

Chapter 1

“You Have Cancer”

The room was dark, and the buzzing light from the fluorescent bulbs in the hallway glinted off the steel handrail of my hospital bed. The elastic band of the powder blue cap covering my head itched, and I pulled at it as I shifted, trying to alleviate the pain in my back. Over the past years, intense back pain had become a daily part of my life. During these excruciating months, I had attempted to alleviate this debilitating pain through years of chiropractic visits, acupuncture, flotation tanks, upside-down back therapy, pain medication, and physical therapy, but every potential remedy failed. So now I was about to do what I'd worked so hard to avoid. This invasive and risky surgery was our last resort to try and mitigate the physically-limiting agony my back caused every day.

Pain in various forms was not new to me, and I didn't consider myself part of the “man-cold” group; I was more in the “push-through-the-pain” club. I had been a competitive amateur athlete all of my life. Football, wrestling, track, basketball, softball—I loved it all. In my twenties, I competed in cycling. Depending on the season, I spent every spare moment water skiing, snowboarding, or snow skiing. Then in my forties, I got caught up in being a triathlete and competed all over the United States in forty-two Olympic-distance events. I even completed an Ironman race. I loved the adrenaline of it all, but my body did not survive unscathed.

Because of injuries incurred during these years, I switched to competitive tennis in my fifties. Carla—my wife and partner in everything I did—and I took the bronze medal at the Senior National Tournament, which is pretty much the Olympics for people over fifty. After more injuries, we switched to pickleball, where I was no less competitive with a smaller racquet and plastic Wiffle Ball. We started winning gold and silver medals in competitive pickleball tournaments, even qualifying in 2018 to play in the US National Pickleball Tournament in Palm Springs.

Now in my sixties, I was paying a heavy price for all those years of intense activity. Over the past four decades, many over-the-counter painkillers had been part of my daily routine. It was very common for me to take 800 mgs of Ibuprofen three times a day. When that was no longer enough, doctors prescribed Lortab or Naproxen. This back pain, however, was a whole new level of suffering. I couldn't just throw back a handful of Advil and grit my teeth through it anymore. For the past few years, I'd have episodes where I'd bend down to pick up a piece of lint from the carpet, and my back would spasm. I'd fall down in excruciating pain, unable to get back up. Eventually, I'd crawl across the house to my bedroom, where my wife—bless her—would get underneath me and basically squat me into the bed, where I'd remain for the next three days.

I'd spent three years with a chiropractor, who assured me he could absolutely fix my back. Turns out, he absolutely couldn't. So, I started working with my good friend from college instead. Rogan Taylor is a Doctor of Physical Therapy and was very confident from the beginning that he could solve my problem without invasive surgery. I spent three afternoons a week for the next two years in his office receiving an uncomfortable treatment I had snippily dubbed “wet table electroshock therapy.” I would have tolerated it better had it been helping, but the intense back pain remained constant.

“Hey, Rogan,” I finally said. “You have been working on me for two years now, and this agonizing pain is getting worse.”

My good friend leaned back against the counter and looked at me quietly for a few moments. “David, we gave it everything we have. I think it’s time you talk to a surgeon. I’m sorry, bud.”

He knew that wasn’t what I wanted to hear, but it had now been five years of severe pain. I sighed, looked down at the floor, and nodded in defeat.

The earliest date available for surgery was six months out, in February. I didn’t know how I’d survive the pain until then. I was barely able to walk. And it was affecting my ability to work. I’d recently hosted our company’s annual customer event, but when we pulled up to the restaurant, I couldn’t get out of the car and walk in. I tried and tried to pull myself up to standing, leaning on Carla, beads of sweat peppering my forehead from the effort. To my utter mortification, I couldn’t do it. Even with the Lortab pain medication I was on, I couldn’t walk the few feet from my car to the restaurant. Fortunately, they had a wheelchair, and Carla was able to wheel me in and up to my spot in the front of the room. Somehow, I coped through the dinner and my speech, but it felt so humiliating. This was a definite low point for me.

Many phone calls later, I was able to get the surgery moved up to October. Although I was still so discouraged about needing such an invasive surgery, I was immensely grateful and immediately accepted. As we prepared for the surgery, concerns repeatedly rattled me. At the time, I had nine grandchildren, and I hated the thought of not being able to be a hands-on grandpa. I also worried about being able to maintain a demanding work schedule with a company where so many were counting on me.

Meanwhile, my wife was having different thoughts. Let me back up here a moment and introduce you to her: Carla and I have now been married for eighteen years. We have a blended family of seven kids and eighteen grandchildren—wonderful chaos! Carla was by my side, not just as a cheerleader, but as a fierce competitor and teammate for every triathlon, race, and tournament. She is an avid snow skier and cyclist, and she can surf behind a boat with the best of them. She is also my business partner, and our strengths and work ethic complement each other in a strong and equal partnership. This back issue was a real challenge for our relationship, because we went from being super active and on-the-go nonstop to... nothing. We’d been told this would be an extra-difficult surgery, and that I would be completely down for two months afterwards and unable to do much at all for a full six months. Looking back now, we both wish it had been so easy!

Carla is a remarkable force for good who is able to remain positive despite hard challenges. She had been with me through a few other surgeries and knew I never reacted well to anesthesia. Her worried thoughts included, “How long until we will be able to resume our normal lives again?” And, “*Will* we be able to resume normal life again?”

It’s a good thing we didn’t know how long it would take to get back to “normal.” The surgery was brutal. Recovery was grueling. What they said would take four to six months took me a year. But before then, things got much worse.

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I imagine you might be asking yourself, “What does all this back stuff have to do with cancer?” Three months after that surgery, I started having a strange symptom that I thought was related to my back surgery. Around the end of January, I had this weird thing happen when I urinated. There appeared to be a significant amount of blood in my urine. The bright red color was shocking. What was happening? In my ignorance, I thought it seemed like something that would only happen to women on a monthly basis. I didn’t understand it and was embarrassed to discuss it with anyone, including my wife. It didn’t happen again the next day, though, and I forgot about it.

It happened again in February, just once, and again I didn’t tell anyone about it. In March, it started happening about once a week, but I really thought it stemmed from my surgery and would go away as my back healed. Then it returned at the beginning of April. For three straight days, I’d stare into the toilet bowl each time I went and see all of the bright red blood. I was officially scared.

For some reason, I thought providing a sample would be important. Never one to do anything halfway, I grabbed an empty quart-sized jar from our food storage and filled the whole thing up. It was sitting on the bathroom counter when Carla walked in. I pointed to it—not that she’d be able to miss the shocking specimen.

“Hey honey,” I asked her. “Um... Do you think I need to be worried about that?”

Don’t ask me why, after three months of hiding my problem in complete embarrassment, I chose to shock her now with this extreme visual version of my problem. I’ll never forget the look on her face.

“Oh my gosh, David!” she exclaimed, horrified. “You have blood in your urine?! You’ve got to get to the doctor right now! This is not something you mess around with!” She insisted I drive down to Instacare immediately.

Even though I very considerably provided my full-jar specimen for them, shoved into a brown lunch snack and awkwardly hidden under my jacket, the Instacare doctor required a fresh sample. “Doc, what is going on here?” I asked the thin, balding doctor. “What is this?” I gestured toward the full Mason jar.

“Well, we need to see if you have a bladder infection.” He paused for a moment, then continued. “We’ll test the urine sample that you’re going to give us right now, and it’ll be good news if you test positive for a bladder infection.”

It didn’t dawn on me until later what he’d really meant by that statement. I returned to the waiting room for the results. When they escorted me back again, this time the doctor looked at me very seriously. He still skipped the small talk, leading with, “It’s bad news. You don’t have a bladder infection.” I then learned what a urologist was, and that I’d need to see one—the sooner the better.

Carla and I still weren’t too worried—she really thought this was something like a UTI—and we were happy to see our good friend and neighbor Ron Oldroyd on the referral list of urologists. I called him with my situation, and he got me right in.

“What Did He Just Say?”

If I thought I was embarrassed about my discolored pee, all modesty now flew out the window. A cystoscopy exam is an extremely hands-on, thorough procedure. It's probably similar to what women have to go through all the time—feet in stirrups, any sense of privacy completely invaded—but this was all very new to me! I looked away and tried to take myself to my “happy place” while Dr. Oldroyd maneuvered the tiny camera on the end of the flexible tubing up through my urethra, past the prostate, and into my bladder. It's uncomfortable and messy, as the tube also shoots out water to keep things clean and expand the bladder, eliminating any possible folds. The water ran out and dripped down my butt, soaking the paper I was sitting on. It was hard to concentrate on the words he was saying, because all I could think was, *How much longer 'til he gets this thing out of me?*

He was peering intently at the screen, twisting the camera in awkward ways, trying to capture all angles. He adjusted his glasses further up his nose and started counting. “Oh yes, I can see there's one...two... There's another, so three... Three good-sized tumors. You have cancer, David.”

What? I thought to myself. *What did he just say?*

“One of the tumors has a burst blood vessel, hence the blood in your urine. That's a miracle, really. Usually we don't catch tumors like this so early.” He looked up, his face serious, his eyes meeting mine. “We won't know for sure until we can biopsy it, but I'm pretty sure they're cancerous.” I was still stunned and trying to catch up with what he was saying. “We've got to get you right into surgery. As in, tomorrow.”

I'm actually not certain of anything else he said. All my brain heard was, “You have cancer.” It fixated there, stuck on those words as if in a deep, inescapable rut. In a blur, they scheduled me for emergency surgery first thing in the morning, and I left the office, shocked and emotional. Because we both thought this appointment really wasn't going to be any big deal, Carla had stayed home to get some work done. How was I going to tell her? I was still really struggling to recuperate from my back surgery. How could I possibly handle another one so soon?

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Carla

As I heard the words David was saying, I was in shock. My initial reaction was, *No, that can't be right! That happens to other people, people who don't take care of themselves, who aren't healthy!* Even though you know that isn't really true—you know plenty of folks who were fit and took care of themselves who unfairly get cancer—but you just think, *This can't be happening to us.*

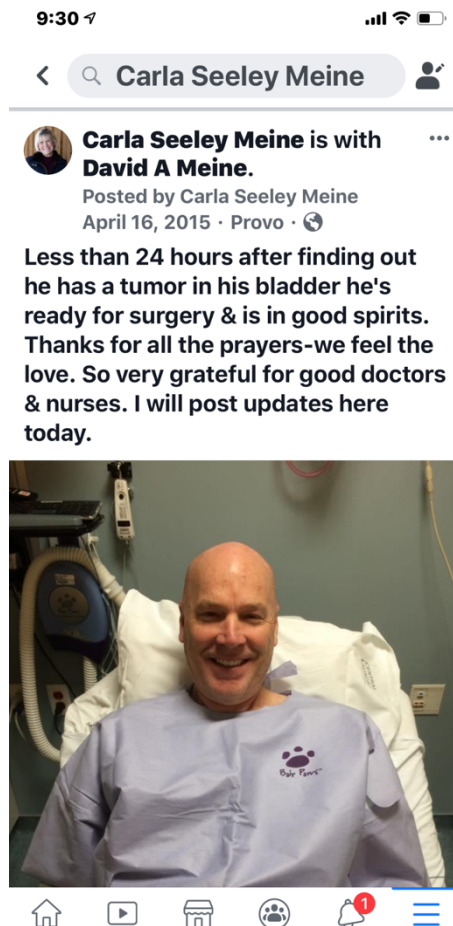
My thoughts came fast and furious, a rollercoaster of shock and denial and grief. In one brief moment, our life completely changed. This was going to change absolutely everything!

My typical response is to look for the good, so I naturally started saying, “Could be it's not cancer, David. We have to wait and see...” And then, “But if it is, we'll get through this. We have lots of friends and family who will pray for us.”

I really wasn't sure how David was actually feeling, but I knew I'd need to stay strong for him. I didn't want us to start wallowing (as is so easy and understandable to do) in the "Why us? What did we do wrong to deserve this?" thought swamp. Instead, the problem solver in me took over. I started making mental lists.

Surgery at 5 a.m. tomorrow. What do we need to do? This is our lot, so let's get to work. What can we do? We needed to get ourselves ready as best we could. We both needed to clear our incredibly full schedules. Mentally, I ticked down the list of things we'd need to handle.

David and I hugged each other, and the tears flowed down my face. "We will get through this together, David." I felt the truth and peace of that statement with all my heart. "Whatever happens, we'll face it together." We then knelt together and prayed, petitioning God for His help and guidance through this. Our faith has been a source of strength to us many times in our life. As we prayed, I had the strongest impression that we needed to let all our friends and family know so they could pray for us, too. I told David, "We need to let all the family know. You call your kids, parents, and siblings. I'll call mine, and we need to let our friends know, too. I feel like all our friends would want



to know and pray for you.”

It can be hard and humbling to ask for help, but after calling our close friends and asking for their strength and prayers, David let me post on Facebook. He wasn't sure he

was comfortable with that, but I convinced him we needed all our friends and anybody else who was willing to join us in prayer.

All of this was very emotional. But it was also very faith-promoting. The next day, as he went in for the procedure, instead of feeling anxious about him going under anesthesia again or about what the results would be, I felt an amazing sense of peace. I knew I was being buoyed up by all those prayers from all our loved ones.



Carla Seeley Meine



Posted by Carla Seeley Meine

April 16, 2015 · Provo ·

Surgery went well. There were 3 tumors so we're really glad our doctor got him in right away. He's very optimistic that **David will have a full recovery. Thanks again for all the prayers. We have felt them.**



Carla Seeley Meine



Posted by Carla Seeley Meine

April 15, 2015 · West Jordan ·

Friends we are asking for your prayers tonight. My hubby **David has a tumor in his bladder that has to be removed. Thankfully our friend Ron Oldroyd got him right in & got him diagnosed & has scheduled him for surgery in the morning. We are feeling very blessed that it was discovered early & is treatable.**

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David

The outpouring of love from family and friends, and even people we barely knew, was amazing. Surgery went well. Dr. Oldroyd found the three tumors he'd spotted during the scope. One of them was large and had to be cut out of the lining of my bladder. "It's a good thing we caught this when we did," he told me from my bedside, post-op. "That was Stage T2a cancer. If that tumor had broken through the bladder wall, then you're known as the Walking Dead."

Gulp. Evidently bladder cancer is known as "transitional cancer." It's often just a matter of time before the cancer takes over your internal organs and you die. Most folks have no symptoms, and they don't find out until it's too late.

That "embarrassing symptom" that started back in January had saved my life. We truly believed we had received a miracle with that early symptom and such quick and competent treatment.

"The Cancer Is Back"

In July 2015, I went in for my three-month bladder scan. Dr. Oldroyd and I got up close and personal again with another fun cystoscopy exam. This time, however, he smiled and told me everything looked good. My bladder wall was healing nicely.

I rushed home to give Carla the good news. We texted and called all our family and friends who cheered. We had won! We'd caught the cancer early and there was nothing to worry about. We went about our lives as we always had, barely giving cancer another thought.

In December 2015, I returned for my next checkup. I sat in the waiting room chair, my legs bouncing with anticipation. *Let's get this over with*, I thought, full of optimism and ready to get back to my busy life. I looked around the room at the handful of other patients. An older gentleman was sitting across from me, talking with his daughter about his stage 4 prostate cancer. He sounded grim and looked tired. I sat there feeling so thankful I wasn't him.

When it was my turn, I joked around with Dr. Oldroyd. He'd had a heart procedure done the week after my bladder surgery, so I asked him how the ticker was and teased him about his cold hands. He was in a good mood, and we were laughing. By this third go-around, we were pretty darn comfortable with each other.

Suddenly he went quiet and started intently looking at the monitor. He started turning the knob, trying to get the flexible tubing to where he needed it to go. The look of concern on his face gave him away. My heart rate immediately spiked. *Please*, I thought to myself. *Don't tell me there are more tumors.*

I felt sick as he started counting. "One...two...three..." He was quiet for a moment, then, "I can see at least six. Six new tumors." I was frozen and remained speechless as he pulled the equipment out. "We need to get you into surgery right away, David. First thing in the morning, let's go get you scheduled."

I drove home completely stunned. The fifteen-minute drive seemed to take hours. I remember the stark, looming mountains covered in snow and the wind whipping around the car. The Christmas decorations and twinkling lights that usually symbolized joy and

hope seemed an affront to the ugly knowledge that cancer had been growing silently, insidiously, inside me.

How had I gone from no tumors five months ago to six tumors—maybe more—so quickly? I'd finally gotten my life back! My back was finally feeling healed, and I'd gotten back into some of the hobbies I loved. Our company was still growing at over 200% for the second year in a row. Life was good! So why this? Why was this happening again to me, to my wife? I already dreaded having to tell Carla the terrible news.

I found her sitting on the floor, playing with one of our grandchildren. Smiling, she looked up at me and asked how the appointment went. When she saw my face, she immediately knew something was very wrong. After hesitating a moment, the words spilled out of me. "Dr. Oldroyd saw at least six new tumors. He wants me in surgery tomorrow morning."

"Oh no, this cannot be happening!" Carla started to cry, stood up, and gave me a long, fierce hug, supporting each other as we cried together.

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Driving in the dark the next morning, all I could think about was a story my good friend had told me about his father who had struggled with bladder cancer. Somehow during the previous cystoscopy exam he'd had, the urologist missed a fold in the bladder where a tumor was hiding. He'd pronounced it clean of cancer. The next year, his father died of stage 4 cancer. The undetected tumor had gone through the bladder wall and attacked his organs. I was visualizing this happening inside of me and the thought made me physically ill. My friend had strongly recommended I have my bladder removed, but I did not want to have to use a urostomy pouch. "Please, God, let this surgery work!" I repeatedly prayed.

Getting prepped for surgery was like terrible *déjà vu*. As I laid in my hospital bed, the nurses were bustling around, and all of the commotion was making me anxious. When the anesthesiologist came over and asked if I was ready, I wanted to scream, "No!" Instead, I gave him a weak smile and said, "Yes." I realized that, this time, I was truly scared.

My next memory was of waking up in a fuzzy room. I tried to get my eyes to focus and looked around for my wife. I saw her in the chair near my bed and could see the relief on her face as our eyes met. "How many tumors did they find?" were the first words out of my mouth.

"Fourteen," she said. "But none of them penetrated the bladder wall." I sighed in relief and closed my eyes.



Carla Seeley Meine



Posted by Carla Seeley Meine

December 16, 2015 · Lindon ·

"The Cancer is Back" words you never want to hear but that's what the doctor told **David** today. His bladder cancer is back and so we're back in the hospital tomorrow morning for surgery. Then he starts Chemo in January. All the prayers really helped last time so we'd appreciate that again.



Carla Seeley Meine is with David A Meine.



Posted by Carla Seeley Meine

December 17, 2015 · Provo ·

Thanks again for all the sweet comments & prayers. Surgery went great. Doctor says they got all of them. (There were 14 but they were tiny so they got it early. He's in recovery. We'll be home late this afternoon.