.

We’re all going to die some day and some way, so when you hear people saying they are not going down without a fight, they are going to fight and in my opinion, they are going to **WIN!**

Too often people will say a person lost their battle with cancer after they died and as I said above, that is true but they are going to win the war. We need to change the perspective to say, they won the war against their cancer which is also true and we all like to win and I personally like to make everything as positive as possible.

Don’t Constantly Feel Sorry for Yourself

I’ve always been extremely upbeat and positive and always look for the good in any situation. One of my doctors once told me that in his over 30 years of practice; I had the best attitude of any patient he had ever seen.

Now, I’m not going to lie and say I never felt sorry for myself as you can’t help but have those feelings every once in a while, but what I never did or will ever do is mope around feeling sorry for myself for hours, days, weeks or months at a time.

I’ve probably had the feel sorry for myself feelings for about 15 minutes total and I’m serious about that and let me explain.

I’ve always followed the principle that there is always someone worse off than whatever I’m going through.

In the case of cancer as I’ve said earlier the true hero’s of fighting cancer are children. I was 62 when I was diagnosed and I’ve had a beyond amazing life.

Children living with cancer have not had the opportunity to really live and that’s beyond sad to me.

If I ever found myself getting down, I simply thought of some child fighting cancer and it immediately brought me back to reality.

There is no way I could feel sorry for myself knowing a child somewhere was fighting cancer, going through Chemo, losing their hair and facing their mortality long before they could ever comprehend what that is.

Plus and this is huge and only my opinion but if you’re positive, happy and upbeat, your body will respond in a positive way.

If you’re down all the time, looking for sympathy and feeling sorry for yourself, your body will respond negatively.

The above are only my opinion and I don’t have any facts or statistics to back this up but it makes sense and while I can’t prove it to be the absolute truth, I can guarantee nobody can prove it to be absolutely false.

You’ll Have Good Days and Not So Good Days

Please take note of how I worded this title. Most people say they have good days and bad days but that has always sounded negative to me.

Again this is only my opinion but a not so good day just sounds better than a bad day. Remember the saying, “A rainy day at the beach is better than a sunny day at work”. Turn everything you can into a positive.

Now about the good and not so good days. Depending on the type of cancer you have and the treatment, your body is going to respond in different ways.

My first 6 to 9 months of treatment included a lot of not so good days, but I knew the not so good days would end and the good days would take over.

You have to accept the not so good days and go crazy on the good days. Roll with the not so good days as they will pass.

I also called these times peaks and valleys. When you're at the peak, life is pretty normal and good and you can take on the world.

When you're in the valley, it's not very happy but you'll be able to start climbing toward the peak and it's **NEVER** out of sight.

Also don't take the frustration of your not so good days out on people around you, friends, family, doctors, nurses etc.

If you need to shut yourself off from everyone, go into your bedroom or other room, close the door and keep from mentally hurting those you care about.

Just stay as positive as possible, watch funny movies, avoid the news like the plague as it's always bad and negative and focus on getting back to the top.

My dad always told me when I was growing up to keep a smile on my face, so let me offer those wise words to you. ***KEEP A SMILE ON YOUR FACE!***

Chemo is Not Going to be Fun---But, it's Going to be Okay

You've probably heard horror stories about chemo and the side effects, such as vomiting, losing your hair (See the chapter called, Cut Your Own Hair Before Chemo) and any one of dozens of other things.

Don't believe everything you hear! There are over 100 different types of chemo medicines and what is used on you depends on many factors.

I forgot the name of the chemo they used on me but let me tell you a funny story before we go further.

The day I received Chemo, I was feeling really good and mine was scheduled for the afternoon.

At the appointed time, 5 nurses and a PA (Physician Assistant) came into my room and they were covered head to toe in hazmat gear. They had gloves, boots, eye cover, full body cover, the works.

I remember laying there and could not help but start laughing with them about how they were so protected yet they were going to inject this stuff into my body.

It really was ironic that they had to take such precautions for themselves but I'm laying there in a tee shirt and shorts and the chemo is going directly into me.

At any rate for as nasty as my chemo was, I had very few side effects other than feeling weaker than a kitten and I could not look at food without getting nauseous.

They have a regimen of medicines they give you daily to help with nausea and to keep you from getting sick.

I still got sick but I did not live in the toilet as some people might want you to believe.

Now with this said, everyone handles chemo differently and you might not have any bad side effects or you could have more than others.

The main thing you want to do is stay positive and trust your medical professionals with what they are doing.

Everyone responds to chemo differently just as everyone responds to medications differently.

One of the drugs they started me on initially that put me in the hospital was called Revlimid and I was only on a 15mg dose. My father in-law who had a different type of blood cancer than I did took 20mg for several years and never had any issues.

So the bottom line about chemo is don't fear it and don't let others make you fear it. There are a lot of people who are anti chemo for reasons that are not medically based.

Me, I love the stuff because it saved my life and it's helped hundreds of millions of people around the world and will continue doing so.

Get Your Affairs in Order

I'm not saying this to be morbid or negative but you need to plan for everything and in the event you die, you want to make things as simple and seamless as possible for those left behind.

My father in-law who was a very smart man left a complete mess of his estate when he died of blood cancer in 2022. The ironic thing is he knew he was going to die 6 months prior to his death.

He had a will but he also had stocks, bonds and bank accounts that nobody knew about. In addition, he did not leave any passwords for his computer, laptops, iPads, phone, email or even his safe.

It took my wife over a year to get everything sorted and fortunately Kathe was an expert in probate but if she was not, it would have cost tens of thousands of dollars for a probate attorney to get everything done.

It would have taken my father in-law just a few hours to provide the details needed to probate his estate and like I said, he had a solid 6 months of decent health prior to his death.

He was just one of those people that did not talk about death and he did not realize the mess he was leaving behind.

Make sure your will is up to date, signed and notarized and kept in a safe place. You may also want to have a Power of Attorney in place as well as a living will and Advanced Directive.

In today’s world passwords and usernames to every account you have for anything are ultra important. Make a document with all these and provide it to whoever will be in charge of your estate or pay an estate attorney to store it for you.

Also if you put this in a word or similar document when you save it, do **NOT** name it passwords. Call it vacation places, dog bills or any other name that has no reference to passwords.

Just because you do all these things does not mean you’re going to die. It simply means you’re looking out for your family and planning for all scenarios.

My wife has worked in probate for over 40 years and is amazed at how many people leave a mess, don’t have a will etc. For some reason people still think if they make a will, they will die.

There is a saying in Scuba Diving that goes, “Plan your dive and dive your plan.” Here’s a new one for us. Plan your death, but keep living your life.

Make all your final plans and keep them updated and make sure the proper people know exactly what you want and where your plans are.

Get a Business Card from Everyone You See

Make sure you get a business card from every doctor, PA, nurse, medical facility you see or go to. Keep these in a folder with notes on who each person is.

I learned this the hard way because I probably saw 15+ people the first month alone after I started my testing.

I started getting cards after the first month and now 2 years later, I have over 115 cards from different people or places I’ve been treated by or at.

Yes all places have apps but having the cards allows my wife or son to contact a specific place if I am not available.

Plus business cards include not only phone numbers but fax numbers (yes these are still used) and addresses. Unfortunately the apps make you jump through hoops to find a phone or fax number.

Have an Overnight Bag Packed

Hopefully you won't need this but it can come in handy and did so multiple times for me. All I put in mine for clothing was a shirt, socks, underwear and a pair of sweat pants.

I also had deodorant, shampoo and razor. All these things you can get the travel size and just leave them packed in the bag.

There was a couple times I had to go to the emergency room and the 2 to 3 minutes I saved having a bag packed made a big difference. Plus, the times I went to the emergency room, I was feeling real bad and did not feel like packing anything.

You can also include a book, extra charger for your phone, deck of cards or anything you might need in the event you need to stay overnight at the hospital.

Focus on Life, Not the Cancer

This is going to take some practice and willpower but you can do it.

When you're first diagnosed with cancer, it can be overwhelming and consume a lot of your time.

As I said earlier, it took almost 9 months to get a confirmed diagnosis and during that time my wife and I had a lot of conversations about cancer.

We never focused on it but because there were multiple tests being done every week we had to discuss things and that kept cancer part of our daily lives.

However after my confirmed diagnosis and when we had a plan setup for the stem cell and chemo, we rarely mentioned cancer and went on with life like there was no cancer.

When I say it will take practice, it's because unfortunately once you have cancer, you have it for life---even if you're cured, it's always part of who you are but don't let cancer win and consume your mind and waking hours.

When the word cancer pops into your mind, just pop it right back out again. This is also why I suggest staying off social media because when you post about your cancer online, it's there forever. Even if you delete the post, it can be found and anytime you see it, it will put cancer right back in your mind.

Life wants to win so let it and keep cancer out of your thoughts as much s possible.

Decide How You Want to Go Out

This topic might be sensitive to some people so if you're not comfortable talking about death and end of life measures such as Death with Dignity, then please don't read this section.

Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. If you're against this, then don't read it. I wrote this because I personally feel it's important and I'm 100% behind people having an option out other than suffering and dealing with the indignities of a failing body.

I personally like to be in control. When I'm in a car, I want to drive. When I'm in an airplane, I'd prefer to be in the cockpit flying—even though I have not piloted a plane since I was 19.

So naturally I want to be in charge of my body and situations I face.

I believe it's wrong that people are not legally allowed to end their suffering on their terms every place in the US. Switzerland has it right, everyone else has it wrong!

We're an animal friendly family and at any given time we have multiple dogs, cats, fish and birds. The unfortunate reality is dogs and cats don't live as long as people and they get cancer and other diseases just like we do.

The difference between people and animals is we're allowed to give our pet's peace and keep them from suffering. I've been with many dogs and cats as they were put down and knowing we kept them from suffering brings a lot of peace to us as well as them.

Unfortunately because we have these draconian and antiquated rules about people they are often forced to suffer unimaginable pain and humiliation and die a slow and miserable death.

As of this writing, there are only 12 states and DC that have Death with Dignity but the rules are so draconian that most people can't qualify or die a horrible death going through the process.

Switzerland on the other hand makes Death with Dignity a fairly simple process where you don't have to jump through hoops to end your suffering.

Kathe and I have a plan for when and if my cancer becomes too much to deal with because I refuse to become a burden on anyone and I refuse to put off something that is inevitable just so I can live in a hospital or nursing home and be kept alive by machines.

Our plan is simple: We're going to Switzerland (Yes I'm getting a one way ticket) I get to avoid suffering, unnecessary pain and degradation and being a burden on my family and Kathe and my son get a nice vacation to Switzerland. It's a win for everyone!

You need to decide how you want to go out and make it crystal clear to your family, friends and medical staff.

Some people want to be kept alive by any means necessary for as long as possible and that's fine if that's what they want.

Other people like myself, want to go out on our terms without creating an unnecessary burden on our loved ones or society because when you only exist in this world that is no longer living your best life.

So give some thought to how you want to go out and as I said, make it crystal clear to everyone involved in your life and care.

There is no wrong way. There is only your way and whatever you choose is the right way for you.

Cut Your Own Hair Before Chemo

This is actually becoming very popular and there are some good reasons to do this. Putting a video of you doing this on social media is not a good reason as it just screams you're looking for sympathy.

The good reasons are as follows: It puts you in control as the chemo is not going to take your hair, you are.

In my situation, I had to stay in the hospital for over 3 weeks after chemo and if I had not cut my hair prior to starting it, I would have been very miserable having my hair fall out in the hospital bed and room and being forced to sleep on that itchy stuff.

My wife Kathe cut my hair the night before my chemo and we made it into a little party as we had a nice meal and then drank Margaritas until 2 in the morning.

Probably not the smartest move to drink the night before chemo but there are lots of things that can go wrong with chemo so even with the very small chance of something going wrong, we wanted my potential last night to be fun and memorable.

Obviously since I'm writing this, nothing went wrong and those Margaritas were probably some of the best ones I ever had.

Everything you can do to fight and control your cancer, do it and have fun doing it!

Don't Use the Cancer Card---Unless You Have To

The cancer card is not an actual card you get to hand out to people that says, I have Cancer…

It’s just a fictitious card you use to get things or explain things that happen because of your cancer.

Most people will not know you had or have cancer and they may want you to do something you’re not up to either physically or mentally. Even if you tell them no, they might keep on trying to get you to do this thing you know you can’t.

This is a perfect time to use the cancer card and simply tell them, you have or had cancer and because of it, you can’t do what they are asking.

You may need to wear a mask for a while after treatment and some bozo might harass you about this. Even though it’s none of their business, you’ll want to loudly and forcefully tell them you have cancer and a weakened immune system and while you would love to not wear a mask, you love living more.

Unfortunately you’re going to run into idiots with brains the size of grape seeds that might say or do something to try and make you feel bad.

The proper approach is to ignore them but I always preferred to make them feel as small as they actually are.

You can handle these situations if they arise however you want as I’m only giving my opinion, but I’ve always hated bullies and people who are just plain mean.

Now with all this said, you don’t want to use the cancer card too often and you never want to make your friends feel bad if they can’t help you when you need something.

I personally only used the cancer card one time when some people got upset when I was taking too long to do something and they made a nasty comment. I wanted to and meant to make them feel bad—which they did.

Write a Daily Journal

You don’t need to be a professional writer or write pages every day but just jot down some notes or a few sentences each day.

Here are some topics to help you get started.

- How you feel physically and mentally
- Any victories of the day. Walked a mile, or around the block, did not get sick or only got sick once.
- Doctors you saw and outcomes as we discussed earlier.
- Friends and or family you saw or talked to.
- What you ate.
- Your thoughts on any subject you desire.
- Anything you found new and or useful.

- Places you went.
- Time you got up or went to bed.
- Something that made you smile.

The topics are virtually limitless but over time you will enjoy being able to look back on your progress and bring back memories.

Stay on Top of Things such as Medicines, Appointments etc.

Unfortunately especially in the beginning of your treatment you are going to see a lot of doctors and potentially be on a lot of different meds.

The apps are a great resource but they can only help you if you stay on top of everything. During my initial phase of treatment, I was taking 12 different pills a day, which I hated with a passion because I just don’t like taking pills.

I’ve had 8 different surgeries in my life and never took a pain pill or even an aspirin after the surgery. It’s not that I did not feel a little pain, but it was never bad enough to take a drug for and I also felt it was good to feel a little pain so I would not do something stupid and mess up the surgery.

With the drugs I had to take, I made it my responsibility to monitor the doses and get permission to stop taking drugs that I either didn’t like how they made me feel or I did not think they were necessary.

Please note that I said I got permission to stop and this is very important. I never played doctor or told my doctor I was stopping. I did my research and then discussed the pros and cons of the medicine with her and then we came up with a plan of action we could both live with.

Most times they would agree with me but the times they did not, their recommendation was the direction I took. I might not have agreed with it but they were the experts and I stayed with the program and it always turned out to be the correct course of action.

Another thing I discovered is that I needed to be responsible for ensuring the drugs I needed were prescribed and shipped to me on time. As I said in an earlier chapter, I was not the only patient they had, so I made it my responsibility to essentially be there support staff for my medicine.

The only drug I’m currently taking is called Revlimid. This is the so-called miracle drug for Multiple Myeloma patients but it must be taken 21 days on and 7 days off each month.

Because this is a very controlled drug and has a lot of potential side effects, I need to get blood work done every month. My doctor has to review the results and then call in the prescription to an outside pharmacy.

Once the pharmacy receives the prescription, it can take 3 to 7 days for them to release the Revlimid and ship to me and this is only have after a 20 minute phone call they must make with me each month to go over the rules of taking this stuff.

The coordination of all this had to be pretty much exact and if anything was not done the day it was supposed to be done, everything fell apart and I would not get the Revlimid on time.

After several months where my prescription was late by almost a week, I sent a note to my doctor and we worked up a system where I would send them a reminder to contact the pharmacy and get my prescription filled. I also started getting my blood work done about 10 days in advance to ensure they had everything necessary to fulfill their legal requirements.

They were happy with this and I did not mind as it was only me I was dealing with and I approached them in a very open and honest manner. I never got mad at them and never made any accusations against them. We worked together and everyone won.

Appointments are another thing you'll want to stay on top of because if you need to see a specialist, they can fill up several months in advance.

Usually you are seeing a specialist so your main doctor can make a decision on what to do next so if you miss the specialist appointment or fail to make it in a timely manner, it delays your treatment from your main doctor and you definitely don't want that.

So bottom line, take it upon yourself to be in control of all aspects of your treatment and help your doctor help you by helping them whenever you can.

Get Used to Being Pricked, Poked, Prodded and Injected

I've heard people say cancer is not for wimps—not my words but they work. People with cancer are some of the strongest people you'll ever meet. Not physically necessarily but definitely mentally.

They sometimes deal with more pain and adversity in a day than most people have to deal with in a year.

You're going to be pricked, poked, prodded and injected more than you ever thought possible, but honestly I almost never felt pain from any of these procedures as the nurses are so amazing at what they do.

So don’t fear or dread this aspect of treatment. Face those needles head on and show no fear. My arms looked like I was a drug user after a few weeks of starting things, but just like everything in our amazing bodies, those marks healed.

Before I started the chemo process at VCU, they surgically implanted a port into my chest because 5 or more times a day, they were taking blood or injecting something into me through the port and while this helped alleviate the constant pricks and jabs, I hated having that thing hanging off my body, mainly because it was a constant reminder that I had cancer.

You may need a port at some point and although I hated it, I know it made things much easier for everyone involved.

As I said before, the nurses are really good at giving shots and sticking you with needles.

There were many times I never felt a thing but whether I felt it or not, I always told them they did a great job and I did not feel a thing and thanked them for being so good at their jobs.

That always brought a smile to their face because everyone wants to be complemented on doing a job well and let’s face it; nurses have a very difficult and unfortunately often thankless job.

The doctors get all the credit and glory but in my experience, it was the nurses and PA’s (Physician Assistants) who are the real heroes.

So while you can’t avoid the pricks, pokes, prods and injections, you can and should attack those with a smile on your face and no fear.

It’s just part of the routine and accepting it will make everything easier.

Cancer is Expensive

If you’re already dealing with cancer, you know how expensive everything is. If you have not started your treatment, you’re about to find out and hopefully you have good insurance.

If you’re reading this and don’t have cancer, make sure you get insurance because statistically about 40% of people in the US will get cancer and worldwide, it’s about 25%. The insurance sales slogan is it’s better to have it and not need it, then need it and not have it is so true.

Our insurance paid over $600,000 to VCU alone and that was for about 2 months of treatment. Our out of pocket was $0 because fortunately we had very good insurance from Kathe’s work.

I don't sell insurance and I'm not advocating for any company, I just know how important it is and how it can save your life.

Ask for Help but Don't Become a Burden

There is absolutely nothing wrong with asking for help from friends and family and I'm not talking financially, I'm referring to getting the care you need, getting to and from appointments etc.

Actually you'll find everyone more than willing to help you in any way they can but just don't wear out your welcome.

There were times I could barely get out of bed but I might have needed a drink or something to eat. I knew my family was there and would be glad to help me, but I still wanted to be as independent as possible so I did everything I could on my own.

I've known people who want to be waited on constantly and have everyone feel sorry for them and that is so wrong in so many ways—in my opinion.

Just because I have cancer and had times when I felt miserable did not mean I needed to make others feel bad as well.

Plus and this is ultra important when you do ask for help, do not make demands. Always ask politely and always thank everyone for all they do no matter how small the request was.

I've seen people in various places who make demands but never say "thank you" and that too in my opinion is just wrong. **Please** and **thank you** are the words you need to learn to use for all aspects of your life and it will make a huge positive difference with the people who are helping you.

Try to keep your life as normal as possible and when you need help by all means ask for it but just don't take advantage of anyone.

After my chemo, my immune system was about zero and because of this Kathe and I had to stay near VCU for about 3 weeks until it built itself up a little.

Due to my lack of immunity I was not even allowed to peel a banana because of the chance of getting a serious infection. I hated having Kathe do all these little things for me, but she was so amazing and did everything without ever complaining in any way.

There may be times during your treatment and recovery where it's essential someone helps you and as I said, earlier there is absolutely nothing wrong with asking for help but please remember to say **"Please and Thank You"** to everyone, every time they help you.

A Lot of People Will Offer Cures

I'll admit right now this unwanted advice really got on my nerves and although I knew they were only trying to help, most of the stuff they told me, they had read online from someone posting their opinion or something they had heard from someone else who had no medical background or knowledge at all.

I'm writing about this so you can be prepared for the inevitable.

What I finally decided to do was just to listen without saying anything, thank them for their advice and then forget the conversation ever happened within about 5 seconds---sometimes faster if what they told me was beyond believable, which most times it was.

Unless someone has the exact cancer that you have and they were personally cured, then just ignore them.

This falls under the 90/10 rule where 90% of what they tell you is wrong and the other 10% you can't believe.

You and your doctor or doctors are the only ones you need to take advice from.

You'll also run into people who have opinions on things like chemo and there are many people who are against it. Not because they have any direct knowledge of it but because they read something or heard someone say it was bad.

You make up your own mind on things like chemo or other ways to treat your cancer. Nobody can force you to do anything you don't want to and while chemo is not fun, I would not be here without it and there are millions of other people in the world that chemo has helped.

The New Norm

You're going to say this to yourself and your family and friends will say it as well. When going through treatment or hopefully after you've been cured, there will be new norms.

The new norm simply means your life, what you're able to do, what you can eat and how your body responds to different situations is going to be different from your life pre-cancer.

This is not necessarily a bad thing and rather than fighting yourself over what you can't do or have to do differently, try and embrace the fact you're alive and roll with things.

I am in **NO** way suggesting you give up, but there will be changes.

In my case there are some days I get tired really easily and there is no rhyme or reason for this. Instead of getting mad at what I can't do, I make the best of what I can do.

Cancer is not an immediate end of the road for you. There will be changes and adjustments but if you keep a smile on your face and stay positive, you'll find the road a little smoother and your opportunity for success to be brighter.

Do You Have Something to Add?

I wrote this book based on my experiences to help others with their cancer journey.

As this is an e-book and can easily be edited and added to at any time, I invite you to share any suggestions you have to help others.

Please follow the instructions below.

This is a free book so we cannot pay or endorse you or any business entity.

Stories should be between 100 and 300 words long.

Because this book is available worldwide, please do not mention anything about religion or politics.

We will include your name as the author and your city and state can also be included if you desire but we cannot include any websites or social media handles.

Please do not mention actual names of doctors or nurses, family or friends.

Please do not write anything hateful, racist or derogatory.

This book is to provide positive help to others. Humor is great but no offensive words please.

Submissions are not guaranteed to be included and if we do not include your story, it will **NOT** be used for any other purpose.

We reserve the right to edit for grammar and punctuation. We will not edit content or make other changes without your permission.

All stories must be written in English only.

Email your stories to Darryl Graham at darrylgrahamkp@gmail.com. Please use the subject line, Purple Story. This is how I know it's not spam!

Please do not add my email to any list or send me any offers for anything.

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