Mallory's Reaction

My fiancée (now wife) responds to my testicular cancer diagnosis.

January 28, 2017 By Justin Birckbichler

2016 has been such an exciting year. Justin proposed in February. After we wrapped up our third year of teaching, we started planning to buy our first house. We hit the jackpot on our first home. It is an absolutely beautiful house, and we spent the summer busily packing up our lives from the first townhouse we lived in together. We moved into our new house in August and began our fourth year of teaching in an area that we have always loved visiting but can now call home. After our big move, we continued to plan for our wedding next summer. We scheduled our engagement photos, planned to meet with a baker for our cake, and began looking into where we wanted to plan our honeymoon.

In the middle of all of these blissful plans and dreams comes a word that I have feared for most of my life…CANCER.

This word has struck my heart like a dagger several times already in my life and has taken away the people I have loved most in this world. It took away my grandmother before I ever had the chance to meet her. When I was eight years old, it took away my grandfather whom I loved dearly. And during my first year of teaching, it struck again and took away a beloved student. I hate to say this word. I hate to think of it. The very thought makes my stomach and chest tighten and quiver with anxiety and fear. It makes me worry about who else it might affect next. Will it be someone I love? A friend? A coworker? Me?

Never could I have imagined that I would be sitting in a doctor's office with my fiancé and hear the words, "Yes, Justin, that tumor that we took out was indeed cancer and it has spread." I felt the air in my lungs squeeze tighter and tighter until it felt like I almost couldn't even breathe. It was as if someone had popped a balloon and the all the air and life was sucked out of it. That was how I felt in that moment. How could this really be happening? Why was this happening? This horrible thing once again crept its way back into my life and was threatening to take someone I hold most dear in this world away again.

From the time we found out that this was the monster we were dealing with, we did not have much time to process the gravity of this life-changing event. We went from one doctor's visit to the next, scheduled appointments and procedures, and in those moments in between, tried our best to just spend time with one another and hold each other close as the world spun all too fast around us. It was then in those moments that we had with one another that I realized, as bad as everything seemed, we would come through it together. Justin would get through this. And in

Justin fashion, he amazed me by turning a bad card he'd been dealt into something wonderful.

Through this whole journey, I had a lot of questions about why this had happened. Why is such a big question and not an easy question to answer to say the least. But I think I've figured it out. Not so much why Justin got cancer. There is no reason for why that happened. But I've figured out why we are going through this journey together and why Justin is taking this journey. This journey has made us stronger than we have ever been. It has taught us to take every moment we have together and cherish it. We've realized that the time spent with one another is more important than anything else we may have going on in our lives. The phrase "through sickness and in health" has taken on a new meaning. We know that if we can get through this, we can get through anything because of our faith and trust in each other. The future is not as important as today. I have always been quite the planner, but now I see how important just enjoying today with Justin really is. This whole experience has been eye-opening into how we should live our lives together. Moments together are something that need to be enjoyed to the fullest and not taken for granted.

I believe Justin's purpose for this testicular cancer journey is to share his compassion and optimism with the world.

He has always had such a driving force and light for life. It has been shared with others through his teaching, charisma, and humor. Until now, Justin had always had things come to him easily. I was terrified that this disease may break his spirit and that light that I love so much. His light was what helped my light shine. But despite all the disheartening and upsetting news that he was told, Justin decided to make something good out of it. I shouldn't have been surprised. Justin has always found a way to make something that I have claimed to be terrifying or awful turn out to be not so bad after all. He amazed me yet again with his strength and fortitude through all of this. I am beyond proud of his strength and passion for creating something amazing out of something so rotten. I have found comfort and strength in his light force and he has shown me that even the things we fear and hate most do not hold all of the power. Justin has shown so much strength and resolve and that holds more power than this disease will ever have on us. Justin is my light, my hero, and my everything. On the other side of this journey lies great things ahead of us, and that is what I'm looking forward to for Justin. I will get to see him do amazing things, and I am blessed to be a part of that.

As you know by now, Mallory is my fiancée. We've been together for nearly three years and are due to be married in July 2017. She has been incredible through this experience, and I don't know what I would have done without her.

Testicular cancer isn't just affecting me; it's affecting those closest to me. Every Saturday, one of my friends or family members will be sharing about their reactions to my diagnosis. I hope these posts serve as a reminder to talk to the men in your life about performing regular self-checks and their health in general. Together, we can lessen the impact of testicular cancer. Check out Healthy But Aware posts here.

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