

Larry A Saltzman, MD
Comments to Team In Training
Leukemia and Lymphoma Society
Inspiration Luncheon
Saturday April 13, 2013

Colleen, thank you so very much to you and the entire LLS staff, coaches, and mentors for adopting me in to your Massachusetts Team in Training Chapter and for your energy, support, and allowing me to say a few words. It is an honor to be here and I am once again humbled. I apologize in advance should I become emotionally overwhelmed.

One year ago, I was privileged to be here as a part of the TEAM and introduced myself to you as a 58 year old Family Physician who in the fall of 2009 made his own lymphoma diagnosis based on an annual CBC and a self examination. I, like many individuals, at first went in to denial and so did not tell anyone until my next regular doctor appointment two months later in late December. At that time white cell cytogenetic studies were ordered and on the evening of January 8, 2010, while attending festivities surrounding my nephew's wedding in New York City I received an email from my physician that said "I'm afraid it looks like its between atypical chronic lymphocytic leukemia and lymphoma." Actually, it turned out to be both – CLL and SLL with multiple chromosomal deletions and poor prognostic markers. Even then, not wanting to affect my family's celebration I went through the weekend and the event before I shared the diagnosis with my wife Sharon. What made the diagnosis even tougher to swallow, besides the obvious, was that we were in the midst of planning for two of our own weddings for our children in that year. Given that this is supposed to be an indolent disease, do I tell them or not. And what to tell my parents who had recently lost their daughter to breast cancer? Well my mantra is -- transparency is ultimately the best medicine -- and so we told our family over the ensuing several months as well as our closest friends. We did not really go public until my Boston effort last year and the response we received was – he runs marathons, he looks healthy, how can that be.

Now one year older, I am here once again to prove to myself, and others, that living with cancer does not necessarily mean one has to give up the

things that we love doing. For instance, running and spreading the gospel that we can beat these blood borne and other diseases.

My journey this year has been particularly touching. I am joined here by one of my honorees, Janie Gumpert and her husband Frank who are our dearest friends. Janie was diagnosed with Follicular Cell Lymphoma in 2009 and went through 6 months of chemotherapy in 2010. I am so pleased to relay that she is in remission with no further treatments planned at this time.

My other honoree, Mort Ehrlich, also a physician, could not make the trip as he has just had another course of chemotherapy for his rare combination of B-cell non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia. He has been responding to treatment and has been a great supporter of our cause as well.

Last year, I raised a lot of money, over \$39,000, for this event and along the way heard of several touching stories. This year as I climbed past the \$50,000 mark the stories I heard became that much more personal and heartwarming as supporters made donations and let me know how these illnesses have touched their lives.

- Such as our personal physical therapist who told me recently that his 10-year-old son had been diagnosed with acute leukemia and ultimately treated and cured using pooled fetal cord blood for a transplant. Amazing.
- A good friend's sister who just went through her 3rd bone marrow transplant for multiple myeloma.
- A business advisor of ours whose wife never met her 5 year old sister who died of acute leukemia.
- Our neighbor whose brother died a few months ago after an 8-year battle with leukemia.

The list goes on and on. I had no idea how many are affected and what a nerve I touched with my effort.

In trying to come up with something meaningful to say to you I decided the best approach would be to admit that I have a bad habit. Only one you may be thinking? Well, one that I am willing to discuss in public.

Yes it is true, while I run I listen to music. I know in the strictest sense this is not allowed by race officials, but what are the odds that I actually place in the top 3 of a run where this would be an issue.

No I am not going to bore you with the playlist I have put together for this Boston effort, although, if you will humor me, I do want to give you a bit of a summary.

The tunes I carry along with me have themes. Good old-fashioned rock and roll, music to help me with inspiration, motivation, perspiration, and some that have personal meaning.

With each event, I mix in new tunes, but there are some standards I carry with me each time.

For those of you who were involved in last year's Boston Marathon, you might recall that it was a bit on the warm side – understatement I know. I really struggled with the heat, fighting leg cramps that began at mile 10. No way was I going to quit. You may have figured by now that I am very goal oriented.

As I passed the 25th mile marker, if I remember correctly, there was an underpass just before the home stretch. My calf's and hamstrings were so tight that I was worried I would look really bad at the finish so I stopped in that underpass and stretched as best as I could. And when I got going again and was greeted by the Boylston Street finish line crowds this Kelly Clarkson song, Stronger, burst out of my playlist and in to my head, with its chorus that goes – What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, stand a little taller -- What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, stand a little taller.

Unbelievable set of words for such a challenging day and a metaphor for what we are doing here. To this day, every time that song pops up on the radio I get goose bumps thinking back to that moment.

And perhaps you have heard the song “Seasons of Love” from the Broadway musical “Rent.” The chorus of this song goes as follows:

Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes,
Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Moments so dear.
Five hundred twenty-five thousand
Six hundred minutes
How do you measure, measure a year?

Wow, how do you measure a year? Well, since we are about to run the Boston Marathon, and since I am a bit OCD and keep track of my mileage for each run I do, I might measure a year in the miles I have run in the last 365 days. That number is 1,407, just about the distance from Boston to Miami.

Or since we are here for LLS, perhaps I measure a year in my white blood cell counts and enlarging lymph nodes. One year ago, just prior to the marathon my WBC count was 23,000. At the time I was feeling sorry for myself and although my medical support team said not to worry, it was hard to put it out of my mind. Fast-forward to this year and my check up 3 weeks ago has my current WBC count at just under 70,000. And again I am told not to worry. Funny thing is this year I am feeling a little more optimistic. Maybe it is not yet settled in that I will need to be treated sooner than later, or maybe it is the great work that LLS is doing and our involvement that is showing me that new therapies such as the combination of Bendamustine-Rituximab are being developed and there is a way out of this. This past January I even launched a new medical advocacy and health coaching service called Ask Dr Larry dot com. When I asked my oncologist at Stanford if I could be allowed to begin my Boston training for this year, she said “why not.” And I said, yes indeed. So here I am.

Or maybe a year is measured by the miracles of life. As in becoming a first time grandparent this past February and knowing that I have lived to see the next generation. I will leave it to you to add your own answer to that question of how do you measure a year. I would love to hear.

And then, there is a song that I listen to as my lead off tune on each and every run. That is a song written by Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul, and Mary – “With your Face to the Wind (otherwise known as Harriet’s Song).”

I began listening to this song in 1996 at first in honor of my sister Bonnie and later in her memory. Bonnie, my younger sister passed away in 2007 at age 50 after an 11-year battle with breast cancer. When she was initially diagnosed she decided to go for the full court press. Meaning mastectomy, radiation, and high dose chemotherapy with stem cell replacement. During the course of her hospitalization and at one of the low points in her treatment I traveled from Sacramento to Chicago to visit her and brought her this song for encouragement. She said she stayed up the entire night listening over and over again and amazingly the next day her condition perked up and she was home a few days later. The chorus of the song goes like this:

With your face to the wind, I see you smilin' again
Spirit's movin' within, I know that you're gonna win

Ironically, after I was diagnosed with my own cancer this song took on much more of a personal meaning and so as I listen to its verses I now remember my sister and at the same time use it for my own peace of mind. Having said that there is one verse that I find so special:

Yes there are hands here to comfort you
And if you need there are tears to cry with you too
And there are hearts that will sing with you
And voices to cheer when you've finally made it through

With your face to the wind, I see you smilin' again
Spirit's movin' within, I know that you're gonna win

Here in this room, I know we are all winners. Whether you are running, supporting, or fundraising, or if you know someone with a blood cancer, or like me carry one yourself, there is hope here.

From the bottom of my heart I want to thank you for your support and efforts. I want to thank the more than 450 individuals and families who

have donated on my behalf. I want to thank my friends Janie and Mort for allowing me to run in their honor. And most of all I want to thank my wife and life partner Sharon for sticking with me through thick and thin.

Enjoy your weekend.

Thank you again.

Larry A Saltzman, MD

Donations to my Team in Training effort for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society will be accepted through May 31, 2013 at the following link:

<http://pages.teamintraining.org/ma/boston13/drlarrys>