



SPECIAL THANKS

- My wife Donna & kids
- Don & Carole Drennen
- Leach Camper Sales Employees
- John Allen
- Bruce Pike
- Our many great friends & family

Edd Leach

Like many successful business owners, Edd Leach really didn't have time for cancer. After all, there are customers who are depending on Edd to keep their recreational vehicles running for those special vacations and make sure the coffee is always on at the Leach Camper Sales in Council Bluffs.

But cancer isn't going to wait, even for a guy like Edd Leach. And even the most hard charging dad, grandpa or business owner can't negotiate an extension or a rain check. So when Edd got the news in July of 2009 that a PSA test on his prostate showed positive results, he had to change his focus and fight a new and very different adversary.

Edd was born in Nebraska and came to Council Bluffs, as a young man he graduated from Abraham Lincoln High School. In 1963 Edd became involved in the recreational vehicle business, where his older brother Pat joined him four years later. They now have locations in Council Bluffs and Lincoln, Nebraska. Leach Camper Sales is now one of the largest RV sales centers in the Midwest. Edd had regular medical checkups and knew his PSA had been slowly elevating for the last few years. The doctor felt there was no immediate

threat, however Edd opted for a biopsy, and he felt there was no reason to worry. Or so he thought. That all changed when the doctor called after a biopsy with the news that yes, he did indeed have prostate cancer. Edd felt that he needed to take immediate action.

"As usual I had a busy Monday full of things to do and when the doctor called with the news. I have to admit I stepped back for a minute to compose myself," he recalled.

"But I just put it in the back of my mind and went on helping customers that day and decided to worry about it later." Edd remembers the news bringing a feeling of "getting kicked really, really hard" but one of the hardest tasks was still ahead...telling his wife and family that he had cancer.

It was a surprise. It was a shock. But I never thought, why me? I just knew I had to get the surgery done and I really didn't have time for all this cancer stuff.

Edd and Donna Ray married in 1984, at that time Edd had one daughter Gina and adopted Christofer and Julie. They now have four grandsons. Through the years the couple raised their family and had the normal day to day chal-

lenges that families deal with, but now the couple faced one of the most serious challenges of their lives. After a blur of second opinions, tests, poking and prodding, Edd and Donna decided of the many options for

treating prostate cancer the most effective and safe course of action would be surgery to remove the prostate. Edd had that surgery in September of 2009. Being "sick" was a new and different position to be in for Edd. He had always been used to serving others including his many customers

By **John Scherle**
Writer & Former Spirit of Courage Recipient

and family and taking care of their needs, and now he was the one who needed help – even though he wouldn't admit it.

"As our friends learned about my diagnosis I kept getting get-well cards, and I said 'Hey, I'm not sick!'" he said. Edd recalls the week before his surgery, his dentist "friend" presented a glamorous and special "gift" for Donna Ray. The gift was a bucket full of supplies such as handi wipes, Excedrin, vinegar and disposable gloves (all necessary when he was released from the hospital).

"Donna and I walked four miles and I ran another five miles the day I went in to consult with the doctor. I had completed a half marathon only one month before I was diagnosed. The diagnosis was a surprise and a shock. But I never thought, Why Me? I just knew I had to get the surgery done and I really didn't have time for all this cancer stuff."

Because Edd leads an active lifestyle with activities such as running, strength training, basketball, fishing, and scuba-diving, he was in great shape and the doctors said he this would certainly help in his recovery. They ordered him to lay low for six weeks, but as expected Edd was back at work after only a week, although he knew something big had just kicked him in the rear and it was unlike anything he had faced before.

"I went back to work but I lasted for only for a couple of hours," he said. "The surgery really took the wind out of my sails and the recovery did take



Edd & Wife Donna Ray



Edd & Family

longer than I had anticipated. But compared to others, my recovery was fast."

Edd still runs but perhaps not quite as fast or long as he did before his surgery. He still runs five to seven miles a day and in May of this year ran in a 5k marathon and took third place. He rides his motorcycle, and he continues to enjoy fishing trips with his grandson Conner, and other outside activities. More recently Edd and Donna joined friends in the Florida keys, and Edd enjoyed scuba-diving for lobsters. Edd has his family and many friends, a loving wife who he says takes care of him "...like a mother hen" and makes certain he follows all doctor's orders. And he takes better care of himself as well.

And what was the hardest part of dealing with his cancer? For a self-made man and successful business owner, just slowing down was difficult. Edd isn't the type to sit down very long and is always on the go, doing things for himself and being totally independent. That had to change when he underwent surgery and through his recovery, he does offer some helpful tips based on his experiences with cancer.

"I guess the number one rule is, don't get cancer," he says, noting the importance of a healthy lifestyle, good humor and positive attitude. "But if you do get the news get your consultations done and do it quickly. Sitting around and waiting for tests and results puts more pressure on you and your family, so just find out what your options are, make a decision and get it done."

Even now, Edd says it is sometimes hard to believe that he has experienced the challenge of cancer and all he and his family have gone through.

"The day before my surgery I met with the doctor, and at the end of the appointment I told him I had one last question," Edd said. "I asked, This is all a big joke, isn't it? I was waiting for him to yell 'April Fools!', but that never happened."

"I very much appreciate being chosen as a Spirit of Courage recipient, but it feels a little odd because I don't feel I was as ill as many cancer patients."

And as long as Edd is a survivor, the coffee is always on!

My doctor said if you have prostate cancer the "Golden Plan" is remove the prostate!



SPECIAL THANKS

- Our parents / grandparents
- Uncle Bob, Aunt Jani, Cousins Colton & Kendall
- Aunt Jen
- Dr. Minnie Abromowitch
- Doctors & Staff – H/O Clinic – Children’s Hospital
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- Family
- Friends
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- Rudy & Tiffany
- Dan
- Pastor Kosec
- Everyone who prayed for Gracie

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Writer & Former Spirit of Courage Recipient

Gracie Hays

If, as many believe, we are all part of a master plan -- how does one explain or live with extreme illness and painful suffering that is sometimes thrust upon the helpless or the very young? What logic would there be or what lessons could possibly be learned by testing these families with such a severe challenge as they struggle to save the life of their children that have been told that, unbelievably, they have cancer?

Gracie Hays is a lucky girl. A very, very lucky girl who has survived one of the most challenging illnesses known to modern medicine. Her parents, Russ and Jill Hays, have been tested as well. Together they have been on an incredible journey that is still in progress, but one that is also positive and hopeful.

Gracie was only two years old when her parents intuitively knew something was amiss. Gracie was not sleeping well and seemed to be waking up through the night. An ear infection? Antibiotics were ordered with no effect. Teeth problems? Ear nose or throat? After several more doctor visits nothing made sense until a blood draw showed a low platelet level, which could be an indicator of acute myelogenous leukemia. That frightening diagnosis was confirmed in 2007 and Gracie immediately was ordered into a heavy regimen of chemotherapy that would have been severe even

by adult standards. But the name of the game was to save her life, and while the odds were essentially 50/50 the family and doctors threw everything they could at the illness and dug in for the long fight.

The good news...her doctors felt there was a good opportunity to attack and beat the cancer. The bad news...Gracie would be required to spend a lot of time in the hospital. A tall order for a two year old kid, and a tall order for her family.

"Imagine a two year old cooped up in a hospital room all day, for more than a hundred days, with all that energy. It can make for some pretty long days," Gracie's

dad, Russ, recalled of their ordeal. "We chased her through the hallways at night-i.v. pole and all. One night I remember we bounced a ball back and forth against the wall for hours."

Her strength was amazing and she had an ability to bring a smile to any person that entered that room, Mom Jill said of the long stay. The nurses became our second family away from home.

Gracie had low resistance and was vulnerable to infection from the chemo and absolutely could not get ill during treatment. So Mom and Dad faced some severe challenges during her long stay and heavy

treatment. They wanted and needed to be there and everything in the family's life was suddenly turned upside down.

"Her strength was amazing and she had an ability

to bring a smile to any person that entered that room," Mom Jill said of the long stay. "The nurses became our second family away from home. They are your eyes and ears and calm your wildest fears. She was just so sick and she hurt so badly. But after about three days of treatment we saw improvement and she was back to being our Gracie again."

As the treatment continued, doctors and the family were beginning to see Gracie make steady progress. Brother Dan, who was 15 years old at the time, did his part on the home front including making himself a frozen pizza each day Gracie was in the hospital which freed Russ and Jill to be with her. Mom and Dad found comfort by joining with the Candlelighter's Support Group, meeting many parents in similar circumstances and unfortunately some who had lost their battle. "The number of children who lose that battle made it very difficult for us," Jill said. "We met a lot of people who lost a child to cancer. But thankfully we are a family that made it." A day never passes without us thinking of all we have and being thankful for our hero, our miracle, our beautiful little girl. We are truly blessed!

Gracie spent 111 days in the hospital over a period of six and a half months. She was hospitalized during chemo and following chemo with fever and low blood counts. She still receives



Gracie & Family

regular checkups from her doctors to monitor her progress although they believe that five years without a relapse is an excellent indicator of Gracie being essentially cured, a blessing the Hays family is extremely grateful for.

"I think as the years pass she forgets more and more of what happened," Jill said. "Sitting in the hospital day after day, writing with your finger on the fog on the window, watching movies and playing games...I think she thought that was normal. I look back through those photos and I realize I wish I could have given her a real 'normal' childhood but you can't do things over. She lives each day to the fullest and all those days she missed out on she is making up for now."

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Russ and Jill said their family is honored to be selected as a Spirit of Courage recipient this year. But it also brings back many memories of that time in their lives, some that are difficult and have been left undisturbed for several years. They think about how fortunate they are, and how others have not been so fortunate. They wonder why some even bigger and stronger than Gracie are taken, while she was spared.

"Russ and I were thinking about reliving all of this, and it is a bittersweet day," Jill explained. "It's a happy thing for us but thinking about all of this once again is hard. People say they know what you are going through, and yes we have all have been affected by cancer in some way. I would tell other cancer patients that they are not alone. You think when you are diagnosed that you are the only person who is experiencing it but then you see other parents with their children and what they are going through and you know you are not alone."

"We have all lost someone to cancer...I lost a person, a big strong man who was my second dad," said Russ. "I thought, if this big strong man could not beat cancer, how could Gracie? But they have come so far with medicines and treatment it's just amazing. In the end we got everything that we prayed for and a whole lot more."



SPECIAL THANKS

- Midlands Radiation Oncology
- Dr. Jeffrey Karnes
- Pastor Nathan Sherrill
- Congregation of St. Paul's Lutheran Church for all their love and prayers
- Caring co-workers and friends
- Last but not least, my wife - Kathy, my children - Krissa, Rebecca, Michael and his wife Jackie and their son Carter
- My mother and extended family

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Horst Rossbund

Out of sight, out of mind. It's a defense technique often used when we fail to address some type of issue or problem that's just been hanging around, waiting for us to act. I really need to do that but...I'll take care of it later. Horst Rossbund found out inaction can sometimes be life threatening, especially when it involves your health.

Horst is a partner in Lund-Ross Constructors, an Omaha construction company. For most of the day, every day, he is out in the field supervising the work of his crews and subcontractors, and is responsible for the timely completion of multiple projects. He admits he should have been getting annual physicals and PSA tests, which, if abnormal, can indicate a possible prostate cancer. It had been several years since his last exam, which was normal so he was not concerned.

In January of 2009, severe back pain and numbness in his leg meant it was finally time for that doctor visit that he previously thought he did not have time for. Good thing he did. Routine tests during that visit included a PSA blood test. "I was told my prostate was three times its' normal size, and the PSA was 32.8, which is over eight times the normal level." Horst explained "You hear about

guys that have warning signs, like getting up in the night all the time, or other problems with an enlarged prostate, but I had not experienced any of that. If there is one thing I can tell someone, it would be that you may not be able to prevent cancer, but you can sure make it easier if you get early detection." Good advice, but Horst was far beyond the early stages of prostate cancer.

Horst tends to view things analytically, methodically and with what some may view as typical German stoicism. He was born in Germany and at the age of 5 came to Council Bluffs with his parents and younger sister under the sponsorship of the German-American Society of Omaha. The Rossbund family started their new life living in

the guest house of Dr. and Mrs. John Cogley. It was 1952, and Horst's father, a skilled carpenter, and his mother were employed by the Cogley's to help maintain the grounds and estate, with his father also serving as the Cogley's private chauffeur. In 1961 the Rossbunds' proudly became U.S. citizens.

Horst met his future wife Kathy one day as she was hitting tennis balls against the side of their local school... she was 14, he was

17. They became good friends and although at that age Kathy said she was "...scared of boys," she says, "apparently not scared enough," as she and Horst began to date when she turned 16. "At first he tried to convince me we were meant for each other because our birthdays are on the same

As for myself, I think I was concerned for the family and how they would react. The kids are all asking, what's going on? What's your PSA level, what's the status?

day, November 8th, three years apart," she laughs. They were married in 1968 when she was 18 and he was 21.

So while Horst faced this new situation in his introspective way, his wife Kathy had enough anxiety for both of them. They immediately sought out specialists in prostate cancer to determine the best treatment plan for this surprising and threatening new development in their lives. After weighing his options, it was apparent a radical prostatectomy was necessary.

"You wait a week to see the urologist, then we will do a biopsy and that takes a week to get the results. Then you find out you have prostate cancer," Horst said of the process. "Then, by the way, the first place this cancer goes is to the bones so we need a bone scan and a CAT scan. Another week, and then you get the results from that."

His radical prostatectomy was performed in July, 2009. In December of 2009, an abnormal PSA prompted therapeutic radiation treatments. Horst selected to have these daily treatments at the Radiation Oncology Department at Jennie Edmundson Hospital. Following approximately 40 radiation treatments over two months, a subsequent PSA showed no detectable cancer. Horst has a special admiration and respect for Dr. Haessler, Michelle Kaufman, Loree Hackett, Barb Kricsfeld, Angie Watts, Tammie Stephens and Karla Owens. With a serious illness like cancer, it is comforting to know that these special women genuinely care about you and your well-being.

When asked how his experience with cancer might have affected or changed her husband, Kathy explains his attitude has been surprisingly solid and consistent and that pretty much fits in with his personality and approach to life before he learned of his illness.

"He's always worked so hard in his business where it's unpredictable and there are many uncertainties and changes that you have to face on the job." She said "His attitude has always been and still remains that you just have to deal with whatever situation life hands you. Tell me the problem. Tell me the options. Let's make a decision and then do it. There are people who are changed by the diagnosis of cancer, but he is really no different than before." Horst says that his thoughts first went to his family and how this news would affect them. He and Kathy are grateful



Horst & Family

for the love and support of their three children, wonderful daughter-in-law, a new grandson, who is the apple of his eye, and many friends and family members.

"As for myself, I think I was concerned for the family and how they would react," Horst said. "The kids are all asking what's going on? What's your PSA level, what's the status? Then later on as people learn about your condition they are concerned or some even are facing the same type of cancer and ask me what they should do? What options or treatment should we try? I try to be helpful but don't want to recommend treatment. You want to leave that to your doctors."

"I think with the type of work I do I am so busy during the day even with the cancer I did not find myself thinking about it a lot. By the time I get home and do what I have to do, I sleep well and don't have a lot of time to dwell on it. I deal with a lot of people and that makes it a lot easier than not having your day filled and having a lot of time on your hands."

"Every week I hear about someone else I know that has been diagnosed with prostate cancer, maybe it's just that I've reached this age. But now I hear of people in their 20's and 30's and 40's. You don't realize how many men are affected by this type of cancer until you've had it. I can't believe I was so oblivious to what was going on around me."

In some ways, Horst is in better physical shape than he was before he learned he had cancer. He enjoys a good ride on one of the local bike trails.

Hunting and fishing are a few of his hobbies and he recently upgraded his boat for his annual trip to Spirit Lake. His grandson and family keep him busy and focused on his health.

"You hear people say that when you have your health you have everything." Kathy said "This experience brings that to bear even more. We're grateful for our time together and pray for his continued health and everyone in our family."

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SPECIAL THANKS

- Jan and Keally, Sydney and Emily
- Council Bluffs Police Department
- My Jennie Edmundson Family
- Heartland Oncology
- Joel and I's family and friends.

Joel Peck
Lifetime Achievement Award

Folks who learn they have cancer and their families are part of a very unique group, an army of individuals fighting for life and doing whatever is in their power to defeat the enemy that has invaded their lives.

In fighting this war, not every hero comes back from the battlefield. Some fight so hard and so long that their lives are simply overwhelmed by an evil and heartless illness. Joel Peck, this year's Spirit of Courage Lifetime Achievement honoree, is one of those heroes.

Joel's story is told with tenderness and reverence by his wife of 10 years, Jenny. If a novelist set out to write a piece of fiction with every twist and tragic turn that his mind could invent, it would not match the true story of Joel and Jenny and their fight against all odds – the biggest battle of their lives.

The story begins when they were both in college ROTC training in Lincoln where Jenny had to put up with a rather annoying upperclassman who enjoyed hassling the underlings and generally making their lives miserable. "I hated him because he got a kick out of ordering everyone

around," she recalls. "Then I went on a motorcycle ride with him, started dating and we were married a year later."

Joel was single-minded in his desire to become a police officer and soon joined the Council Bluffs police force. Jenny was starting nursing school which required a physical exam and medical review for admission so the two of them went together for their physicals. What started as a no-brainer quickly spiraled into a maze of tests and panic after an MRI showed a tumor in Joel's brain stem, which doctors said was inoperable and not likely to respond to chemotherapy. It was a condition more commonly seen in children and could have laid

dormant for many years. Because it was so rare, doctors were unsure what would happen as they attacked the rare and dangerous tumor.

"We were just married and at that point wondered, should we start a family? Should we do anything?"

Jenny said of the uncertainty. "We went through six weeks of therapy and the only symptom was a shaking in his leg. The treatment seemed to work and things became stable. We had checkups every three months, then every six months, then every year. Each time the MRI showed no change in the tumor, which to us was good."

Feeling more comfortable with their future, the

couple then did what young couples do...they bought a home, they got a dog, they had a kid. And they were really happy. Then, right before their fourth anniversary, trouble tragically hit without warning. The tumor was active once again, and by the way...Jenny had just learned she was pregnant again, this time with twins. This time the couple and their doctors threw absolutely everything they could at the tumor and Joel's health suffered terribly. Although surgery was not considered a viable option, Joel wanted to try anything and everything possible to live and the tumor was partially removed in 2008.

The surgery weakened him even further and he had trouble bouncing back. Even a warrior cannot fight forever, and after a tearful discussion Joel and Jenny decided to seek help from hospice, and a month later he died.

Jenny's journey has been tough, but she feels a lot of comfort and peace in their partnership and their fight together against cancer. "We were not support group type of people, our support came from each other," she remembers. "If you need me, I am there. A big part of the strength I felt came from the kids. There were times I did not want to get up in the morning. There were times I was driving home from work and wanted to just keep on driving. But then I go home and the girls are so happy to see me, and seeing Joel even when he was sick. I was just so happy to see him. My family was what made me get up in the morning and come home at night and get



Joel & Kids

through it." Like any spouse who experienced this unspeakable loss, Jenny felt an incredible vacuum left by Joel's passing but says her girls keep her "in the moment" and living in the present. Many caregivers say that there is actually a significant grieving period that takes place while their loved one is ill and Jenny says she believes she actually began the mourning process long before her partner was gone.

"I think I did a lot of grieving while Joel was still sick," she said. "I think that although I did not want him to know, I knew already that it was not going to turn out the way I wanted it to. Then, when he was ready to go, I was not ready. They say to tell them it's OK, that we'll be OK, and I tried to tell him that but I wasn't ready. I needed him and his daughters needed him. That was my biggest regret, that I could not tell him it was OK to be moving on."

Joel did everything he could to survive. He studied his condition tirelessly on the internet, asked questions and sought any new or innovative treatment that might help him win. He had

incredible faith that medicine would come up with something new to save his life, Jenny said, and if the odds were 33 percent that something would work, he felt he would be in that 33 percent and had extremely high expectations that things would be OK.

Joel has moved on, another hero in the fight against cancer. Cancer may have prevailed in that round, but not before Joel had a chance to meet a wonderful woman and bring three beautiful daughters into the world who carry on in his name, not before he had

a great career and made a difference by improving his community, not before he had an opportunity to touch lives and have an impact on people's lives that continues even today.

"In life you can't take anything for granted,"

Jenny concluded. "Joel taught me when we were together you have to do everything NOW, not in five years. My own dad was so important in my life, I guess I worry about what the girls are going to miss out on without him. There are so many things I try and remember about Joel so I can tell them..."

"I want the girls to remember him and know him. He was a great dad."



Joel & Wife Jenny

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There are so many things I try and remember about Joel so I can tell them... I want the girls to remember him and know him. He was a great dad.