

Gunter Lauterbach

My Journey began in 2003 when my family doctor sent me to see a urologist, because he was concerned about the way my PSA had been going up. The urologist promptly ordered a biopsy and three weeks later gave me the bad news; that two of the samples contained cancer cells.

He referred me to Dr. Loblaw at the Odette Cancer Centre, who examined me and ordered more tests. The resulting numbers were: PSA 7.1, Gleason 6, and the cancer was a stage T2A.

Upon consulting the tables, Dr. Loblaw told me that I had a better than 80% likelihood of cure with radiation treatments and late in 2003 I received 38 external beam radiation treatments. At my first follow up visit in the spring of 2004 my PSA was still 3.4 and I was told that sometimes it takes up to a year for the PSA to come down.

At my next visit in the fall of 2004 my PSA was down to 2.4 and at the next test in the spring of 2005 it was down to 2.0. But this was as low as it got and by the fall of 2005 my PSA started to go up again and by March of 2006 my PSA was back up to 4.0 and by June 2005 it was up to 5.3.

At that time all indications pointed to the fact that radiation had not produced the expected results and a new biopsy confirmed that my cancer was still quite active.

I underwent more tests: a bone scan, a pelvic scan and X-rays to determine whether the cancer had spread past the prostate and fortunately it had not.

My treatment options at that time were limited to hormone therapy or to consult Dr. Robert Nam who had done surgery after failed radiation on a selective basis and this seemed to be my best option.

I first had to see one of Dr. Nam's assistants who gave me a physical exam to determine whether I was a good candidate and warned me as to how difficult and messy it would be to perform surgery after radiation and all the likely side effects that could result.

Dr. Nam kindly agreed to perform a radical prostatectomy with the provision that after the incision he would first examine the pelvic lymph nodes for cancer cells, which all prior tests could not have shown and that he would not complete the surgery if my cancer had spread to the lymph nodes.

Dr. Nam also told me that it was next to impossible to spare nerve bundles since radiated tissue is mostly unrecognisable and that I would have a catheter for six weeks after the operation.

So in September 2006 I had the surgery and when I saw Dr. Nam after I woke up in recovery I asked him first whether he completed the prostatectomy and he said, "Yes, it went well", and then I asked, "Could you save any nerves", and he shook his head, smiled and said, "But don't worry, we will fix that too". I recovered really quick and was discharged two days later. For the next six weeks I was counting the days and when the catheter finally came out I thought my ordeal was over; how wrong I was!

Three weeks later I wound up at the ER at Sunnybrook with my first urinary blockage which was diagnosed to be the result of an infection and the catheter went back in for a week. When three weeks later in December I wound up in the ER with my second blockage, Dr. Nam diagnosed the problem to be scar tissue growing where the urethra is attached to the bladder neck and performed the first procedure to remove scar tissue using a laser during a Cystoscopy.

This is done with only local freezing and is certainly not my favourite experience. Bladder neck contracture from scar tissue has become a recurring problem for me, since radiated tissue is difficult to heal.

In February of 2007 while vacationing in Florida I started to close up again, so we jumped in to the car and drove home post haste and I had a Cystoscopy the very next day; the laser procedure a week later, and underwent Day Surgery the same month to correct the problem.

In October 2007 I closed up again and had the third Cystoscopy laser procedure to remove scar tissue. For the past 16 month I have also been practicing Self Dilation whereby I insert a catheter every day for about one hour to stretch out the contracture. This sounds grim but after 16 month it is no worse than shaving and brushing my teeth every day. The only problem is that this is counterproductive to overcoming incontinence which is also still is a problem.

I have learned to adjust and live with my ongoing side effects and while they are a nuisance, they don't really affect my life style too much and I am sure to overcome them soon.

The happy ending to my story is that since my hero Dr. Nam performed the surgery, my PSA has been below 1 and my cancer is hopefully gone for good.

I AM A SURVIVOR !!!