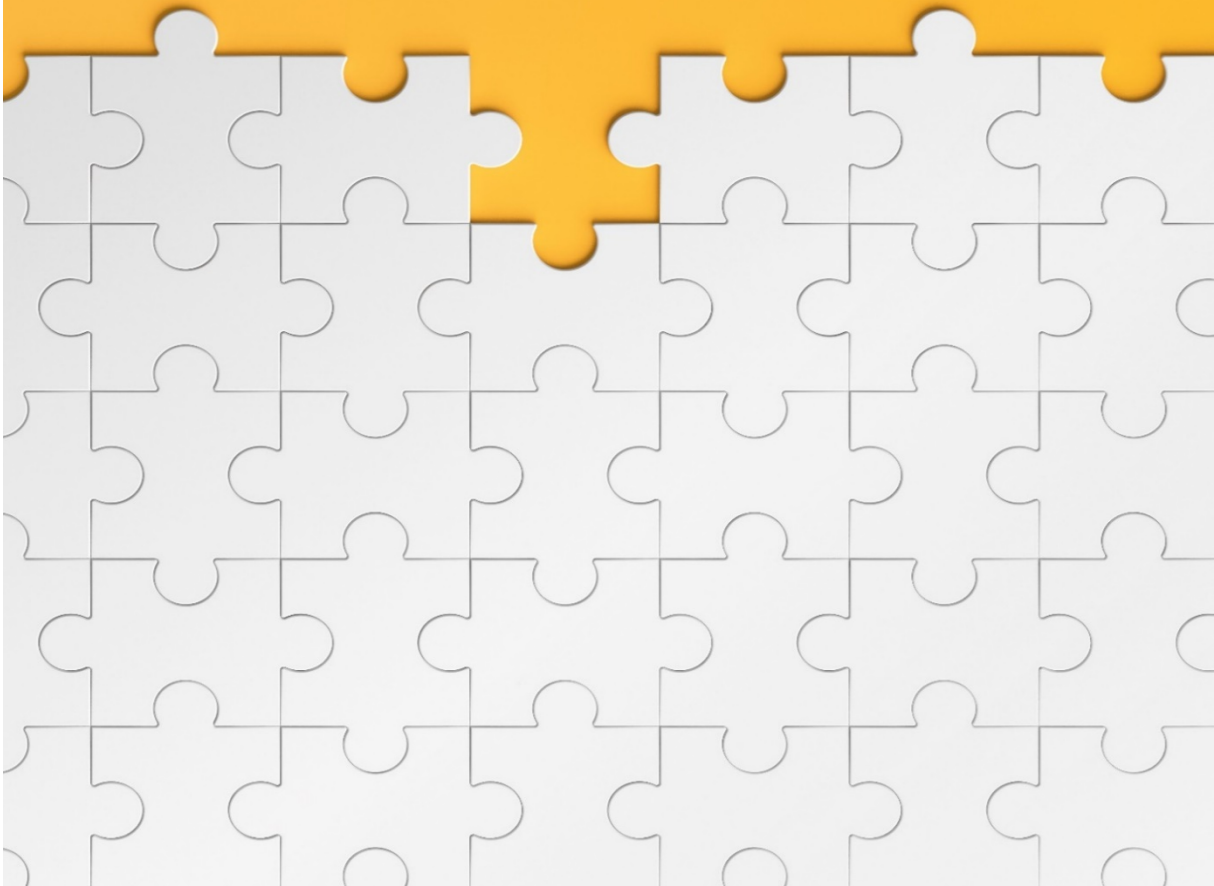


Putting the Pieces Together!



by Wendell Timothy



UCA | UROLOGY CENTERS
OF ALABAMA
VAN SCOTT CANCER CENTER

Words of Encouragement from Family and Friends

Hi Wendell!! 😊😊👐👐👐

Empowerment is the process of encouraging an individual to think, behave, manage, take action and make decisions to move towards their goals.

I read this and thought "Wow, that's Wendell alright!"

Whether you're at church, with your family/friends, Youth Ministries, SCC, your Facebook posts (about exercising, health, biblical, LIFE, etc.) and I am pretty sure at your former work places and TMT too....

You Empower People to be Better! Even through your own challenges and that takes strength from an extraordinary person.

The Greens are very thankful to know and call you our friend!

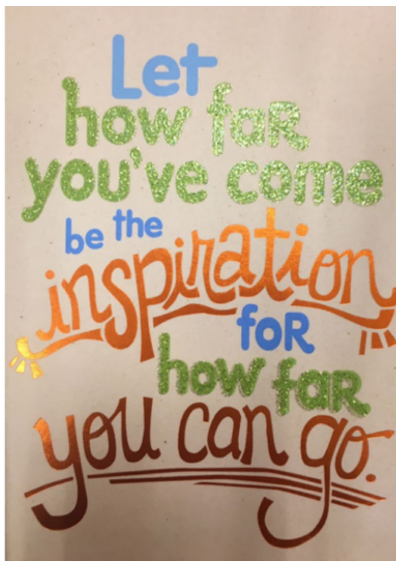
Love Ya! *Danell, Jonathan, Jr & Alisha*

The Heard family is soooo happy for you and have been praying for you thought this process. We would like to say CONGRATULATIONS and to GOD be the GLORY!

Love, The Heard family (Travis, Dayna, Gabby and TJ)

Wendell, I pray the God continue to heal your body completely. You are such a strong and positive person. Thank you for sharing your experience and may others learn from you.

Gwen Reasor



With LOVE to you Wendell and your family, *Annie Dailey*

Congratulations you're a Survivor! We wish many more years of good health

Kevin & Tinita Jones

Wendell, I am always praying for you. Stay strong. There is nothing is too hard for God!

Love, Felecia Scott Johnson

My brother! You have carried us along with you through your journey. Our faith has increased and our resolve to be restful in circumstances the most foreboding has strengthened. Thank you for your transparency! May God Bless You and keep you every hour by His power.

Courage, Tyler Buford

Wendell, your strength for this journey has been nothing short of amazing. You personify how God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. As a partner in ministry, you have always 'had my back', Thank You. I compiled your journey in the following pages. May it serve as a testament to how God has blessed you and jumpstart to your

book 😊

We are grateful to God for you and pray for many more years of good health.

Love, The Hannah Family (Mark, Tameka, Austin, Asher)

Day 1: October 9, 2019

This is my reality for the next 7 plus weeks. Day 1 of 38 days of radiation treatments completed. Precautionary steps to help ensure all of the prostate cancer is eradicated from my body. Did you know that 1 of 7 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime?

I went to my appointment this morning and met 5 other older men already going thru their treatments. Today was the last treatment for one of the gentlemen. Everyone congratulated him and wished him well. We all sit around a round table with a 500-piece puzzle in our white robes waiting for our turn. The guys introduced themselves to me and welcomed me as the newbie. I completed 5 pieces of this huge puzzle in the time I was there. I'll take a picture of it tomorrow and post it. My goal is to help finish it by my last treatment.

The countdown continues. Be blessed everyone. Be nice to everyone and don't sweat the small stuff.

Day 2: October 10, 2019

Day 2 of 38 days of radiation treatments is a wrap. I arrived at the appointment about ten minutes earlier than yesterday so I could work on the puzzle a little longer. I completed 6 pieces today. Actual treatment seemed quicker than yesterday. On Thursdays, I see the doctor after treatment to discuss anything that may be going on with my body. I've been having hot flashes lately as a result of the three-month hormone shot, I received in August to help with the effectiveness of the treatments. Hot flashes are of the devil.

The nurse had to take my blood today to check current PSA levels and establish a baseline. Normal range is 1-4. Pre surgery, mine was a whopping 27. Post-surgery, it was 0.22. My veins have always been difficult to find, and I let the nurse know that. Three sticks later..... time to get a smoothie. Until tomorrow, drink some water everyone. Call a close friend you haven't spoken to in a while and do something nice for someone. And if you haven't had a physical yet this year, please schedule one; especially my stubborn male compadres.



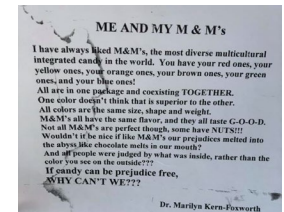
Day 3: October 11, 2019

Treatment 3 of 38 radiation treatments is complete. I was eager to get to the appointment this morning so that I could work on the puzzle. I discovered that in each of the four changing rooms, there are framed puzzles on the wall that previous patients completed during their treatments. It's my goal to be there and see our current puzzle completed, framed and placed on the wall.

One gentleman said he is looking forward to his last treatment next week. He is going to drive off and look at the clinic in his rear-view mirror.

It is interesting that at 50, I'm the youngest of the bunch. Most of the men that I've met are in their 60's, 70's. They each have their own stories. Some had the radiation seeds implanted. Some had open surgery. One guy had 11 surgeries over the years for a variety of issues. But we all have at least one thing in common. We survived.

There is this one older guy that I can most relate to. I guess because he reminds me of some father figures. Plus, he is always working on the puzzle. Anyway, he handed me this printout on M&M's. The words are so true and so appropriate for the times we are living in. I couldn't help but think that here we are; men of different ages and races. Under normal circumstances outside of this situation, we might nod our heads at each other or offer a smile. However, cancer has brought us all here and although we don't know each other, we feel free to be open and honest about our conditions and share life stories. I shudder to think that if we all took a moment to look for our similarities, what a better world this would be. Anyway, Monday is his last treatment so I won't have additional time to bond with him, but I will make sure I send him a picture of the completed puzzle. I got 11 pieces today. Remember to drink water today and give a loved one a long hug today and tell them that you love them. Have a great weekend. I'll talk to you on Monday.



Day 5: October 15, 2019

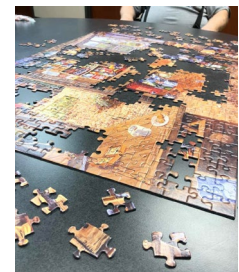
Day 5 of 38 radiation treatments was pretty "normal". Today was a really good puzzle day as I got 12 or 13 pieces completed today. I had about 5 extra minutes to work on the puzzle because one of the guys came earlier than his normal time slot because of some other appointments that came up.

The guys talked a lot more about what they have dealt with. Hot flashes. Controlling their bladder. PSA levels.

Today was the last day for one of the guys, affectionately called Santa Claus. He passed out candy canes to everyone and we all wished him well. I can't wait to be on the tail end of my treatments. I know that I will want to do something special for the guys that will follow in getting treatments.

I looked at the calendar and counted the days until my last treatment. I should be done on November 29.

Got super tired today and napped on and off for about three hours. Until tomorrow, stay safe and tell someone you love them.



Day 6: October 16, 2019

Day 6 of 38 days of radiation treatments started out differently but was still a learning experience. It was raining early this morning so rather than going home after dropping the princess off at pre k and then going in for treatment, I decided to go in early for my treatment to work on the puzzle.

Because I was early, I was able to get prime parking in the covered lot which is unusual. I said my now usual good mornings to the two ladies at the front desk and used my special ID to check in. To my surprise, no one was sitting around the "table". A dressing room was available but since I was early, I got started on the puzzle. To me, finishing the puzzle and allowing it to become "whole" again has a lot of symbolism.

After a few minutes, one of the technicians told me to go ahead and change in one of the dressing rooms so I could be ready for my treatment.

After only six treatments, I've gotten the hang of the routine. Walk into the treatment room, confirm my identity on the touch screen, untie my robe, lie down on the table, raise my legs for the foot pillow, allow the techs to align my body to the machine (they do this by shifting my hips enough so that the lasers on the machine line up with the three dot tattoos I was given a couple of weeks ago) and then finally laying still while the table retracts into the cylinder.

Easy listening music plays daily. Yesterday was Lionel Richie's "Say You, Say Me". Today's song was unfamiliar but definitely from the 80's.

Anyway, body alignment and targeting the treatment area inside the gold markers that were implanted in my body weeks ago went smoothly because the treatment was completed on the same song that I walked in on. That's good because that means that I did my part in making sure my bowels were empty, but my bladder was full. It makes it easier for the tech to target the specific area precisely.

After treatment, I walked out to the waiting area to head to the dressing room and two of the guys that are usually there before me were there. They were late because they ran into traffic. I wished them a good day but not before placing one more puzzle piece.

One day closer to being whole. Take care of yourself and each other.

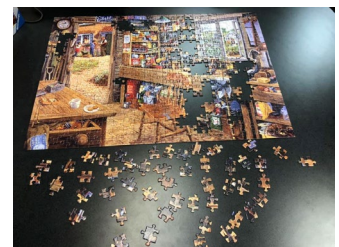
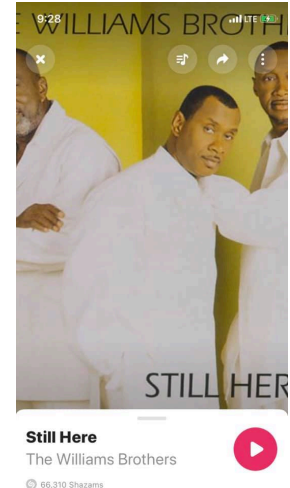


Day 7: October 17, 2019

Day 7 of 38 days of radiation treatments for prostate cancer began and ended with music.

Exhibit A. After dropping the princess off at day care, I headed over to the Urology Center for my appointment. I'm a creature of habit. So, I listen to one radio station for the "rumor report" at 7:55am and then another one at 8:06am to hear the morning minute with Chris Paul. By 8:10, I usually just tune in to any station with a song that I might like. Today, the songs were either horrible or there were commercials. I love the gospel music station, but I don't listen to it that much in the mornings because the voices of the two hosts are so very annoying (to me). Today, I had no choice so when I tuned in, I was surprised to hear "Stand" by Donnie McClurkin". While listening to the words, I thought about the day I had my follow-up visit with the Urologist and he told me that I had cancer (paraphrased). I remember the shock that I felt in the pit of my soul. I remember thinking; "What did I do to have cancer?" I don't want to die. I thought about how sad and hurt my princess would be if I "went away". Like the song says, I prayed and cried. Afterwards, I did everything possible to be positive and determined that I was going to fight. I remembered the words of my primary care physician when she told me of all the patients that her father diagnosed with prostate cancer, none of them succumbed to the disease. So, I decided to "Stand". Immediately after that song finished, the next song that came on was "Healing (I need a healer for my soul)" by Kelly Price. The words to this song really spoke to me. It was a great reminder to me that The Great Healer was working on me thru the doctors and medical staff; not just physically but mentally and spiritually. After my appointment was over, I got in my car, started it and Still Here by the Williams Brothers came on. "Through it all, I made it through another day's journey, God kept me here". What a way to end an appointment.

Well let me get back to the actual appointment. I was early again today and anxious to get to work on the puzzle. There was only one gentleman at the round table, and I could tell that a lot of progress was made on the puzzle (see picture) since yesterday. I quickly placed 5 pieces until the technician told me to take the next available dressing room. I had not been in room 1 before so I had to look at the completed picture on the wall in this room. Whichever set of guys worked on the puzzle of Gone with The Wind (see picture), they were extremely good. I took my robe out of my "blue" bag, took off my pants and shoes and put on the robe. Now about the blue bag (see picture). When I first started coming here prior to starting any radiation treatments and sat in the main waiting room I noticed these guys coming and going while I waited to see the doctor. After I became a radiation patient and received my own blue bag, I became a member of the club. In the bag is your own white robe, a water bottle (they want you to drink 16-20 ounces of water prior to appointment to make it easier to see the treatment area) and my access badge.



I don't remember the name of the song that was playing while I was on the table getting "zapped", but today's visit consisted of the song and a commercial. I don't think I drank enough water this morning, so it took the team a little longer to line up the treatment area.

Afterwards, I walked out to the area where the guys all wait their turn around the round table. A few more pieces had been placed and it looked like only 25 pieces remained. I was tempted to get dressed and go back to the table to finish the puzzle, but I decided not to rush and let others do their part. The big lesson that came across was it's not my time but God's time.

Thursday's are doctor follow up visit days after treatment, so I waited a few minutes in the main waiting area before he was available. He asked the regular questions from last week. For me, no blood in urine. No issues with bowel. Haven't had to wear pads/liners. My only physical side effects have been the hot flashes and those have dropped off since last week. I'm very fortunate.

Until tomorrow, be thankful for all that you have.



Day 8: October 18, 2019

Day 8 of 38 radiation treatments for prostate cancer. TGIF. Feeling a little melancholy today. Walked into my appointment this morning a little early expecting to find a few pieces left to the puzzle. To my surprise though, the puzzle was already finished. I thought about the 2 or 3 guys who had their last treatments this week and remembered that the puzzle being completed and the men finishing their treatment was a great thing.

I've been marking off days on my calendar as I finish each daily treatment. I've always been that guy that creates a to do list and scratches items off as they are done. I'm looking forward to a new puzzle to help me continue my journey until I reach the end.

As I laid on the table today, I kept my eyes open and kept my eyes fixed on the three beams pointed at different parts of my body. I was totally at peace at what was transpiring but also looking forward to the weekend for a break from this new normal; for a chance to reflect; to recharge; to reset.

Without the puzzle to work on, I had an opportunity to talk to the fellas a little more. They shared their observations about how busy the center is with guys coming in all day long for radiation treatment from as early as 6:50am to 5pm. I wished them all a good weekend and told them I would see them on Monday.

Until then, females, please encourage the men in your lives to get checked. Men get checked. You have nothing to lose, except your life.



#puttingthepiecestogether

Day 9: October 21, 2019

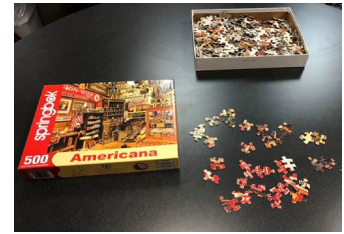
Day 9 of 38 days of radiation treatment started with apprehension and intense anticipation. The puzzle that first met me on my first day of treatment was completed on Friday so all weekend, I wondered if the staff would have time to get another puzzle to work on. To me, it represented a new challenge and fear of not knowing what was coming next. I wondered would it be difficult. It so reminded me of my journey with cancer. To my surprise, when I opened the swinging door leading to the prep area, lo and behold, there was a new puzzle box on the table. I immediately perked up. The unknown had now become known. It was just like completing my first treatment. I immediately perked up. As you can see in the pictures, no one started working on the puzzle yet. I met the challenge head on, emptied the pieces onto the table and began to find the pieces with the flat sides. Until last week, I don't ever remember doing a puzzle over 200 pieces. As some of the guys started coming in for their appointments, one or two commented about the new puzzle and even looked for a few pieces to complete. The others sat around and talked. I learned that one guy had surgery to remove his prostate 15 years ago but over the most recent months, his PSA levels started to slowly increase warranting the doctor making the recommendation that he complete a regimen of radiation treatments. I'm so thankful to have been made aware of the option to do this now rather than wait ten or fifteen years and have this weighing on me then.

So, I have affectionately been referred to by two of the guys as the puzzle guy. As I took pictures today, I told the guys that I was journaling my journey to help bring awareness and to help inspire others who are facing some sort of "challenge" in their life.

The puzzle served a secondary purpose today in distraction in this way. It is important that I come to my radiation treatments after drinking at least twenty ounces of water. I usually drink about 10 when I first wake up, use the bathroom and drink another 20 about 30 minutes before heading to the urology center. My schedule leaving the house was thrown off today, so I drank it all earlier than usual. Needless to say, when I arrived, I really had to use the bathroom, but I tried to think of something else. After spreading all the pieces individually on the table, turning them right side up, looking for all the pieces with a flat side and managing to put about 16 pieces together before a room became available to change, I did not think about the bathroom until after my treatment was over.

I recall someone saying that at least 65 men walk through the doors every day for their radiation treatment. I'm looking forward to tomorrow's challenges and eager to see how many other pieces others completed throughout the day.

Until tomorrow, remember that you are loved.



Day 10: October 22, 2019

“Beam Me Up Scotty”

Day 10 of 38 radiation treatments. I was pretty upbeat this morning. Except for sweating out of three shirts the night before, I felt pretty well rested. I was on schedule leaving the house and getting the princess off to school. Rather than go home for a few minutes, I decided to drive straight to the urology center and if there were any openings, I could get my treatment a few minutes early. To my surprise, not much had been done with the puzzle, but I decided to change into my robe first before beginning to work on the puzzle. I immediately tackled an easy part of the puzzle that had a lot of red and white in it. (See the last picture). A lot like life I suppose where most people tend to tackle the easy things first and build up confidence for what lies ahead. It hit me today that about 25% thru this process. It still seems like such a long time but it's helpful that there are other guys going thru the same thing. We celebrate each of us getting one step closer to the finish line.

On any given day, there are 2-4 radiation techs working. Today, there were two that have been there from the beginning. I purposed to ask them their names one more time and promised them I would remember them. Emma and Quinton are two of the nicest people I have met. I can't imagine how they stay so personable yet professional all day when their job consists of doing the same thing all day long. From the time they call our name, we walk to the room, sign in on the electric display, lay on the table, raise our legs for the leg and foot mold, open robe, get body aligned to the lasers, grab the plastic ring to hold over chest, get moved back thru the machine and wait for more fine-tuned alignment. The techs look for the gold markers implanted in my body. About a minute later, the machine starts up with a whirring sound. When it's done, the table lowers a little bit and slowly slides back out to its starting position. Pretty routine now. Twenty-eight more treatments to go. If I complete as many pieces of the puzzle each day that I did today, I will see yet another puzzle completed.

A friend from church came by today. We talked for a while about a myriad of things then he prayed for me. His visit was a nice change to the monotony of most of my days. No nap today although I drifted off to sleep a few times. But by later this evening, just sitting at the table, I could feel the sweat beading on my head and my body got super warm. After a few minutes, the hot spell passed but I just felt drained.

Early night tonight but always thankful for God 's grace and mercy. Until tomorrow, have a great night and drink room temperature water.



Day 11: October 23, 2019

Day 11 of 38 days of radiation treatment. Another early arrival. No one was sitting around the table, but all the dressing rooms were taken except one. I decided not to put on my robe too early because I did not want to take anyone's turn. I learned that once I scan in with my id, the techs know that I am there. One of them usually walks out to the round table and lets everyone know what order to go and who should get the next dressing room, if necessary.

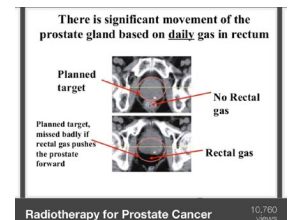
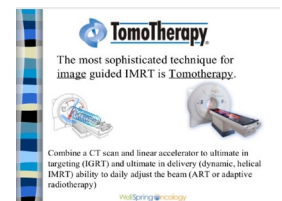
Slowly but surely, the puzzle is coming together. I need to keep busy with it today because I need a distraction from having to use the bathroom before my treatment. One of the things I've learned is that I need to wait until I'm driving to my appointment before drinking my water. I need to take the princess to the pumpkin patch tomorrow so I ask the doctor if I can come in at a different time tomorrow morning. He says sure so I book an earlier time of 6:30am. Not much to talk about today except to say that my body feels different. It will take time to adjust but I will come out on top. There is no other option.



Day 12: October 24, 2019

Day 12 of 38 radiation treatments for prostate cancer. Today started off much differently than other days. I woke up an hour and a half early for a 6:30am appointment so that I could take my daughter on a field trip to the pumpkin patch at 8am.

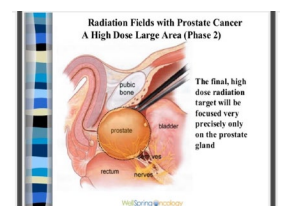
I was surprised that the urology center was open so early, but I guess if you treat over 65 men a day, you need every hour possible. Choice parking was not a problem at all this morning as the parking lot looked like a ghost town (picture 1). I arrived just a few minutes before 6:30 so I went directly to the dressing room. As a matter of fact, as soon as I entered the treatment waiting area, since no one else was there at the time, the radiation therapy tech (Quinton) came right out and said, "Mr. Timothy, when this gentleman comes out, you can go ahead and come right in". I changed into my robe quickly, glanced at the puzzle and then walked in to the "beam" room for my daily dose of radiation. While on the table, I really hoped that I had emptied my bowels enough for them to get a good scan. You see, the day before, when I was on the TomoTherapy machine (see picture 2), they had to abort the treatment because they could see that I had stool in my bowels (see picture 3). I had to get up, use the bathroom, drink more water and wait for some time to pass by for my bladder to get full again. I know that I spoke about the importance of this before but if you look at the last picture, you can see why accuracy is important.



I have a cousin who is a radiation therapy technician who reached out to me on fb messenger a few days ago and shared this rationale with me:

"Drink that water Cuz..the more the better.... here's why....

Allows for more targeted radiation helps protect your rectum, bladder, bowel and fragile healthy tissues with up to 60% less radiation to nearby organs. Probably doesn't make sense but as your bladder expands (when full) surrounding organs are more protected...Targeted treatment to avoid/minimize dose exposure to surrounding organs"



He didn't have to tell me twice. Anyway, everything was a go and the machine did its thing. Since my treatments began, I've never once thought about moving an inch while on the table. That's a good thing because just an 1/16 of an inch can make a big difference.

#puttingthepiecestogether

Everything went smoothly and since today was Thursday, it meant I had to stick around a few minutes to see the doctor for my weekly check in. This allowed me just a few minutes to work on the puzzle. Amazingly, I put together 6 or 7 pieces relatively quickly without much focus. Pieces just came together. Sometimes life is just like that. We have good days when everything just falls into place and we also have our share of bad or more challenging days when we need to work a little harder to overcome the obstacles thrown our way.



After a very short time, I was escorted to a consultation room where a nurse checked my vitals, confirmed how many treatments I had (completed and remaining) and asked what side effects I was feeling. Shortly afterwards, the doctor came in and let me know that my PSA from the blood I gave last week came back at 0.074. From a 27 in December 2018 to a .25 post surgery in June 2019 to a .074, I give God all the glory and all the praise. With 26 treatments to go, I am looking forward to a 0.000 reading.

The journey isn't over yet, but I can start seeing over the horizon. It hasn't been easy, by no means, but James 5:16 says: The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Tomorrow is Friday. Thank God.

Day 13: October 26, 2019

"A Man Possessed"

Day 13 of 38 days of radiation treatment. What can I say about today's visit, I like getting to the urology center early so I can work on the new puzzle. It took a little while for me to walk in once I parked as I finished up a phone call, When I walked into the waiting room today, the whole gang was there around the table. As none of the dressing rooms were available yet, I took a spot around the table facing an upside-down puzzle. Today, I was in a zone. I placed piece after piece in just a few seconds. It's as if I was a "man possessed". At first, I thought that this puzzle would be completed by the time my last treatment came up at the end of November. I don't think that anymore. As you can see, this puzzle will be finished by the end of next week. It's amazing what a group of people with one singular goal can accomplish in a relatively short time. Another life lesson as I think about so many things in my life that would just run a lot smoother with the right team. I can think of one thing that has really been picking up of late. Thanks to a wonderful, passionate, driven youth and young adult pastor, the youth ministry at my church is growing and making major moves under his leadership. He has been a tremendous help in "putting the pieces together". Before, I was putting one piece at a time but now several likeminded individuals are contributing to one major goal.



It's amazing what you learn by talking or collaborating with others. It's a diverse group of guys that come in daily for radiation treatment, but we are a community. One of the guys starts talking about the hot flashes. We all nod in agreement and give our affirmations. I told them that one day during the week while sitting at home, I took off and put on my sweater several times over four hours. One guy quickly said, "that happened to me too" and we all laughed. I learned that I can sleep a little better by leaving one leg out from under the covers at night. Apparently, doing so helps regulate your body temperature.

My time in the "beam" room getting zapped was uneventful. When it was over, I bid the radiation tech team adieu and told them to have a great weekend. Until Monday, I hope you all have a great weekend also.

#puttingthepiecestogether

Day 14: October 29, 2019

“How do you eat an elephant?”

Day 14 of 38 radiation treatments is complete. Monday visits are a little strange after not going in for two days over the weekend. It seemed like a big reunion today as I walked into the big table in the waiting area. The techs were a little behind and one new guy joined our group, so it was a little busier than usual. Six of us sitting or standing around the table talking as if we had known each other for a long time. We made jokes about getting zapped, being able to glow in the dark from the radiation, getting superpowers like the Hulk after he was hit by the gamma radiation rays.

Making progress on the puzzle. It seems like more guys are working on this puzzle throughout the day than on the previous puzzle. I said it before, but this puzzle will be completed this week. I average about ten pieces per visit. I probably did about fourteen today though.

I arrived a little closer to my actual scheduled time of 8:50am today because I went home after dropping off the princess to try to use the bathroom one last time before heading to the clinic. The last time they told me I had to empty my bowel after already being on the table, it was a big letdown. No one wants to be here longer than we need to.

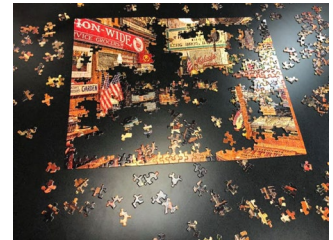
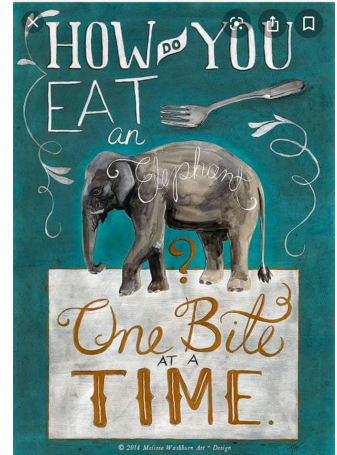
Good news!! The man I affectionately call “Navy” has his last treatment on Thursday. I asked him what he will do to celebrate. He said he did not think about it, but he had been counting down the days on his calendar.

Usually, I just drift off into a blank state of consciousness while listening to the music during my four-minute treatment. Today, however, my mind raced as I thought about how many treatments I had left. The end still seems so far off. I remember back in the summer when my urologist and surgeon first told me he recommended I get the radiation treatments and how many, it was like Mike Tyson hit me with an uppercut. I had no real reaction but deep down inside, I was floored. On that table though, I reminded myself of that old question. “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.”

How do you finish a 500-piece puzzle? One piece at a time.

How do you finish a marathon? One step at a time.

How do you finish radiation treatments? One day at a time.



Day 15: October 29, 2019

“Cherish”

Day 15 of 38 radiation treatments is complete and I feel pretty good. I can't wait to get to the halfway point next week. Then I can truly say that it's all downhill.

I stopped at home to fill up on water before heading to my appointment. By the time I got there, I had ten minutes until my appointment. When I walked in today, most of the guys were there. I'm so amazed at how much progress is being made in the puzzle. I think the hardest parts are left but I'm still pretty confident that it will be completed by the weekend.

Sometimes I doubt myself, but validation and affirmation go a long way in curbing doubt. Unbeknownst to me, one of the men noticed how focused I was on the puzzle and how I found pieces from across the table and placed them with seeming ease. He told another guy “that fella is really smart. I've watched him pick up a piece and find where it goes out of nowhere”. I look at this group of guys from all walks of life and how, right at this table, stereotypes are being broken.

“Navy” walked in later and everyone said hello to him. I patted him on the shoulder and said, “two more days”. He smiled and said “I know it. I'm ready”.

I was at peace on the table today. I guess it was mostly due to knowing there wouldn't be any reason to postpone the treatment. The song that was playing today was “Cherish” by Madonna. I immediately started thinking about the 80's as a young Madonna made her impact on the music scene around this time. I listened to the words while the radiation machine whizzed and clicked and sent beams to my body. I thought about the things I cherished the most in my life. I'm so thankful to not be alone in my fight against this terrible disease. My wife has been an amazing partner and I can't say enough about my friends; many whom I have known for over 40 years. Others that I have known for less. But the prayers and support and outpouring of love has been all that and then some.

I have always believed that it is important to be nice to people and treat them with respect. “The harder you work for something, the greater you'll feel when you achieve it”. Judge Caprio

Until tomorrow, please remember to tell the men in your life to go to the doctor.

Day 16: October 30, 2019

“Blessed”

Day 16 of 38 days of radiation treatments is in the books. I had a string of days where I would go in early but the last few days, I've found myself going home first to make sure I didn't need to use the bathroom. I just fear getting on the table and then being told that they have to try again later. After not having to use the bathroom and filling my bladder with water, I headed out to my new normal. I pulled up into the parking lot and was able to get premium parking. I've seen the “Reserved for Radiation Patients Only” sign on previous visits but today I thought about its meaning a little more. Many of the men that come to the urology center come for a variety of reasons but those that have radiation therapy needs a little more priority due to the number of men that are scheduled to get treatment throughout the day from as early as 6:30am.

It rained a lot today and I could tell that the rain made some of the guys late. When I walked into the room, the dressing room which we call the “palace” was available and no one was sitting around the table waiting. We call it the palace because it is the larger of the dressing rooms. I went in to put on my robe but after taking off my shoes in the room, I heard one of the guys arrive in the waiting area. I peeped my head out the door and realized that it was one of the guys that is scheduled to get treatment before me. I put my shoes and jacket back on and let him get the room. After all, by letting him go first, it would allow me more time to work on the puzzle. I truly believe that God has a purpose for everyone. My focus on completing this puzzle this week is contagious as more of the guys in this morning group are taking the time to contribute. As you can see in the pictures, we are getting close to finishing. After I got my treatment, I got dressed and went back around the “round table” to work on the puzzle. By the time I finished saying “just one more piece”, I successfully placed another eleven pieces. If I didn't remember that I had another appointment, I probably would have stayed another ten minutes.

Tomorrow is “Navy's” last day. He still had not thought about what he is going to do to celebrate. I told him that he better not forget that he was done after tomorrow by showing up on Friday. I thought to myself that under normal circumstances, I probably would never have spoken to him.

While around the table today, we started talking about how many treatments we had left. We determined that after another 7-10 days, many of the guys in this group would graduate and I would become the new “leader”. I must admit that while extremely happy that these guys will soon be able to put this behind them, I am going to miss them. I will do my best to carry the torch.

In the midst of it all, I don't know what I have done to deserve all the positive things that have been happening, but I am truly “blessed”. Yesterday, I mentioned how I was thankful for all the prayers and support from everyone. But left and right, people have been extending so much kindness and generosity towards me with “extra” gifts. I am humbled by the love bestowed on me.

I pray that the radiation treatments continue to be specifically targeted to the right areas. Until now, the side effects I've experienced are a little fatigue and hot and cold flashes. However, I can't tell if my need to use the bathroom more frequently at night is a result of my drinking more water at night or a side effect of the radiation. I'll get answers tomorrow since it will be Thursday. Thursday's are check in with the doctor says.

Be extra nice to someone today and remember that you are loved.

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Day 17: November 1, 2019

“Bittersweet”

Day 17 of 38 days of radiation treatment is over but was “bittersweet”. My emotions were all over the place upon my arrival this morning. It started off with me getting here much later than normal but I wasn’t too stressed about that because I was sure only a few pieces of the puzzle would remain. When I pushed open the double doors to our waiting area, I saw one of the guys sitting at the table smiling. He said, “there he is” as I walked in. He told me that only one piece remained, but he couldn’t figure out where it went. Then he picked up his blue bag and headed to one of the vacant dressing rooms to get changed. Now this particular gent usually arrives after I do but today, he was here before me. I am pretty sure that he strategically “saved” the last piece for me knowing how invested I was in its completion. Now sitting at the table alone, I looked over the puzzle, amazed at how much was completed in such a relatively short amount of time (see picture). I picked up the last lone piece and placed it right in the middle of the puzzle. It is finished.



A minute or two later, he came out of the dressing room with his robe on ready to go back to the radiation room when it was ready. With a smirk he asked if I was able to find out where the last piece went. Sarcastically, I told him, it was a little difficult, but I finally figured it out.

A dressing room soon became available but just as I was going to take it, Mr. S (name redacted) walked in. We are both scheduled for 8:50 so I told him to go ahead and take the room; that I wasn’t in any rush since it was Thursday anyway. On Thursdays after treatment, we all meet with the doctor overseeing our radiation therapy to discuss how things are progressing and what changes may be occurring as a result of the radiation.

I wore a long sleeve black shirt today with the Iron Tribe logo on the sleeves and back. One of the guys that eventually came and sat around the table asked me if I was an Iron Triber. (Iron Tribe) is a set of gyms that you can become a member of and participate in some pretty hard-core circuit workouts over a 45-minute window. I told him that I used to but stopped going some time ago.

After my treatment was over, I got dressed and waited to be taken to the dr. Before doing so, my weight was taken. Since my surgery, I had lost about 8 pounds but over the last two weeks, it had started to slowly go back up as the hormones have affected my metabolism. I kind of like the slimmer me so I’ll definitely be managing my weight going forward.

I finally got shown to a room to meet with Dr. L (name redacted). Now this is the doctor who I originally consulted with well after my surgery to remove my prostate. I was referred to him by my urologist and surgeon once it was recommended that I get the radiation treatments. As I stated before, we meet with one of two Doctors each Thursday after our treatment. They take turns each week so that both are aware of our individual situations. 17 treatments in and three Thursdays in, this was my first visit with Dr. L due to him not being available on the Thursday I should have seen him. He perused my file, asked me how I was feeling. I told him that up until last weekend, I was sleeping thru the night and not having to use the bathroom until I woke up. Now, however, I’ve had to get up two to three times a night. He said that we knew about halfway thru the treatments that that was one of the side effects that might become a factor. The bladder muscles are just not as strong as before. I said if that’s all I have to deal with, I’m cool with that. He asked about my energy levels and I said that since I’m

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home (temporarily), I try to stay active but for the most part, I just sit around throughout the day. He asked about my shirt also and said that he used to be a member of the “tribe” and recommended that I do a little exercise every day to help get my energy back up. Thinking back to my previous life, I was reminded of my previous passion to work out and I thought that was a missing piece of my current life. Truth be told, I looked forward to working out again vigorously but a feared potential hernia as a result of my surgery derailed those plans. I haven’t had the pain or discomfort for several weeks so I will attempt some very light exercises to help stay active and build up my energy to combat the side effects. One thing I have learned throughout this process is that I have a pretty high tolerance level to pain.

I forgot to mention that “Navy” came in after I got my treatment. More of the guys were around the table by then. It was fitting that in his last day of treatment, he was able to get the “palace” for his dressing room. I congratulated him on getting thru the radiation treatments, wished him well and shook his hand. It was so bittersweet to see him go.

Until tomorrow, think about how much you have to be grateful for. Give a loved one a hug and keep pressing on.

Day 18: November 3, 2019

New Challenges

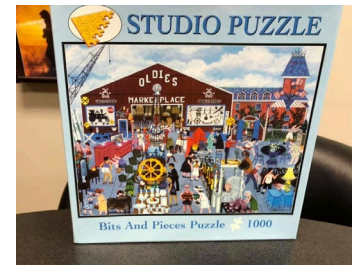
Day 18 of 38 days of radiation treatments is over. One more day before I hit the halfway point. I was so glad to walk in and see a new puzzle but wow!! 1000 pieces. The two puzzles I’ve worked on since getting my treatments have both been 500 pieces. The techs said that we finished them so quickly that they must not have been challenging enough.

I guess sometimes in life, we are faced with new things that are more challenging than things in our past. We become complacent and tend to forget the help we got to get us through previous challenges or obstacles.

All of the guys slowly came in and seemed interested in working together to complete this puzzle.

After getting zapped, I got changed and went back to work on the puzzle. We all spent more time working on the puzzle and talking about our predicaments. Having to use the bathroom more frequently due to the radiation. Night sweats from the hormone therapy. One of the vets shared his advice on foods to eat to stay regular. It was oddly a good time of fellowship before we each went our own way.

Of course, I couldn’t leave without setting the foundation for getting the puzzle completed. One of the guys that has been there from before I started coming even said that he would bring his glasses next week so that he could help put the pieces together. Many of the guys will be graduating this week so we must get as much done as possible.



Day 19: November 4, 2019

“Oh, we’re halfway there. Oh, we’re living on a prayer”. ~ Bon Jovi

Day 19 of 38 days of radiation treatment. I’ve been waiting for this day for it seems like a long time. Today marks the halfway point of my radiation treatments. I’m glad to finally be at this point but I must admit I’m not happy about 19 more days of radiation to my body. Early on, I could not tell any difference but over the last week and a half, I just haven’t felt myself. I know my body. I still feel strong, but I can tell that my body is different internally.

I talked awhile to some of the guys around the round table today while working on our new puzzle. Several newbies started today so we gave them the rundown. One guy is new to the group but not new to the treatments. He said this is his second round of radiation treatments. He had his prostate removed 9 or 10 years ago then had 25 radiation treatments a few years later. However, after having his PSA levels checked every 6 months, his physician discovered the cancer cells were showing in another area as his PSA levels started increasing. So now he has to do a second round of ten treatments. I guess one of the reasons why it was good for me to do this now shortly after having my prostate removed in June is to help ensure I won’t have to deal with this again 10 or 20 years from now.

This week will be a tough week as most of my group will be finishing up between Thursday and next Tuesday. I slowly see my role changing as time passes and I open up more to the guys. Now I become more of the elder statesmen helping the newbies feel more comfortable about the process, sharing side effect stories and making playful fun of ourselves.

This puzzle is really challenging. I found myself staying longer than usual to put some pieces together. I felt like I underperformed today. However, tomorrow is a new day. Another opportunity to become whole.



Day 20: November 6, 2019

Day 20 of 38 radiation treatments is over and I must say this; men, if you are 40 plus and have not had your PSA levels checked, do it before the year is over. If you are 40 plus and have had your PSA level checked and it’s above 5 but the doctor hasn’t recommended next steps, go get a second opinion. Prostate cancer is a slowly developing disease but if you let it get out of control, you will limit your medical treatment choices later.

After my treatment today, I stayed behind about 45 minutes because I had to make progress on this very challenging puzzle. One of the radiation techs said, “Mr. Timothy, you’re not going to let the puzzle get the best of you, huh?” I said, “No sir”. Like this puzzle, I’m going to beat cancer into the ground.

I could say more but I’m tired. Keep fighting everyone. The battle is not yours. It’s the Lord’s.



Day 21: November 7, 2019

“Slow progress is still progress”

Day 21 of 38 days of radiation treatments is in the books. I really can't wait for this to be over. I just keep thinking about all this daily radiation and the effects on my body. While the side effects are minimal at the time, I don't doubt that over the years, my internal organs may be affected somehow.

My dad was diagnosed with prostate cancer many years ago. He chose to bypass surgery because back then it was open surgery vs robotic laparoscopic robotic surgery. He chose the radiation seeds and since it wasn't as precise as the technology that is available today, he has suffered over the years with “damaged” organs. While my condition was not the result of unhealthy living, I do hope that it is a wakeup call to everyone to take care of their bodies by watching what you are eating and drinking.

Slowly making progress on this difficult puzzle. That's how these daily radiation treatments feel. But slow progress is still progress. Remember that when trying to reach whatever goals you have in life. If you are trying to lose weight after years of eating too much or eating the wrong foods, remember that you didn't gain the extra pounds overnight, so you won't lose them all overnight either. But you have to put in the work every day. Each day will bring you closer to your goal.



Day 22: November 8, 2019

“By Any Means Necessary”

Day 22 of 38 days of radiation treatment brought me one day closer to the end. At first it didn't look like this puzzle would ever get completed but every piece that is placed makes it that much easier to find another piece. I had an epiphany today. It's something that I noticed before but had not put two and two together until today.

So, I'm extremely focused when working on the puzzle; more than any of the other guys. “M” would always stand around the table with me and we would make a lot of progress together but today is his last day. I congratulated him on getting thru this and wished him well. I'm really going to miss him. I heard him say that he works nearby so when I put the last piece of this puzzle in, I'm going to mount it and gift it to him. Anyway, when I work on the puzzle, I hold the box to look at the picture closely to find where to put the pieces. I have a lot more success than the guys that stand/sit around trying to figure it out on their own. For me, looking at the picture and holding up individual pieces against the overall picture is like opening the Bible, following God's instruction and finding the answers to living an abundant and “complete” life. Yeah, it's possible to do some things without direction but think about all the times you went one way when you should have gone another. Could you have gotten there sooner and made less missteps?

Thursday is doctor day so after my treatment I had to stay behind to meet with him to answer some questions on how I was feeling so far. I could tell that I've been feeling a little different the last few days and one of the side effects is having to go to the bathroom more often.

The doctor said that the radiation causes a little swelling at bladder which leads to not emptying bladder out fully and thus having to go more frequently. I could get medication for it if it gets bad. But I think I'll manage for now as I was

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never fond of drugs/medication. For now, I'll keep doing my Kegel exercises. They were very helpful after having my prostate removed and allowed me to regain full control of my bladder shortly after getting my catheter removed. As you can see, the puzzle is coming together. I've never completed a 1000-piece puzzle before, but I will complete this one by any means necessary.

Day 23: November 10, 2019

"Goals"

Day 23 of 38 days of radiation treatment. Today is graduation day for two more guys from the group today. That makes four this week. The bond that we have created in such a short time is special. I'm happy that they have pushed through but will miss our jovial and informed conversations.

Like any other day, I waited for a dressing room to become available and changed into my robe. I had a little more pep in my step this day; a little extra confidence. I felt as if I did a pretty good job making sure the techs would get a clear picture of the treatment area today. This allowed me to be more relaxed than usual and just drift into a state of peaceful euphoria. Before the song that was playing was over, the machine stopped whirring and the table slid me back out to the world.

I had no other errands to run this morning and while wanting to spend more time on the puzzle, I also wanted to say goodbye to the two graduates who were scheduled after me. When they were finished, I shook their hands, patted them on the back and wished them well. That's when I noticed that one of them had on a hat that he did not have on when he arrived. It was given to him when he exited the radiation treatment room and simply said, "I Survived".

Week by week. Day by day. Piece by piece. Treatment by treatment. My goal is to get my very own cap to wear proudly one day soon. I will shout at the top of my lungs... I Survived!



Day 24: November 12, 2019

"Always be grateful"

Day 24 of 38 days of radiation treatment for prostate cancer and we are starting to pick up speed as we get nearer to the end. 13 more treatments to go and I can't wait. I definitely need to be extra focused if this puzzle is going to be completed before my last day. Another of the guys from my group will be graduating tomorrow. With new people coming in the last few days to fill in the vacancies, I have noticed that the newbies aren't into puzzles. Hopefully some of the guys in the afternoon take up the slack. Sometimes, that's how life goes. You get used to certain people always being there to chip in but sometimes you just have to go it alone. And that's ok.

Today I learned that there is always someone else who is going through something much more challenging than you are. I got to talking to some of the new guys today. One is on his second round of radiation therapy because his PSA levels started to go back up. He said that the first time around, the radiation caused him to have diarrhea for over a year. Another guy had to have emergency open heart surgery about halfway through his radiation treatments. Another guy has to get hormone shots for the next two years. That's two more years of hot flashes, mood swings, etc. I certainly don't envy him. I will always be grateful. A few more pieces of the puzzle completed today but so much more to go.



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Day 25: November 13, 2019

“A picture speaks a thousand words.”

Day 25 of 38 days of radiation treatments. What can I say about today? It's a totally different vibe as only one guy remains from when I first started my radiation treatments. It's interesting to see new guys coming in with a certain look of fear of the unknown, a little uneasiness and un-comfortability. While not a big conversationalist, I take the time to welcome each one and give them a brief rundown of what to expect on their visit today.

Today I arrived shortly before my appointment time, so I quickly change and prepare to be called to the room. Afterwards, I got dressed and spent significant time working on the puzzle and meeting new members of the club. What can I say except that a picture speaks a thousand words? Getting close to the end.



Day 26: November 14, 2019

“Before and After”

Day 26 of 38 days of radiation treatments means that I have it two-thirds of the way. I can't begin to verbalize how excited I am to put this chapter in my life to bed. I know that I said this before, but I recall when the doctor first told me that he was recommending radiation therapy for me. That in itself was a shock. Then when he told me that it would be 38 treatments for 5 days a week, I was floored. That was before. This is after.

There are a complete different set of dynamics now that several guys from the original group have “graduated”. I walked into the waiting area about twenty minutes early and was greeted upon entry by one of the techs (K) to go ahead, get dressed and come on in.

I said my morning greetings to my techs for the day (E and K), checked in on the machine, laid down on the table, raised my legs for the leg pillow, had my body aligned to the machine and got my daily dose of radiation.

Afterwards, I got dressed and got right to work on the puzzle. My observation is that with many of the original crew gone, a few new guys in the rotation and the difficulty level of this particular puzzle, there aren't many guys working on the puzzle during the day. I can tell on the looks of some of the guys that they are new to this particular journey and a little uneasy. Some barely utter a word. I think back to how I must have been on my first day. That was before. This is after.

While the puzzle has served as my coping medium, a few of the guys have found commonality around sports or growing up in Birmingham or serving in the military as the way to more easily accept this new reality. The conversations are fun, enlightening, entertaining and sometimes educational.

Anyway, after working on the puzzle for two hours today (time sure does fly working on puzzles), I have no doubt that it will be complete in four days or less. When I first saw the puzzle, it seemed impossible. That was before. This is after.



*note: look at the before treatment and after treatment pictures. 38 pieces today

Day 27: November 15, 2019

“11.....”

Day 27 of 38 days of radiation treatments. It is taking a while for me to get used to the guys from my regular group not being there anymore after having finished their treatments. It appears that many of their time slots have not been filled yet. Every day this week when I walk in, I am greeted either by an empty room or one guy. Today, I noticed two vacant dressing rooms. I chose the “palace” today only since it was the closest one to me at the time. And just like the day before, within a few seconds I was able to walk right into the radiation treatment room.

I could probably sleepwalk into this room and complete my treatment for as many of these that I have done so far. I realized that after today, I only have ten more treatments to go.

When the treatment is over, I get dressed and assume the position over the puzzle table. Yesterday, I remember telling everyone that the puzzle should be finished in four more days. It looks like I misspoke. This puzzle could easily be finished today. Some of the guys watch me while telling their stories. My focus is impenetrable. After studying this puzzle for so long, I pick up a piece and immediately know where it should go. Piece after piece gets placed in a matter of seconds until my knees start to ache from standing so long. It’s not about 40 minutes since I got my treatment. I stretch for a few seconds and then have to take off my sweater because of the sudden hot flash. Winter is going to be rough for me having to take my sweater on and off during the days. I will grin and bear it though because I can’t help but think about the homeless who wish they had a sweater to put on. As a matter of fact, I know that I have some sweatshirts that I can giveaway to my church’s homeless ministry this weekend.

Well, if you look at the picture, the puzzle is almost complete, three days earlier than I predicted. I decide to leave the pieces of the sky/clouds so the afternoon crew could finish it. Stay tuned.

Remember 1 in 7 men have prostate cancer. Fellas, have you gone to the doctor to check your PSA? Ladies, have you encouraged/pushed/prodded the men in your lives to go to the doctor?



Day 28: November 18, 2019

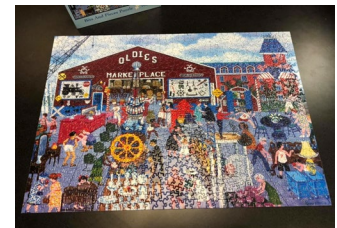
“10 more...”

Day 28 of 38 days of radiation therapy treatments is over. That means only 9 more days of radiation. As I write this recap, I can't help but wonder about the long-term effects of the radiation on my body. I realize that it is not natural at all and after all is said and done, I'm going to do my best to make sure the health message is spread to all that I know. It certainly won't guarantee that we won't get sick, but it will definitely help.

When I arrived a few minutes before my scheduled treatment, I fully expect that the puzzle would be completed. To my surprise, only half of the pieces were completed. Another 25 or so pieces remained. While near the end, it seemed that these remaining pieces were harder than the rest of the puzzle. No one was here when I arrived so I could easily have gotten undressed for treatment however the three slices of pizza I had the night before finally made its passage and I needed to end its journey prior to treatment so that the techs could get a clear picture of the treatment area when they scan my body so as not to cause damage or minimize effects of radiation to the surrounding organs, nerves or tissues. Since I also partially emptied my bladder, I had to delay my treatment for about 15 minutes and drink several ounces of water to allow my bladder to get full again.

While I work on the puzzle for a few minutes, a few guys arrive and get prepped for their treatment. They all ask if I have finished yet. Two stand over the table with me to help complete it. Piece by piece, we finally make connections. Working together to finish this very challenging puzzle makes the task more meaningful, rewarding and exciting. I can't help but countdown the number of pieces that remain after we find another match. The comparison to our helping each other get thru this chapter in our lives is chilling. We finally make it to one last piece, and I tell the guys that we are going to save the last piece for one of the guys. His name is “B” and he is partially blind. He started the treatments around the same time I did but since I usually left a few minutes after my treatments early in the process, I never saw him. In the last few weeks of staying behind for 30-60 minutes, I have seen him more often. I felt it was only right to give him an opportunity to share in our triumph.

Today was a very good day. 10 more days to go for my own personal victory.



Day 29: November 19, 2019

“New challenge”

Day 29 of 38 days of radiation treatments. Coming in for treatments on Monday mornings always a little aura of uncertainty as to what the day will bring. I seem to get into a little rhythm during the week coming in one day after the other and developing a routine. The weekend certainly fosters a welcome break, both mentally and physically.

Upon arrival today, I’m greeted by two of the radiation therapy techs (E and K). Unfortunately, I’ve spoiled the surprise that they have for me. They were in the middle of removing the complete puzzle that we finished last week. They are going to frame it for me and gift it to me to acknowledge how hard I worked on it. I’m taken back by the kind gesture on their part. It makes me think about my last day coming in for radiation therapy. The sheer joy of completing the “marathon” will be overwhelming. Saying goodbye to this wonderful team of techs will also be overwhelming.

Getting my treatment for the day goes without a hitch. I did notice that after lying on the table and getting aligned with the machine, that it appeared that they raised the table a little higher than usual. I think that because of where I am in the process, they might be attacking the treatment area at a slightly different angle as I near the end of this journey. I will ask my doctor on doctor day (Thursday for the morning patients).

Over the course of this journey, I have been inundated with messages of love and support and prayers. I’ve been showered with gifts and encouragement and praise for my positive attitude. I’ve even been given a few puzzles to donate to the urology center. Since I have completed my treatment (early) for the day, I quickly decide to drive back home and bring one of those puzzles back. It’s time for a new challenge for the newbies and the vets like me.

Until tomorrow, remember this.... “It’s nice to be important but it is more important to be nice”.

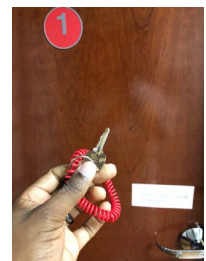
Day 30: November 20, 2019

Day 30 of 38 days of radiation. No major changes to report but I have noticed that the hot flashes are building up in frequency and intensity. To think that I will get another three-month hormone shot in a few weeks is not something I want to dwell on. I will have to dig deep and push through.

Things have certainly changed as many of the regulars have graduated. I arrive early today and am greeted by an empty room and all three dressing rooms available. I choose room number one (the palace) to prepare for the morning treatment. Quite confident that I am fully prepared for the treatment, I walk into the radiation room, as if on autopilot, and get my daily dose of radiation beams.

After it’s over, I tell the team goodbye and that I will see them tomorrow. I say hello to two of the guys standing around the table waiting for their turn and then I head to the palace to get dressed. I’m one more day closer to finishing this marathon (more on that in a subsequent post).

I make significant progress on the new puzzle. My new strategy involves a significant amount of preparation. I sort out the all of the pieces by color or hue, plan what parts of the puzzle I will work on and then focus on the task at hand. Seems like a pretty good strategy for life.



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Day 31: November 21, 2019

“Blessings”

Day 31 of 38 days of radiation treatment. It appears as if any new radiation therapy patients are scheduling their daily appointments for either late morning or afternoon. I choose a dressing room and once done changing; I head to the treatment room after being called in by one of the techs (K). I exchange pleasantries with today’s crew and after a few minutes pass, I bid them adieu, get dressed and begin to work on the puzzle.

Little progress has been made but I’m not surprised. This puzzle is more than challenging. I decide it’s time to implement the strategy. Although time consuming, the only way this puzzle is going to get completed is if the puzzle pieces are sorted by color or hue. I take out all the sky pieces, then trees and finally the castles. It’s like this cancer process. Very overwhelming at the beginning but once you start laying out the strategy for addressing it and conquering it, the load becomes a lot more manageable. About thirty minutes later, everything is now sorted, and it becomes a lot easier to complete the puzzle border. (See before and after pictures). While all of this is going on, some of the “guys” come in for the scheduled appointments and we all talk around the table. We converse about this journey we are all on, how many treatments we have left, if we had surgery or not, Alabama football, Alabama quarterback Tua and his unfortunate situation and a few other things.

I ask one gentleman (Mr. W) what he has planned for the rest of the day. He stated that he will head into the office. By this time, he had already received his treatment for the day but stuck around a few minutes afterwards (like some of us do) to talk with new friends and decompress before heading back out into the outside world. He asks me the same and I let him know that I will just head home since I don’t have any errands to run today and that I am currently out of work. I briefly tell the guys about my 24-year background in sales and that I lost my job in a corporate restructure in February. Through it all, the timing behind finding out about the cancer diagnosis, then finding out about the job, then getting the biopsy in March, surgery in June, markers implanted and hormone shot in August and starting radiation treatments in October, has been nothing short of a blessing. I don’t see how I would have been able to manage it all and still be productive. Mr. W gets ready to leave but before doing so, he tells me, “when this is over, let’s talk. I could use a guy with your mentality and demeanor and not just because you are good at puzzles”. I was floored I have always tried to treat others the way I would want to be. I can remember the voice of my mom instilling the golden rule in me.

Shortly after this, the brother of a church friend of mine walks in (now a friend of mine) and we chat for a second. He mentions that he did not see me yesterday and I tell him that I did not stay long after my treatment yesterday because I was hungry but mostly because I wasn’t at a point where I could really get into the puzzle. He tells me that he had been looking for a Dallas Cowboys puzzle to buy for me on Amazon yesterday but there were so many to choose from. He decided to just give me the money to choose one I really liked and purchase it myself. The gospel song “Blessings” by Anthony Brown immediately jumped in my head. Every time I turn around, blessings. Blessings.



Once done putting the border together and a few more of the inside pieces, I say goodbye and head out for the day. I achieved my goal for the day and can move forward. Always give glory and honor to God for we are just mere mortals. Everything good comes from Him. Be nice to someone today. Smile and be a blessing to them. Signing off for today.

Day 32: November 22, 2019

“Technology”

Day 32 of 38 days of radiation therapy treatments.

When I arrive this morning, all three rooms are available and “Q” tells me “when you put on your robe Mr. Timothy, you can come on back”. I take room number 3 today, just because. I get dressed (undressed) quickly; Shoes off, pants off, robe on; and head to the room.

I’ve always wanted to see the scans of my body during the radiation treatment so today, I ask if it is possible for them to take a picture for me. Instead, they ask if I want a video. Of course, I said yes.

Technology is something else. This urology center is one of the top four in the nation and I am so thankful to have been referred here after my diagnosis. I’m also very thankful for this great team of radiation therapy technicians. They are caring, thorough, personable and just all around awesome. I will “never” forget them.

Day 33: November 26, 2019

“Surprise”

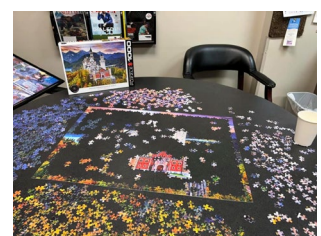
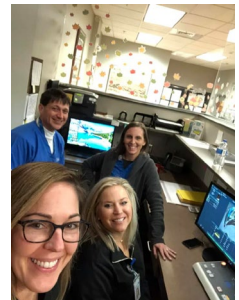
Day 33 of 38 days of radiation is over. Wow! This morning, I had to make a stop at home to use the bathroom before heading in for treatment. I still get there about 20 minutes early and all three dressing rooms are available again. By now, it’s all a thoughtless routine. Take key off door and unlock it. Take off blue backpack. Take off jacket and hang it up. Take off sneakers. Take off pants and hang them up. Put on robe and tie the belt. Put key around wrist and exit room.

As I exit the room, I believe “E” tells me to come on back and as I round the corner to walk into the treatment room, the team surprises me with the puzzle that the guys and I finished several days prior. Remember that I had told them to save this one for me to get framed. Well they saw how long I stayed after my treatments each day and were kind enough to surprise me by having it framed for me.

The radiation therapy staff here at Urology Centers of Alabama are simply amazing. I am beyond grateful for this gesture. My original plan was to give this puzzle to Mr. E; one of the guys that finished his race a few weeks ago. We became close as we both put in time working on this puzzle.

Anyway, I still have the current puzzle to work on and only a few days left before I cross my finish line. With a little help from JM (one of the guys running the same race), I make major progress by completing the red part of the castle.

It’s Friday and I have several things to do today for church, so after a few brief conversations with the guys that come in, I take a few chocolate goodies that someone brought in and head to the door.



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Day 34: November 27, 2019

“Not giving up”

Day 34 of 38 days of beam radiation therapy treatments. If it weren't for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday, today would be the beginning of my final week of beam radiation therapy treatment. However, the Urology Center is closed on Thursday and Friday and I will be headed out of town on Wednesday. So tomorrow and three days next week and it's all over.

I'm not giving up on this puzzle. I'll be back to finish it.



Day 35: November 28, 2019

“Bada Bing. Bada bang”.

Day 35 of 38 days of beam radiation therapy treatments is over. I have a long break before my last three. I really wanted to come in tomorrow and not miss a day but it's important that we get on the road very early in the morning.

Like most mornings the last two weeks, I arrive to an empty room and all three dressing rooms available. I get ready for my daily dose of radiation and head to the treatment area. While on the table and after the techs align my body to the scanner, I realize that I have not fully relaxed and my hips are tense. I relax and the techs make the appropriate readjustments.

Bada Bing bada bang. About four minutes later and I'm ready to go.

Today, two guys graduate and received their going away gift. I'm so happy for them. I gave a sympathy card to Mr. W because he told me a few days before that his mom had passed away. Going thru this and having a death in your family is too much for anyone to bear. I'll be praying for him.

A great reminder to be extra thankful for all that we have. Happy Thanksgiving everyone!!



Day 36: November 29, 2019

“Hot Now”

Day 36 of 38 beam radiation therapy treatments is complete. Still no new guys to fill the open times ahead of me so I get prepped for treatment and walk into the treatment room. I feel very confident about today’s treatment because I made sure I did everything necessary to keep my bladder full and my bowels empty. It’s becoming harder to keep bladder full for long. Over the holiday break, it seemed like anything I drank went straight to my bladder. I’ll be so happy when this is over.

When the treatment was over, I got dressed and went to the round table to make some progress on the puzzle. This one really is challenging especially since it appears that not many people are working on it throughout the day.

I notice two newbies that enter the room, so I introduce myself to them and kind of let them know what to expect. Some of the regulars come in during this time. I introduce them and the new guys are welcomed to our group with the regular joking around and talk about sports and life.

One of the regulars talks about how prevalent prostate cancer is among African American male and states that he read that prostate cancer can be likely found in at least 95% of African American men over the course of their lifetime. I don’t know how true this is but when I look at a room full of men in the main waiting room each day and the fact that ~65 men come thru these doors for beam radiation therapy every day and that 5 of the 6 of us in this room right now are African American speaks volumes.

I’ve made significant progress today by completing about fifteen pieces. Just as I was getting ready to leave for the day, one of my friends comes in with two boxes of Krispy Kreme donuts. What a pleasant surprise. I grab one to eat and the donut literally melted. I tell “B” that he must have bought these with the “Hot Now” light on. He lets me know that tomorrow is his last day (we were supposed to finish on the same day but since I missed a day last week, I’m one day behind. I congratulate him early and tell him that I will see him for lunch one day soon.

It is obvious that I won’t finish this puzzle in two days, but I will continue coming until it is finished.



Day 37: December 2, 2019

"The setup"

Day 37 of 38 days of beam radiation therapy for prostate cancer is over. One more day to go and the marathon will be completed.

I was a little restless last night. Almost how I was the night before my surgery, the night before getting the gold markers implanted and the night before my first day of radiation treatments. I'm sure most of the restlessness was due to having to use the bathroom more frequently at night after all of the effects of radiation on my bladder and also the frequent and intense hot flashes. However, I remembered that I would be getting the second three-month hormone shot today. The memory of getting the first shot triggered my apprehension as well as the hot flashes side effects which have been very annoying and mentally and physically draining.

Anyway, I arrive to the urology center around my normal time; about twenty-five minutes before my scheduled time. I choose room number 3 today as I did yesterday even though the other two dressing rooms including the "palace" was available. I'm saving the palace for my reward on my last day.

I go to the treatment room for my second to last dose of radiation but with a little less confidence. I had not used the bathroom in the last twelve hours so I'm a little nervous that they might have to delay the treatment until I am able to do so. I don't feel as if I have to go so, I just say a quick prayer that the treatment will proceed as planned. About a minute later, I hear the usual clicking sound and the table does a short shift. The machine starts buzzing and the beam of radiation shoots through my body. Whew. The radiation treatment had only been delayed three times before and it was sort of a letdown. So, I was happy to be able to proceed with no hiccups.

Before walking into the waiting area, the nurse reminded me about getting my hormone shot after the radiation treatment was over. I joked with her that I thought she would forget about it. After my treatment was over, I changed back into my clothes and worked a little on the puzzle. One of the techs if I was trying to delay getting my shot. I smiled and said, I'm going.

I leave the waiting room to go to the nurse's station where she takes me to the room and tells me she will be back once she prepares my hormone cocktail. I have actually gotten pretty good about needles (blood taken, IV drips) but the memory of those biopsy needles and the first hormone shot is what had me on edge. I take some deep breaths while in the room while slowing my heart rate down and internally repeating my woo-sahs. By this point, I am completely relaxed. The nurse comes in and I mistakenly look at the needle. Oh boy! This is going to be rough. I force myself to remain calm, lower my pants and assume the position over the table. When I tell you that I barely felt the needle, that is an understatement. By far, the best shot I have ever received. No flinch. No grimace. No nothing. I thank the nurse for doing a great job because I barely felt a thing. She said it's because she's a pro. I laugh and then head back to the room to work on the puzzle some more and talk to some of the regulars while they wait for their treatments; after all, tomorrow is my last day.

I work on the puzzle for quite some time. I keep looking at my watch because I know that this is the longest time, I have stayed behind but I was determined to finish the parts of this challenging puzzle that had the castles and connect them all together.



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A few of the guys, including some newbies, talk amongst each other while I put down piece after piece.

“Q” calls out from the back and says, “Mr. X, you can come on back when the gentleman comes out”. I look at one of the guys sitting down and ask him “Are you Mr. X? My name is Wendell Timothy. You see, I know his family and come to find out, he had read some of my posts and they helped him with this process. Had I not stayed behind as long as I did, I would not have met Mr. X. We shook hands and he went in for his treatment.

If you look at the picture and the video of the puzzle, I did some damage today. After reaching my goal and then some (about twenty pieces), I call it a day so I can head to the Starbuck’s in Target and treat myself to a slice of banana bread.

Before leaving, I tell the guys that now that the castles are done and connected, the best way to finish this puzzle is to separate the remaining pieces even more. We/I need to separate the tree pieces from the leaf pieces and the mountain pieces from the sky pieces; also separating the leaves by the various colors (red, yellow, green). Taking the time to do this tomorrow won’t bring the puzzle closer to completion but “the setup” will make it a lot easier for others to finish the puzzle.

I can’t help but think how life situations are very similar. We reach a crossroad in life and don’t know which direction to go. So, what do we do? We use various resources to help us go in the right direction and reach our destination in a timely manner.

I read a text message today that said, “Our trials are not always for us. They are always to bring God glory and help someone else”. How true this experience has been for me; I am so thankful. My good friend Annie reminded me that “If God brings you to it, He’ll bring you through it”. After tomorrow, I can yell at the top of my lungs, “I made it. I survived”. I can’t wait to get my hat. It will be the only time I wear a cap as proudly as I wear my New York Yankees cap. Until tomorrow, cherish your loved ones and do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I love you all and can’t wait until tomorrow. I have a big surprise for everyone at the center. Hopefully, I get some sleep tonight.



Day 38: December 4, 2019

“The Battle is not yours. It’s the Lord’s.”

Day 38 of 38 days of radiation treatments for prostate cancer. Finally!! As I get in the car today for my final day of radiation treatment, I can’t help but think of my first day back in early October. I remember hearing the doctor tell me that I would have 38 treatments and the thoughts that went through my head. I immediately calculated how many weeks that would be and could not imagine doing it for so long, five days a week. But here I stand. I remember coming home each day and marking the days off on my calendar to show that I got one day closer to finishing this marathon.

I think about the first post I typed on day one and the inspiration to share this story. It was never about me. From June 2, when I shared my prostate cancer diagnosis with the world the night before my laparoscopic radical prostatectomy surgery to now, it was always about creating awareness about this disease that affects 1 in 7 men. It was always about being there to support or to lift up someone that might be going thru the same thing but was scared. I know how scared I was when I first heard those dreadful words “you have cancer”. No, not me. I’m Mr. Health. I try to do the right thing. I treat people with respect. I have a four-year-old. She can’t lose her dad. I can’t bear the thought of seeing the sadness in her face or in my wife’s face as the inevitable happens. But, by the grace of God, here I stand. Then and now, I remember and recite the words to the song, The Battle is not yours. It’s the Lord’s.

There is no pain Jesus can't feel, no hurt He cannot heal
All the things work according to His perfect will
No matter what you're going through
Remember God is using You for the battle is not yours
It's the Lord's

There's no sadness Jesus can't feel
And there is no sorrow that He cannot heal
For all things work according to the Master's holy will
No matter what you're going through
Remember that God is only using You
For this battle is not yours, it's the Lord's

It's the Lord's, yes, it's the Lord's
Hold your head up high, don't your fret
It's the Lord's, it's the Lord's

After dropping off my princess at day care, my watch vibrates as the GPS tells me how many minutes to my destination. It vibrates again and it’s my calendar reminder letting me know that today is the final day.

I had prepared for this day for a couple of days. Over the course of my daily visits for treatment, as some of the guys approaches their last day before graduating, I asked them what they are going to do to celebrate. Most said “nothing”. Others said, “go to lunch”. I made sure to congratulate each one of them for making it through. To me, completing 38 days of radiation treatment is a major accomplishment that should be celebrated. I plan for my celebration today to express my gratitude to the wonderful team of radiation technicians here at The Urology Center of Alabama, then hug my wife afterwards and then get that special grilled Red Snapper at The Fish Market. Little did I know that that would not be all.



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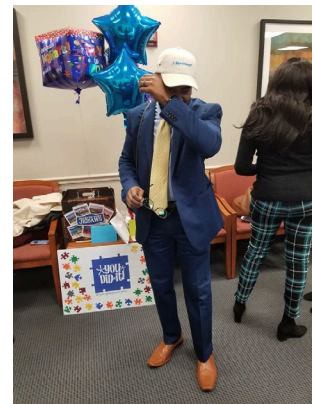
I park my car and find a parking spot for my wife who accompanied me for my last day. She helps me get the poinsettia's out of the trunk that I bought for the check in area. I grab the fruit platter that I bought for the guys to snack on while waiting for their treatment and I also grab the gift basket that I put together for the team.

Like the appointments leading up until today, no one is around the table and there are dressing rooms available, so I go ahead and get ready for my last dose. I walk into the treatment room and check in on the computer display. 38 of 38. Check. This treatment was a "one song" treatment. It was a pretty cool song from the 80's that I thought I would remember for this post but in all the excitement, I can't.

Once the treatment is over, all of the techs come into the room and hand me my graduation cap. "I Survived". I give them all a hug and tell them now that it is over, there is no more calling me Mr. Timothy. It's Wendell. I rush out of the room because I want to give them my surprise. Originally I was going to just get the gift basket from my wife in the main waiting room and bring it back to the treatment area but since none of the other guys show up yet for their treatment, I ask my wife to come on back to meet the staff. I get a little emotional but am able to give them the small token of gratitude for making this journey as pleasant as they could for me. Without them and their professionalism, their calming effect, their understanding and their positive attitude, this entire experience would be much different. To think that they do this all day long for 65 plus guys, 5 days a week is nothing short of awesome.

I missed seeing the doctor on doctor day last week due to me leaving town for the holiday last week, so Dr. L makes time to review my chart and see me on my last day. My wife comes to the consult room with me to wait. My blood pressure is higher than normal, but we chalk it up to just being super excited. Dr. L asks me how I'm feeling, and I tell him about some of the changes to my body. Now that the radiation treatments are over, I should begin to get back to my base; the new normal. Just days before, I received my last hormone shot, so I'll still have low testosterone until around March but should get back to normal around then. We head out to main waiting area to check on my follow up appointments and I almost stumble in my steps. My church family showed up and showed out. From the gifts, the cards, the yell of Surprise, the hugs, the laughter, the smiles from them and others in the waiting area, the live stream video with my dear friend Annie Sellers (who could not be there but was instrumental in planning and organizing the surprise), I was completely surprised and grateful.

After wiping away a few tears, reading a few cards, getting more hugs and taking a few pictures, everyone says goodbye and help me take everything to the car. I can't stress enough the importance of a support team whether it is one person or a hundred people. I have no doubt that most of the guys that come here have a support team because they talk about their wives either waiting on them or we joke about having hot flashes together with our wives and never complaining about them feeling hot again. However, when I look at the faces of the guys that come in for their first or second days of treatment, I can only imagine how I must have looked on my first day. For me, talking to them has helped but working on the puzzles has been the X factor. These puzzles have changed me. I have exhibited more patience than I thought I ever had but more importantly, I have realized that the most challenging thing that we might face in our lives can be overcome if we just take it one day at a time.



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The “You Did It” sign that I received is one of the best gifts ever. You see, it has 38 puzzle pieces that represent the 38 days of treatment. (See picture).

Once everyone leaves, I kiss my loving and supportive wife goodbye so she can go to work, and I turn around and head back into the treatment room. I still have work to do. The puzzle isn’t finished yet. By this time, some of the guys have come in for their treatment so I talk with them for a while and they congratulate me while I attempt to work on the puzzle. I’m so off my game though because I am so overjoyed. I can’t concentrate on the puzzle at all. So, after a few minutes of sorting the remaining pieces by shade and color, I bid adieu.

It’s not farewell. I’ll be back tomorrow and the next day and the next day until ALL of the pieces of this puzzle are put together.



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