



Ted Stansbury
Thymoma (Small cell lung cancer)

In June of 2002, after a routine physical, I received notification that a mass had been discovered in my left lung. These results were confirmed after re-examining the X-ray and undergoing a CT scan. I was referred to a pulmonary doctor for further evaluation. During this appointment, I was told the mass was certainly something to be concerned with, but nothing could be determined without a biopsy.

I agreed the biopsy was necessary, but asked for the doctor's "best guess" as to what the mass might be. The doctor declined to speculate until I asked the fourth time. He proceeded to tell me, 'It's only a guess, but in my opinion, it appears you have stage 4 small cell lung cancer, it's attached to your aorta, and is inoperable.' He added, 'My best guess is you have three to six months to live.'

A few minutes later, my wife and I left his office. I stopped her in the hallway and asked who the doctor was talking about with three months to live. I asked, "It isn't me, is it?" Because she couldn't speak, she took my hands, looked up at me, and with tears in her eyes, just shook her head yes. The news that I actually had cancer threw me into denial almost as soon as I heard it.

Over the next few days, I found I could do nothing to replace the certainty that I was going to die. The idea that the doctor had simply hypothesized completely left my mind. I couldn't eat or sleep. Talking with friends or family didn't eliminate the fear. I was certain my life was going to end and nothing could be done.

Within two weeks of the mass being discovered, I found myself at the IU Simon Cancer Center. The oncologist who first met with me gave me a list of several things the tumor might be. His best guess was that it was a thymoma. Thymoma is a rare tumor of the thymus gland, which is a small organ that lies under the breastbone and is part of the immune system.

He arranged for the biopsy to be performed the next day. After three unsuccessful attempts to identify what was growing in my chest, an operation was scheduled. Ten days later, after the operation was completed, I was told I had a stage 2 thymoma. The thymoma was removed and all outer margins were clear of any cancer cells.

It's now been seven years, and I'm still cancer free!

During the pre-operation days, I found that my life was changing in a dramatic fashion. Things that had been important to me before now held little meaning. Other things I had taken for granted, now became the most important in my life. That continues to be true today.

Finding you have cancer is certainly frightening. It brings us to face the idea that we are mortal. Cancer forces us to make decisions we hope we'll never have to make. A cancer diagnosis changes your life, for better or worse, forever.

Fortunately, for me, I've been blessed by my experience. I believe I'm a better person for it. I know I can now face whatever struggles I may encounter. The most positive effect is I'm now committed to helping find a cure for this most dreaded disease. What's most therapeutic for me is sharing my story with groups of people who are also dedicated to finding a cure. Each time I relate my experience, I heal a little more.

I believe there are many people who help cancer survivors get through the most difficult times of their lives. For me, my wife was a source of strength every day. She was the one who told me to keep fighting, not to lose hope, and that we would beat this terrible disease together. She was truly an inspiration. Another person who encouraged me so often was my oncologist, Pat Loehrer, M.D. His support during the post-op period was, without question, inspiring. He is also the person who asked me to share my story with others and to become involved in the fight to find a cure. He changed my life in such a positive way - I can never repay him.

As we all are aware, everyone is touched by cancer. It is such a far reaching disease that we cannot find a single person whose life has not been impacted. My advice to all is to get involved. We need each and every person dedicated to finding a cure.

For all who may find themselves being treated for cancer, my best advice is Jim Volvano's statement, "Don't give up; don't ever give up."