Featured Survivor Model

Bill Ramey

Survivor outfit designed and donated by Steiner Woodruffe
Live Life Love Life

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Hello, my name is Bill Ramey. I grew up in a very small town in central Indiana and graduated from Indian Creek High School in Trafalgar. Upon graduation, I followed in my father and grandfather's footsteps and began my career as a tile mechanic installing ceramic tile and marble. My favorite jobs involved intricate patterns and layouts.

In October of 1982, I met my future wife Susan and proposed to her 34 days later. We were married the following year and will be celebrating our 34th anniversary later this year. Having both grown up in loving households, we couldn't wait to start a family of our own. But life, as it often has a way of doing, had other plans. Finally, after eleven years of ups and downs, dashed hopes and dreams and one infertility treatment after another, we were blessed with the birth of our daughter, Hannah. On the day she was born we promised one another to never take this gift from God for granted and pledged to be involved with, and support her, every day of our lives never thinking that in 19 years I might not be able to keep that promise.

On Friday, February 8, 2013, I had an annual checkup with my cardiologist. He said everything looked and sounded good. Unbeknownst to me, though, he thought I looked quite pale and order "stat" results on my blood work. Before I even got home, he had left a message on the answering machine to immediately stop my blood thinners and daily aspirin regiment and to be in his office first thing on Monday morning. My blood test results showed a hemoglobin level of 7, down from 14 the previous year. On Monday morning, I was hit with extreme dizziness and uncontrollable diarrhea. Unable to walk, Susan called 911 and I was transported to the hospital via ambulance. Diagnosis: C. diff. That, however, was not the worst of my worries. Next began a battery of tests to determine the cause of my extremely low hemoglobin level. After a battery of tests came up inconclusive, including an upper and lower GI, I was scheduled for a colonoscopy on February 14. Happy Valentine's Day to me! Before I was even awake from the anesthesia, the doctor informed Susan that they had found a large mass in the ascending colon near the cecum and in all likelihood, it was probably cancerous. Four days later, I underwent surgery to have the tumor removed, along with a number of surrounding lymph nodes. The tumor tested positive for cancer and several of the lymph nodes as well. A PET after the surgery also showed tumors throughout the liver, rendering a liver resection as a non-viable treatment option. Next step: chemotherapy.

My initial treatment plan: six rounds of FOLFOX with Avastin and then another PET scan to determine the effectiveness of the chemo. It was at the end of these first six treatments that I began my search for a new oncologist. My "hospital prescribed" oncologist had no bedside manner whatsoever and talked over our heads. The next
oncologist we met with asked me "What do you see as your prognosis?" I told him after the next 6 rounds of chemo, you are going to say I am cancer free. Boy did he ever rain on my parade, stating that with the number of mets to my liver that surgery was not an option and that I was basically inoperable, incurable and that given those circumstances, most people have a life expectancy of just two to two and a half years. It was at this point, I reached the lowest of lows during my cancer journey. I began feeling sorry for myself and lost all desire to do anything. After all, I had cancer and wasn't expected to live much longer. One day, I cried out in pain and frustration and said "God I can't do this, it is in your hands. Show me what to do". That's when I began searching the internet for online cancer groups and communities. It was through these pages, communicating with others who were undergoing similar circumstances, that I began to realize the power of my own story and how I could help others facing a similar diagnosis. Now co-administrator on four Facebook pages (Stage IV Colon Cancer, Repurposed Drugs for Cancer, The Faces of Cancer and My Parent Has Cancer), I have found the true purpose and calling in my life -- to be open and forthcoming with my story in an attempt to give others hope in their lives when all they see is despair. I have made friends throughout the world who have shared so much of their lives with me and I am truly the one who is blessed.

It is through my involvement with these communities and organizations that I met Suzanne Lindley and was introduced to her organization, "Say Yes to Hope". Having numerous liver mets myself, I see so much value in the information and message she is sharing with others. And as a long-term Stage IV colon cancer survivor, she provides me with the inspiration I need to continue on my journey. By participating in "Surviving in Fashion 2017", I hope to demonstrate to others that "statistics" are just that and with a positive attitude and purpose in life, anything is possible.

Now, the results of that 2013 PET scan: Tumors were still visible but shrinking and inactive. I opted to forego my remaining six sessions of FOLFOX and instead started maintenance chemo of Xeloda and Avastin. After three months, the CAT scan showed no visible sign of cancer. To this day, almost four years later, I am still on maintenance chemo and remain NED.

In closing, and most important of all, I did live to see that precious gift from God graduate from Saint Joseph's College in May of last year. And, on July 17, 2016, I had the honor and privilege of walking that beautiful girl down the aisle. Next major life milestone: grandchildren. No one is giving me a 2 - 2 1/2 year sentence. Say "Yes to Hope".