

## **Bill J.: A Chapter in My Life**

My life is like many others, happy doing the things in life I want to do. I have a great family, a wonderful wife, good friends, great health, and enjoying regular exercise resulting in better than average fitness. Also experiencing a healthy life style while being conscious of eating "healthy foods" has allowed me to keep my weight at an excellent level.

I have always been conscious of my cardiovascular fitness given my Dad suffered from high blood pressure and experienced a stroke. Thus my exercise regime was conducted with this in mind.

I had regular medical checkups including PSA from around 50 years of age. My GP once said "if all my patients were as fit & healthy as you, I would be on the golf course by midday each day."

Then in the short space of 2 years from my previous check up, it all changed.

October, 2006 following routine check up, my GP called me in for a discussion; my PSA was 8, he didn't believe the result and suggested a 2nd PSA test. It returned a 7.9. I was 2 months short of my 65th birthday.

I was off to the specialist for the "finger test" resulting in an abnormality being found, then into hospital for a biopsy. The pathology results indicated a T2 and Gleason score of 8.

My wife & I went back to the specialist to hear him say the dreaded words "you have prostate cancer." When asked how he would describe the severity, his words were "aggressive." He recommend taking action sooner rather than later.

My initial response was "This is bull shit!" I was thinking at the time, "I'm healthy, have no symptoms of any ill health of ANY kind! My heart rate is great and blood pressure excellent, etc. Debbie and I hadn't even been married for a year, this can't be happening to us!" To say I was angry is an understatement! If you would have faced me to a brick wall, I would have punched the thing to smithereens!

Then I quickly thought, "Hang on; we are with a specialist and we need to get as much information about this as possible so we can learn what we should do."

The doctor's manner was good; he gave us plenty of literature and information for The Cancer Council Australia, Nepean Prostate Cancer Support Group and at our request for a referral for a 2nd opinion.

Further tests were done over the next few days while we moved quickly to learn as much as possible about the disease and various treatments. I contacted the Cancer Council as well as the Nepean Prostate Support group and spent countless hours on the internet.

The support from all manner of people was overwhelming. My best mate of 50 years is a member of a bible study group that meet every Tuesday evening. The group had said special prayers for Debbie and me during their meetings. Debbie's mother put us on the prayer line through her church. I thought this was just unbelievable that all these people from around the world who I didn't know would go to this much trouble.

Our boys were great; we had plenty of contact and support to see how we were coping.

We have a daughter-in-law who is a leukaemia survivor of 5+ years. Her input & support along with her personal experience was a huge help.

The decision was made to go ahead with the surgery (radical prostatectomy) and following the operation in December, I decided to embark on an additional approach by taking nutritional medicine. I have always been of the opinion that the body must have good fuel if the motor is to function well. Besides, this was the first time in my life where I had to trust the experts and was desperate to have some control & input to regain my health.

The operation went well with the usual problems of incontinence; however, with a gradual return to exercise and regular pelvic floor exercises, I just about had the situation under control by 3 months.

The first PSA at 3 months following the operation revealed that I still had some issues as I had a PSA reading of 0.21. Next step recommended was for radiation therapy. I wanted to be sure this was the correct approach and once again gained a second opinion. It appeared that it was the best approach for me.

Seven weeks later it was all done. I found the treatment a breeze and was able to ride my bike to and from the hospital each day. My major concern when I started radiation was that the treatment may cause some permanent damage to the bowel as well as the bladder. Each day when I climbed on to the machine bed for treatment, I would always remark to the technicians "Make sure you aim correctly! I don't want the bowel stuffed up." While there were no major issues with bowel, the continence levels declined back to what it was like 3 weeks out from the original operation.

Now 5 weeks since radiation, I have just about have bowel returned to normal and with regular exercise plus pelvic floor exercises, I have no problems during the day with my bladder. However, I still lack the confidence to go without a pad at night even though the problems are minor.

Within the next 2 weeks I will go back to the Oncologist for my review & PSA test and my start to quarterly blood tests and reviews.

I guess to sum up my emotional feelings throughout the experience I would say that in the first instance there was disbelief, shock; I felt cheated. I was too healthy to have this happen to me. Then I quickly kicked into research mode but didn't like what I'd found.

For approximately the first 3-4 months, I was still feeling overwhelmed but determined to do all I could to beat this monster. Now some 9 months down the track, I have pretty much returned to normal life with just the odd issue of bladder capacity depending upon whether I am doing something active or in a passive mode.

I have been really fortunate to have had such tremendous support from my wife; she has been a tower of strength. The fact that we were comfortable talking about anything that was on our minds, I believe, has helped us both deal with the various ups & downs that come with an issue as serious as this.

The rest of our family have been very supportive and in hindsight, our decision to tell them all that was going on was the correct approach. We have 5 boys and are sure they will embark on regular checks at the appropriate time.

The support from Cancer Council Australia and the Nepean Prostate Support Group has been brilliant. When you first hear the dreaded words "you have cancer" it was great to be able to talk with men and their wives (the silent carers). To be able to

discuss treatments available, hospitals, doctors etc. was priceless. I can't imagine what it's like for couples who don't have an opportunity to talk to somebody who is "in the know".

The one thing that continues to be stated by many people is "cancer doesn't discriminate" but we can as sure as hell not let it beat us.