



ITS IN THE BLOOD

Peter Adamis - Abalinx - 5 November 2015

After some 30 years of Regular and Reserve service I shed my camouflage uniform for life outside the Army and felt that I had done my bit for this nation we call home - Australia.

This brings me to those life's challenges and how we faced them in the past, especially when faced with something new and alien. In such unforeseen circumstances we were trained to go back to the basics and find solutions to the task on hand. That may be well and good, but life outside the Army can be at times a roller coaster and riding it without a safety belt can be hazardous to one's health.

I had raised four sons alone then remarried, paid off all the debts and the family home loan off and look forward to a secure future and a life of bliss. I was of the impression that I could just laze around, sit in the sun, have a quiet beer and write my stories and yarns on my favourite's topics. We even went to Europe for an extended holiday, catching up with friends and relative and basically enjoying the sun and the surf on the many shores and inlets of the Mediterranean Sea.

Prior to leaving for Europe I had been diagnosed with severe bronchitis which antibiotics helped relieve the chest pains and our trip overseas was secured. However on our return from Europe, I began to my coughing violently and even then I put it down to the cold Melbourne winter which happened to one of the severest for almost 20 odd years. I was not overly concerned as I had already suffered three heart attacks and nothing could be worse than that. Suffice to say my lovely wife suggested that I undertake a blood test just to be sure that my cough was not associated with something else.

What happened next was like opening Pandora's Box, leaving only poor shivering and lonely "hope" alone in the box while all the evils of the world escaped from within. The same day I had the blood test, I received a telephone call to return to the Doctor the next day. The Doctor did not mince his words and said that I had "*Acute Myeloid Leukaemia*" (AML). Well "*stone the crows*", I knew what leukaemia as my son Matthews God father Norm (Ned) Kelly had passed away some many years ago from the same illness. I also knew that it was "*in the blood*", but much progress had been made since the mid 1980s'. All I could say to the Doctor was "Well you can't beat them all".

The next moment after some digressions of calling my wife the news and confirming it with the doctor we find ourselves in the isolated ward at the Olivia Newton John Cancer and Well Being Centre at the Austin Hospital. The consults confirmed that I had "*Acute Myeloid Leukaemia*" (AML) and that the prognosis was not good. Suffice to say they added to be sure they wanted to conduct more tests.

The very next day the same consultants advised me that I had "*Mantle Cell Lymphoma*" (MCL), which was incurable but that they would give me the best treatments available. In the same breath, the consultant said that they were waiting for one more test to come back but that as it would take two weeks they would treat me for the worst case scenario. "*Fair enough*" I said "*it is what it is*" and my wife and I just looked at each other as if time was important to the both of us.

The illness had infected my bone marrow, blood, lymphomas, chest, liver and kidneys. The PET scan showed that I glowed like a Christmas tree, where all my lymph glands were infected and I could see that I had a much enlarged spleen. The first chemotherapy I did not do well at all. I was given a drug which I cannot even spell or pronounce and its effects made me shudder, tremble, feeling of coldness, shivering, shaking and breathing quickly.

Luckily staff realised what was happened and wrapped me in a space blanket, filled with other drugs and I slowly began to recover. On reflection, I look back on that moment and realised that in that half an hour seizure I was witnessing the dying of millions of cancerous and healthy cells, of which I now believe put on a stable footing for further treatment.

When the final results came back, the consultants advised me that I had "markers" of "*Acute Myeloid Leukaemia*" (AML) and "*Mantle Cell Lymphoma*" (MCL). What floored me, were the consultants advising me that my condition was somewhat baffling and unique and that I did not fit into any known Lymphomas. A week later, the Consultants came back and that they had discussed my case amongst themselves to decide the best course of action.

They noted that after the initial chemotherapy, PET scans and bone marrow tests; I had a "positive outlook", no more "blasts" of immature and cancerous cells being ejected from the bone marrow and no cancerous cells in the spinal fluid. As a result they believed that my illness was treatable extending my life for a few years. The consultants went on to say that that I "*probably fitted*" in with what was commonly known as "Diffused Large B - Cell Lymphoma" (DLBCL).

Some two and half months later I am still here and kicking points which is not bad for a bloke who was standing at the edge of the abyss. I am now walking back to the centre of safety and trying to be as positive as possible. I have more chemotherapy, (now on my fourth as we speak), PET scans, Bone Marrow biopsies, X-rays and Stem cell harvesting to be reintroduced into the body after my final heavy doses of chemotherapy. In early December we hope to receive positive news in order that we can at least make some plans of an uncertain future.

If all goes well, it will mean twelve months of visiting the hospital every month for blood checks, followed by two years every three months visits then another two years of every six months. The golden rule is that if after that *"five years survival"* rate, there is a very good likelihood of living a normal life. However I have always been a realist and will take life day by day. If it's not cancer then the heart will eventually give way. We all have to go one way or the other, but not just yet. I still have much unfinished business.

I am mindful of many mates who have since passed way and of others battling this dreaded illness; and if this article helps others, then it's been worth the trouble writing it. As always, please accept my apologies to the purists for the grammar, punctuation and longwinded essay.



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