



# Cancer *for* Two

## Selected Excerpts

“Nothing has been exaggerated, embellished, or fabricated; as you will see, there was no need.”



“. . . it is absolutely essential that the caregiver take some time for him/herself. As the flight attendant says in the pre-flight instructions, ‘Put on your own oxygen mask before helping others with theirs.’”



“Then it was my turn. Yes, I was going to cut off my hair since Chris was losing hers, and I must say that it was mildly frightening!”



“... I noticed that all of my senses were heightened. We were holding hands and her hand seemed warmer and softer, the air seemed crisper, the sky darker, and the noises of the night seemed sharper.”



“Then Chris asked Dr. Loman the big question. ‘Am I going to die? Is this going to kill me? If so, how long do I have?’

“My fantasy was that he would say something like, ‘Don’t be silly! Your case isn’t that serious and I’m sure that you’ll be fine.’

“He didn’t.”



“It absolutely broke my heart. I couldn’t hold her or comfort her; I couldn’t even touch her because she was in the back seat. My eyes teared up and I had to concentrate on driving, but I knew that I had to say something to comfort her. Or did I? Everything that I considered saying seemed hollow, empty, or just plain stupid. I was dying inside, not only at hearing her so distressed, but also at the thought that she might die.”



“...it is imperative that you learn as much as you can as quickly as you can in order to reduce your fear of the unknown. It is a classic example of the adage “information is power” because the more we learned the less apprehensive we were, *even if what we learned was scary.*”



“She told me, ‘I look at this way: on the roller coaster of life, I guess it’s my turn to be in the front car. Bring it on!’”



“It was a wonderful conversation in that we each expressed our needs to the other and asked for help and cooperation in doing what had to be done in these difficult circumstances. This 10-minute discussion made a tremendous difference in our relationship for the next nine months, in that we gave each other ‘permission’ to have faults and asked each other for whatever we needed.”



“After the diagnosis, it quickly became evident that there was another aspect of this situation that neither of us had anticipated: dealing with other people and their reactions to the news that Chris had cancer.”



“...interacting with interested and concerned people just goes with the territory. They truly care so, in my view, it is important to include them. On the other hand, it is difficult to keep everyone informed to their satisfaction. My advice: either get someone else to help you, create an email list and send them periodic updates yourself, or do it electronically at **[www.ThePatientPartnerProject.org](http://www.ThePatientPartnerProject.org)**”



“The cancer diagnosis is scary. The days and weeks immediately after it is handed down are not the time to go hide in a corner; the patient and partner must take an aggressive stance and do everything they can to not only ensure that they get the *best* care, but that they get the *appropriate* care as well.”



“To say we were impressed with the Revlon facility would be a gross understatement. As soon as we walked in, we knew that we were in a special place because there is very little about the Center that felt ‘medical.’”



"It just goes to show that you shouldn't be afraid to question some of the rules; they may not be what they seem."



"Then the big moment came when they whisked her off to the operating room. We said our goodbyes and I told her I loved her. Through her fog, she looked up at Georgia and said, 'Take care of Dave.' Then she was gone and I was crying like a baby."



"The only thing you need to worry about right now is recovering from this surgery. The rest will happen when it happens.' I sounded much braver that I felt."



"By the time I got to bed around 1:00 am, I found myself feeling extremely depressed and discouraged. What was going to happen to Chris? How would I be able to pay for everything when I didn't have much time for work? I didn't even *fee* like working, and the projects I had been excited about held no interest for me any more. It all just seemed so hopeless. Above the din of all of those voices, I tried to remind myself that I was tired and everything seems worse when you're tired."



"So we started singing loudly together and I emptied the rest of the fluid into the cup without a problem. And we laughed about it. With a little creativity, it is possible to turn something unpleasant into something fun, a technique we would use many times in the coming months."



"In order to effectively dry the 'private areas' I would scrunch the towel up length-wise, place it between her legs with one end in front and one in back, and then move the towel back and forth in a sawing motion. But Chris insisted that I make a noise while I was 'sawing' that sounded like 'VVVVOOOO-tah, VVVVOOOO-tah VVVVOOOO-tah!' We did that for every shower and laughed every time. It just goes to show that if you can put some fun into something it's no longer a chore."



"Due to my new-found shampooing, drying, and styling skills, Chris began to refer to me as 'Mr. Dave.'"



"Dealing with Chris was the easy part; she was in good spirits and we had fun. Besides, I just loved looking at her. All of the other stuff started to become a drag and I found myself sinking into despair at least once a day."



“Sometimes the best thing you can do to help is to do nothing at all.”



“I’ll never forget that two-minute conversation. I feel that it was a major moment in my life, mainly because of Dr. Brooks, her demeanor, and her genuineness. Maybe it was just that I needed so much to hear what she said to me, but I can still hear her voice in the phone as clearly as I did that day.”



“My gast had never been so flabbered. Talk about insensitive; what a thing to say to someone with cancer!! She laughed about it later and we wrote it off to semi-senility, but I think that down deep it bothered her just a little. I remember thinking, ‘No matter how much I do, I just can’t protect her from everything.’”



“As I thought about that one, I could feel the stress shrinking my body inside my skin again, so I told myself, ‘There’s nothing you can do about that one, so don’t go there ‘til you get there.’”



“‘You’ve been a good boob all these years,’ she said. ‘I’m sorry this is happening to you, but it’s not your fault.’”



“It wasn’t long before they came and wheeled her away. ... when that last door closed behind her I completely broke down. I wasn’t really worried that something bad would happen, it was just so horrible that she had to go through all of this, she seemed so vulnerable, and it was just so damned unfair. I leaned against the wall and sobbed uncontrollably.”



“In the process of this excitement, her gown came down exposing the dressings on her ‘new’ breast and I yelled out, ‘Oh, my God! Your nipple fell off!’”



“She held up her wrist and we put our bracelets side by side and admired them facetiously, cocking our heads in mock adoration of this wonderful bond between us. It was so silly we laughed out loud and we were having fun, despite the bizarre circumstance in which we found ourselves.”



"I always enjoyed being around Chris and helping her, and those were the high points of the day. But the chores and responsibilities were just too much to think about and left me with no time to make any money; the frustration level was, at times, unbearable."



"We looked at each other and laughed nervously at the situation in which we found ourselves. Chris said, 'Now listen, Nurse Dave. I don't want you to run screaming from the room until after it's completely out!' That helped to break the tension a bit."



"I experienced a feeling that I don't recall ever having before; a combination of relief, pride, renewed self-confidence, and that incredible satisfaction knowing that I was taking good care of Chris. It was quite a rush."



"About half way home I guess I dozed off while driving because I was startled by the horn blast of an eighteen-wheeler after I apparently drifted over into his lane."



"I felt like a complete idiot. Of course she was right; what did I have to complain about? I was ashamed of myself for even entertaining such feelings."



"It was surreal to be sitting there eating while Chris was getting her chemo; all three of us were eating, talking, and laughing, having a great time."



"Although it was something I had always known, it reminded me of the importance of having something to look forward to."



"I don't think my poison oak is poison oak after all. I just figured out what it probably really is,' she told me with a dreadful tone in her voice.

"Tell me.'

"Shingles."



“She was so brave, hardly ever complained, continued to do as much as she could around the house, and still had a pleasant attitude most of the time in spite of the pain.”



“Chris . . . said that when she saw the women who had lost their husbands, had to raise children on their own, are financially strapped, and were losing their homes, she realized that what she was going through was a ‘walk in the park.’”



“Although I had already known this, it struck me as I was making that dinner that it was very smart to make large meals, then refrigerate or freeze the leftovers.”



“Thank you for taking such good care of me. I don’t know what I would have done without you.’

“Suddenly, it was all worthwhile. I told her, ‘Thank *you* for being a good and brave patient. You make it easy.’”



“It was a good reminder for her that life *does* get back to normal and that this ordeal *will* end.”



“As you can see, there is still life after chemotherapy and reconstructive surgery.”



“An unpleasant but amusing image leapt into my mind of a bunch of bearded, burly biker-types wearing leather vests standing around watching one of their own tattooing color onto my wife’s nipple. I suppressed a laugh.

“How are they going to get Momma Never Loved Me into such a small area?’ I asked, trying to make it sound like an innocent question. ‘I guess they could make it a one-eyed eagle, couldn’t they?’”



“I distinctly remember walking out of Loma Linda after the last treatment with an incredible sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. I felt like we had really accomplished something special together: Chris had fought the battle of her life and I had helped her do it.”



"I can tell you this without any reservations whatsoever: taking care of my wife for these nine months was the most rewarding, uplifting, satisfying, and meaningful thing I've ever done. My business suffered. Our finances suffered. I endured a lot of stress and I did lot of unpleasant things I never thought I'd have to do. But I would do it again in a heartbeat, because this is what life is about. This is what it is to be human. "

