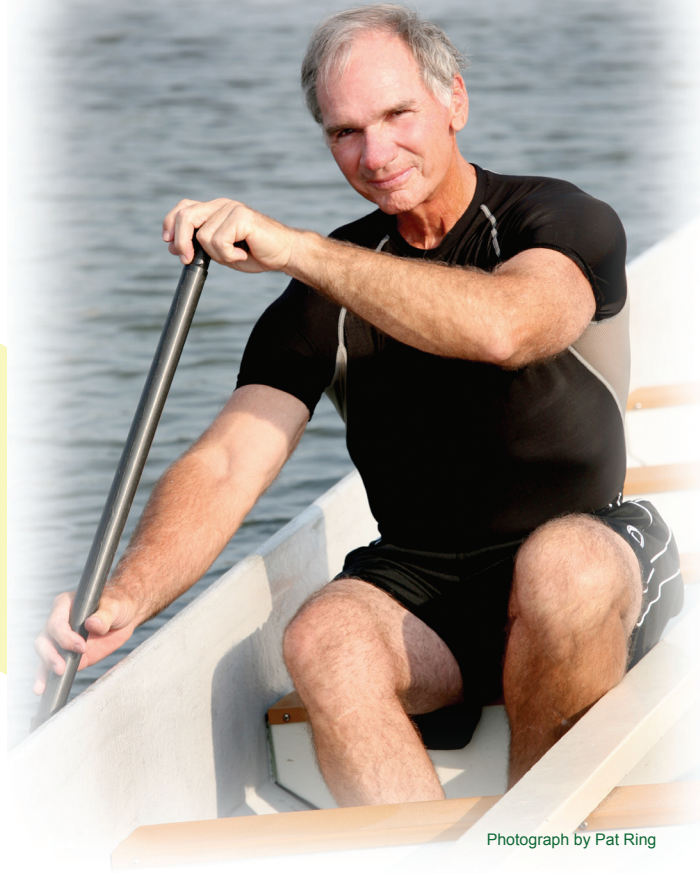


Faces of Hope



Photograph by Pat Ring

How does one tell the story of a personal struggle to combat the diagnosis of cancer?

How do you tell your buddies you won't be there for the first day of hunting season... or maybe any other day? How do you convey the terror of surgery to cut out part of your neck and tongue? How do you let your family take care of you when you expected to take care of them? How do you find the inner strength when physical strength has always been taken for granted? How indeed!

First: Listen carefully with eyes wide open....My doctors always had my best interest at heart, but I needed to learn all I could about my disease, my options and my outcomes. Being competitive, I made up my mind to be in the survivor's category. My family and I took an ACTIVE role in facing our new dilemma... finding good food, planning treatments so I could continue working, speaking with survivors who had been through similar treatments, always asking questions.

Second: Take it one day at the time. It helped to learn to separate adverse effects of the cancer treatment from the effects of the cancer itself. Knowing that side effects could be managed and would go away in time helped get me through the treatment. Plan something to look forward to after your treatment. By November, thirty five pounds leaner and with a new hunting outfit...I went to Canada for a trophy hunt.

Third: Be vigilant. The doctors don't tell you to come back to see them for their own health. After two years of good follow up reports, I took a once-a-lifetime trip to Africa. While sitting quietly in an archery blind waiting for a Kudu or Water Buffalo to come to drink, I could hear in the silence the blood gushing through the artery on the right side of my neck with each heart beat. Thinking that it was only the virtual silence that surrounded me I paid no attention. Upon return home I looked carefully at my neck just below my right ear and noticed a knot. It felt hard and when I pressed it, I could hear the blood gushing louder. After the swelling increased, I returned to see Dr. Terry Day at MUSC.

Only people who have heard "Your Cancer is back" can describe what goes through your mind. X-rays, CAT scans, PET scans, MRIs, the waiting rooms ... I was PARALYZED WITH FEAR. The following words flooded my brain, "Is there any hope for me?", "Will they operate and say we cannot help you?". This time I lost a major muscle in my neck and a portion of my tongue. More radiation and chemotherapy was recommended, this time twice a day radiation with chemo for "lunch"... Who could stand that? When my radiation doctor told me that a woman half my size and twice my age was going through a similar regimen, my competitive spirit kicked back in. Thank goodness for tough grandmas as role models.

Today, six years from my first visit to MUSC, is a great day for me and is every day I spend with my wife and 3 daughters. Yes, I do suffer from lasting side effects from my treatments. But I'm here and winning the war against Cancer with my family and friends. Joining other Dragon Boat Charleston Cancer survivors has enriched my life. These athletes take surviving to the next level. Dragon Boaters offer no sympathy, but lots of empathy and laughter. These elements along with power of family and friends are very therapeutic.

A special thanks to them for helping me realize the hope and caring for others is part of leading a fulfilling life.

BOB

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