

CANCER: An Alternative Treatment Viewpoint

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This story is for people who, like myself, waited until a diagnosis of cancer spurred them into a serious investigation of a life-threatening condition. I have hopes that it will reach others before they have a need for it.

I have been 'healing' myself of Squamous Cell Carcinoma of the throat since my surgery in March of '94. I refused the follow-up standard treatment (radiation), much to the dismay of the doctors who said I would not live without it. My surgery was no more complicated than a tonsillectomy, I even lost my left tonsil in the process.

I found the tumor myself one day when I looked into my throat to see why I had been bleeding from the mouth every day for the previous five months. What I saw looked like a tonsil that had gone out of control with infection. It was a lump about as big as the end of my little finger with what looked like white pus all over it.

The bleeding started as a gusher one Saturday morning while I was drinking a coke. I went to a doctor that day and he found no obvious cause for the bleeding and made no mention of anything like an infected tonsil. I was referred to an ENT (Ear-Nose-Throat) the following week and he also found no evidence for the bleeding. Since the bleeding went from a gusher to a trickle on the first day, I did not feel I was in any immediate danger. On the ENT's advice I just kept monitoring it to see if it would go away or get worse. From September of '93 to February of '94 the bleeding diminished to a trace that showed up only in the mornings and late evenings in the mucous that collected in my throat from a persistent post-nasal drip.

My visit to another ENT in February resulted in a biopsy that confirmed the lump as malignant Squamous Cell Carcinoma. Immediate surgery and follow-up radiation was the only prescribed treatment. It took four weeks of sec-

ond opinions and adjusting to this new reality before I submitted to surgery. During this 'holding' period I made a lot of phone calls and talked to a lot of people about alternative therapies.

Although I was fairly convinced that I could beat this cancer using alternative therapies only, I decided that to get rid of that massive lump would be like taking an aspirin and giving me a jump start with whatever alternative therapy I chose. In this regard, medicine is no better than magic - it doesn't cure the real problem, but it does give one some temporary peace of mind during which time the real problem can be uncovered. I'll talk more about that later. In the meantime, I started drinking Pau d'Arco tea which, in South America at least, is accepted as a viable cancer treatment. When the lump was excised, the surgeon and the pathology report stated that it was in an advance stage of necrosis. In other words, it was almost already dead and gone.

An oncologist told me that this was not unusual and that he considered this to be just a stage which was sure to be followed by a ten-fold recovery of growth; if not there, somewhere else. The doctor emphasized that this particular cancer was not likely to just 'go away.' They gave me less than a year for a recurrence if I did not accept radiation. A check-up in January of '95 showed no sign of a recurrence. Physically, I am in better shape than I was before the diagnosis. Mentally, I am much happier than I have ever been.

I am not making any recommendations because I believe each patient has to make his/her own choices based on their own research. For the record, I have been getting good results with the following practices:

- Water
- Herbs and herb teas
- Vitamins/minerals
- Vegetarian diet

Exercise
 Hypnotherapy
 Personal counseling
 Regular medical check-ups

Lots of water. Please do not think this is an overkill. I carry a water bottle around. Anything you do to make your body heal will need lots of water to flush out the junk. I drink up to three 32 ounce bottles a day and I do not think it is enough. I did not think I could do it, but having a large bottle with me all the time and sipping from it made all the difference. I drink water when I think I am hungry and would ordinarily go for a snack. The 'snack attack' goes away and I feel really great instead of hyper. I do not drink with meals. I sip small amounts of water if I have especially dry foods, but I let the liquid in the meals be all I need. I chew slowly. I cannot emphasize this enough. I force myself not to swallow - I let it disappear on its own. It can take 15 to 45 minutes to eat a plate of food, depending on the consistency of the items. When I chew thoroughly, I find I do not need as much food. About half an hour after a meal I drink all the water I want, without bloating myself, of course.

I am now on a maintenance program with my herb teas. This consists of Aloe Vera juice (whole leaf, cold processed), Essiac tea (also known as Caisse's Tea), Pau d'Arco tea, and Echinacea. In maintenance mode, I take my herbs once or twice a week instead of every day. Some weeks I do not take any. The idea is not to make the body think everything has to come from the outside. I found a chiropractor who also specializes in nutrition and herbs who has been guiding me through this. I also see an Ayurveda physician.

The Essiac tea is available as either powder (you brew, I do not recommend this process - it is too involved) or concentrate (mix with water - I mix with the Aloe Vera instead.) If you take Essiac tea, this stuff can

throw off your whole day's schedule because it has to be taken on an empty stomach.

The Pau d'Arco tea is available from any herb store and some health food stores. I brew it and drink what I need. I was taking up to four cups a day in 'medication' mode. I take one or two cups a week in maintenance mode. I substitute now and then with a tincture form.

The Echinacea I get in two forms. One is a tablet and contains other herbs. I take two a day (one in morning, one at night.) The other is a tincture that I prepare as a tea. The tea is quite strong and it takes a real commitment to ugly tasting stuff to get it all down.

Vitamins and Minerals: Do not leave home without them. Actually, if I eat well I should not need any supplements, right? Since I have never gotten used to eating right then I take supplements, especially those that I am fairly sure will help out in my condition. So I take lots of cruciferous vegetables (concentrated in capsules) and beta-carotene. Then comes the multi-vitamins and other stuff that I think will enhance my chances, like zinc, extra vitamin E, garlic oil, Pancreatin, and, as directed by my Ayurveda physician, additional herbs for balancing my body. None of this is taken without the full knowledge and consent of both my nutritionist and Ayurveda physician. I do not play doctor on my own.

My vegetarian diet consists mostly of brown rice as the base. Lots of vegetables. If you have not ever read anything about food combination I highly recommend getting a book on it to know what, how and when to eat. My diet of brown rice is a mixture of several rice varieties with wild rice added for texture. To keep the flavor from being totally boring, I add sauce to it, usually a Pesto sauce or tomato sauce (no salt/sugar added.) I add a vegetable protein (Seitan, a meat substitute) now and then for more variety. I perk up the rice with lots of added extras - anything that tastes good and does not throw off the food combination

measures, like artichoke hearts, olives, Heart of Palm, curry, etc. I make up my own gourmet dishes. And of course I eat some fruit every day. I lost twenty un-needed pounds in the first two months on this diet, and another five disappeared in the months following. I have stabilized at what I consider to be my perfect weight. Possibly another benefit of this new diet is that the 'usual' body aches and pains I had in the region of my liver have disappeared, but this I attribute mostly to the large amounts of water I have been drinking.

I avoid foods that have any form of carcinogenic ingredient (nutrasweet and most hot dogs; a six-pack of warm diet coke and two hot dogs a day were my basic staple for the two years leading up to the cancer diagnosis.) I avoid foods that are harmful to my immune system (caffeine, sugar.) I mention caffeine because it counters most vitamins the body needs. Taking vitamins and drinking tea or coffee (or eating chocolates) is like throwing away my money; I would have to take a much higher dose of vitamins than I would ordinarily need. Megadoses of vitamins may also damage my body in other ways. My opinion on this is if you must live, be sensible about it.

Some people think they cannot get along without something sweet to eat. I was one of them. Probably still am. So I reconciled myself to eat just a small portion of something sweet once a week. After a while I did not really care anymore. I still pass through the pastry section of the store just to smell the stuff, and that is enough. I have learned to bake my own cookies and muffins so I can make sure the food I eat is healthy and fat and sugar free. I am not a diabetic, so that is not the reason. I think that the American fat and sugar diet is a large factor of poor health. The mind (one's attitude) is the main cause of poor health. I believe that if you think you have to eat poorly because it tastes so good, your body will eventually behave poorly.

Lately I have started eating more raw foods, like munching on carrots and broccoli. When I cook vegetables I try my best to keep them crunchy, including squashes. There is a revival going on about how enzymes in food get destroyed when you cook them, so I am interested in letting more 'live' enzymes get into my system because I understand they aid in digestion.

I avoid alcohol like it was poison - because it is. When I looked carefully at the ingredients on mouthwash I discovered they all contain alcohol. I stopped using mouthwash because of my particular cancer and where it was. I gave up drinking fourteen years ago for other reasons. I also gave up smoking about the same time. Because of this long period of abstinence of the two main known causes of throat cancer, it makes the doctors wonder how I got throat cancer. Maybe we can add another cause: carcinogenic foods.

I stay away from people who smoke. I literally gave up family and friends who smoke because they wanted me to accept them on their terms, not mine. Those people I know who do smoke only see me at my house or talk to me over the phone. I work in a smoke-free environment as well. I gave up smoking because of asthma, but having cancer is another good reason to stay away from it.

I have learned to exercise twice daily at home. I do three sets of push-ups, deep knee bends (squats), toe extensions, body twists, leg lifts, and dips, and occasionally work out with light dumbbells. The regime takes up to one hour and it means getting up early and going without TV at night. The benefit is that I am now 55 years old and I have the strength and physique that I had at 28 when I was into body building.

I knew at the outset that my cancer was caused by my attitude about life. The story is a complicated one and I hope it will be available soon in a book that I am now writing. Through

hypnotherapy and personal counselling I have managed to turn my life around. I am never giving up on either forms of therapy. I see a hypnotherapist every three to six months. Each session takes about three or four hours. I do not believe in one-hour sessions - you cannot get anything done in one hour. I stay in there until I get a 'whammy.' It takes me up to three months to settle in with the new information and attitude before I feel that I am living normally again (that is, having no special emotional emphasis on the new information.) I see my personal counsellor at least once a week. This particular form of therapy concentrates on language as a tool for discovering and correcting body and mind conditions. As passive as this might seem, it has proven to be an extremely fruitful tool.

I found that I cannot do life on my own. My recommendation to anyone is to find a guide. Find several guides. I started by going to a support group. I attended a ten week support group at the Cancer Support and Education Center in Menlo Park right after my operation. Best money I ever spent. My mother was my support person who went with me. My step-dad died of cancer seven years ago, so it seemed appropriate to ask her to go with me. We have a better relationship now because we fought the same battle together. She now has a better understanding of herself as well.

My personal counsellor is a friend to whom I gave permission to be my conscience about how I speak. He is a self-made expert in linguistics and knows how to alter body conditions by altering the way you speak. It is truly amazing. That he frequently used the foulest words I had heard since my Navy days made me think at times that maybe he was not such a good teacher after all. Because of the results I gained from his counselling, I no longer think that the person who can help me has to be perfect in every way. Sometimes their example is what not to do. I sometimes need that reminder. Since I am really no angel either,

sometimes my counsellor and I have a good round of slaughtering the English language together. By giving up my 'preferences' on what is right and wrong I seem to be much more relaxed when things 'appear' to go 'wrong.' Recently I have noticed that my confident and teacher has almost totally given up foul language. The difference is like seeing a transformation from a rough and ready old-time sailor to a modern gentleman. Had I given up on him when I had my first negative thoughts about him I would never have gotten to know him as he is today, and probably never have achieved the level of success in my healing as it is now.

Speaking of healing, I see my healing as being on several levels, physical, mental, and emotional. The physical healing is that the cancer appears to be gone and my body has returned to its peak condition as it was over twenty years ago. The mental healing is that my general outlook on everything has turned around such that I am not nearly as judgemental and impatient as I used to be. The emotional healing is that I am no longer on a roller coaster ride through life.

Being who I am today means taking responsibility for my life. Just as a car needs scheduled maintenance, so does my body. I still see my ENT doctor every three months to just to keep my medical record up to date about the progress I am making. I also keep in close touch with my nutritionist/chiropractor, the Ayurveda physician, the hypnotist, my personal counsellor, and my mother who serves as a good barometer for how well I am handling upsets.

I believe that if you are reaching out, you are going in the right direction. I think the one main characteristic of a person who gets cancer is one who, at one point, has decided that it is okay to just drop out of the big picture. I also believe the main characteristic of a cancer survivor is one who has an ornery streak and refuses to die when faced with that

option head-on. That is why I did not commit suicide years ago and I believe that is why I am alive today with no sign of cancer. If it has been as long as five years since your diagnosis then I do not think you can get that far without some of that same onerousness. But, beware! It does not take much to get that "I don't care" attitude, especially when you think you are out of danger and you think you can handle being a radical, or, you just do not care.

There is nothing more critical about the five years after diagnosis than there is about the five years before diagnosis, and every year in our lives for that matter. I have learned to watch what I think, watch what I do, watch how I feel. Words and deeds that are constructive and complete are conducive to contentment and joy. Anything I would do that does not have a sense of completion will seem to nag me until I turn it around. Anything I do that has a destructive tone seems to deteriorate me physically as slowly and surely as water dripping on a rock. An angry thought causes a chemical surge through the body that creates a fight or flight situation. Although seen as a good thing, this chemical surge also inhibits normal cell growth. Showing lots of anger, as I have most of my life, can be just as debilitating to the body as eating the wrong foods.

Being alive is not easy when I have to think about what I am doing every day to stay alive. It is not always fun, either. I have learned to make what I do what I want to do. I learned to give up what does not work when I really know it does not work, not because I am convinced it is better that way. The difference is that one is a decision and the other is a choice. It was not easy to learn which is which and to go with the one that feels right. I am deliberately avoiding saying which one is preferred over the other (choices vs. decisions,) because this is something that we each have to learn on our own. There are enough clues here to work it out.

The bottom line is that as long as I am alive I have a choice: do I want to continue to live or does it not even matter if I die? If I live, do I want to really experience what I am doing or do I need to be dragged through it?

How I make choices and what decisions I live by determines the quality of my life. A higher quality of life may extend the duration of life, but it is not a guarantee of a long life. Some people might think that if someone lives a good life and then dies young that it was a waste of a good life. I think they missed the point, don't you?

Follow-up: April 30, 2007

I have been cancer free since the operation in 1994. Unfortunately, I can't say I have avoided all the hazards of living. In 2002, I had a triple bypass surgery. That episode was most likely brought on by a lot of stress at work (deadlines) combined with not eating well and getting very little exercised. In other words, I let my job take precedence over my life - something I no longer allow.

I think I'm back on track now. My eating habits aren't perfect, but no one can say I don't eat healthy. I continue to avoid junk food and alcohol. I also avoid any food items that contain corn syrup or hydrogenated oils. (Reading package labels is a habit.) The fewer ingredients, the better. Pasta, potatoes, and white rice are very rare items on my plate. I'm also down to two meals a day. Breakfast comes anytime between 9:30 A.M. and 1 P.M. Dinner is between 5 P.M. and 8 P.M. We rarely eat out as we have discovered that one meal at a restaurant results in at least one extra pound the next morning and it takes up to three days to get back to "normal". It's got to be the sugar and salt. My weakness is sweets, but I've learned to keep that under control.

My exercise habits can be irregular at times, but no week goes by without at least 2 hours of some kind of cardiac workout and weight training. When the weather is nice, this

goes up as high as 8 hours. Weight training at home consists of push-ups and working with a set of springs and dumbbells. Cardiac workout is a very fast-paced two mile walk around the neighborhood, and we have somewhat hilly streets.

My weight is managed as close to 160 pounds as possible, and for a 5'8" frame, that's very good. My muscle tone is excellent for my age. I still feel like I have a 30 year old body.

But healthy diets and adequate exercise are only part of the story. Being conscious of my mental state of mind is very important, if not the key to good health and happiness. I wish I could add something here that would make a difference to the rest of the world, but I have learned that just putting it out does create changes in other people. They have to want it, and they have to ask for it. Everything I have said already contains all the "secrets" and "magic bullets" that anyone could hope for. Aside from that, there are many books and Internet resources that can whet one's appetite for more.

<http://www.blochcancer.org> (for many, many useful tips and links - be sure to visit the Info for Patients link and read "Fighting Cancer")

Mind, Body & Soul: A Guide to Living With Cancer, by Dahm, Nancy Hassett, ISBN 0970290403

Mind, Body and Spirit: a complete guide to holistic therapies for maintaining optimum health and wellbeing, by Alexander, Jane, ISBN 1842222481

Healing and the Mind, a video with Bill D. Moyers; New York, NY: David Grubin Productions: Distributed by Ambrose Video, c1993.

Excuse Me, Your Life Is Waiting: the astonishing power of feelings, by Lynn Grabhorn. (<http://www.lynngrabhorn.com/excuseme.htm>)