



On June 7, 2021, at 6:45AM, I lost my wife and best friend to cancer. Some may consider a post like this to be “not tasteful” I disagree wholeheartedly! I will tell you her story! First let’s preface to say that she never smoked or put a cigarette in her mouth. One of many reasons I loved her so very much. In fact, throughout her life she took VERY few medications or pills, aside from an occasional Tylenol or Advil, she took nothing. So it came as a surprise when she was diagnosed with cancer, not just any cancer, Uveal Melanoma, which means it started within her eyeball!

2005, she saw some floaters in her left eye. A subsequent visit to eye doctor indicated and diagnosed as fast growing tumor within the eyeball, AKA Malignant Choroidal Melanoma, otherwise known as Uveal Melanoma! After the diagnosis, she was very quickly sent to www.willseye.org one of the leading eye cancer centers in the world. We arrived on a Monday morning in a room with over 50 other patients with similar or identical diagnosis. She went through a full day of testing and diagnosis to include ultrasound, biopsies, digital imaging and too many others to mention. Sadly, the only prudent treatment was for a complete enucleation of the eye! Which is to say, removal of the entire eye. The benefit of this procedure over radiation or other chemo type procedures is the entirety of the tumor, which had not broken through the eye wall, would be cleanly removed. Four days later, her left eye was removed as an out patient if you can believe that!!

Thus started her next phase, which was healing the surgery, having a prosthetic created, and learning to live with one eye. The most interesting aspect of the enucleation was the creation of the prosthetic. When the eyeball was removed, a perfect replica and size of the eyeball was created from coral. Yes, that coral, from the sea. The corral was sewn into the place where the eye came out, thus letting small muscles inside the cavity attach themselves to the coral. This, in turn, gave the prosthetic eye a little bit of movement. The actual prosthetic was created in Rochester, NY. The cavity was filled with liquid to create a mold for the new prosthetic. The actual prosthetic was made from a wax base material, then covered with many layers of polyurethane. An artist then painted the new prosthetic using her other eye as a guide. When it was finished, it was incredibly identical to her real eye. Many, many folks never knew she had only one eye after the surgery! She learned very quickly how to exist and deal with only one eye. I truly believe playing racquetball at a pretty high level, gave her a very good head start on adjusting her depth of field, the hardest part of having one eye.

As she adjusted and healed, she/we went back to WillsEye in Philadelphia for a yearly scan every year for five years for any other cancers, including the melanoma! ALL NEGATIVE for cancer. Needless to say, we figured she would be clean for the rest of her life!

Fast forward many years, to 2018 to be exact. We were on a cruise-tour to Alaska in August of 2018. That was the first time she mentioned a “pain” in her right side. As we age, we all have some pains so initially, not a big deal. But by mid September, and still concerned enough about the pain in her side, she went to see her physician. Intuitively, a scan was ordered, and her/our world was changed. The scan indicated, tumors in and on her liver. A subsequent visit to Corning Cancer Center resulted in a much needed biopsy of the cancer. Sadly, the biopsy indicated the exact same chemistry as the Uveal Melanoma from her eye! Next stop, December 2018, Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center to speak with a cancer/melanoma expert! The conversation was NOT GOOD! We were dealing with a melanoma that had no good answers for treatment, in fact we came away with a prognosis of 2-5 years unless something changed. Next up, back to Corning Cancer Center for a try at immunotherapy. December 27, 2018, started Opdivo then adding Yervoy in January! For 18 months give or take, weekly infusions, and unfortunately, tumors still were growing, albeit, pretty slowly! Then COVID takes a grip on us all! Next up possible clinical trials! First at Roswell, that fell through for numerous reasons. Enter MSK, Memorial Sloan Kettering in NYC! After much thought she agreed to go and do a trial at MSK. October, 2020. What an experience!! World Class melanoma doctors! At this point, let me restate, her melanoma had no good answers and a trial was somewhat of a Hail Mary! The good news with this trial was no chemo, just pills. The theory was to block proteins needed by tumors for their growth! After 8 weeks she had her first scan, albeit, some side effects caused some interruptions in the trial. December scans showed same growth rate in tumors as was evident during immunotherapy. The next 8 weeks were sadly interrupted by her positive COVID test right after Christmas, 2020. Until the end, never fully got rid of all the COVID side effects from December. She never regained any taste or smell! COVID and Cancer do not mix well as we found out. She was able to get back on the trial early February 2021. As end of March approached, it was very evident she was declining in an obvious way! Early April brought about her desire to stop trial as she was just feeling bad on a regular basis. Another set of scans to finish trial, then 1 last meeting with oncologist at MSK. Scans showed continued growth, but very slow, but by now, all the slow growth scans obviously added up to a more substantial spread. By this time, lesions had appeared on her kidney, lymph nodes, and close to her spinal chord. The spinal chord tumors were most likely the cause of her increasing pain all around. With some tears, the oncologist suggested she would never feel good again and he estimated a survival time of 2-6 months. She was never the same after that last meeting at MSK. We left MSK for the last time on 4/12/2021. Less than 2 months later, she passed on June 7, 2021 at 6:45AM, with myself, her husband, Steve, and her son Bryan, at her side.

It needs to be said, thank you, thank you, thank you, to everyone involved, from secretaries, nurses, doctors/oncologists first at Corning Cancer Center, then the same at Memorial Sloan Kettering were absolutely fantastic and went well above and beyond to make her comfortable at all times—SHE WAS SPECIAL in their eyes!