



“If you are breathing, there is hope.” Those encouraging words were what resounded in Dana Rodgers’ thoughts as he journeyed through the previously unthinkable - a lung cancer diagnosis as a 58 year-old nonsmoker. What started as an ordinary day, July 12, 2012, would quickly change to a day that Dana would never forget. After struggling with a prolonged cough, Dana decided to go to Urgent Care. While concerned about his symptoms, lung cancer was the furthest thing from his mind.

To his surprise, a chest x-ray revealed a softball-sized sarcomatoid and a resulting diagnosis of non-small cell lung cancer. The tool of choice for detecting lung cancer is always a Low-Dose CT (LDCT) scan. As a tool that commonly misses detecting lung cancer, Dana was very fortunate that the chest x-ray found it.

Dana will always view Jennifer Kulus, PA, as his guardian angel. Due to her excellent listening skills and erring on the side of caution, the lung cancer was found. Had she not been attentive and proactive, Dana’s diagnosis would have been delayed and likely less treatable.

Upon diagnosis, the five-year survival rate for this mutation of lung cancer was less than 5%. As frightening of a statistic that was, Dana had no time to stay stuck in fear. Christopher Foley, MD, Dana’s primary doctor, called him the next morning to arrange a CT scan and appointment with thoracic surgeon, Louis Jacques, MD. Dr. Jacques recommended that the upper half of his left lung be removed for best chances of survival.

Following lung surgery, Dana began three months of chemotherapy while still working a full-time job. Six months later, he got the devastating news that the cancer had spread to his brain and adrenal gland. As a stage 4 cancer with no known cure, and highly-aggressive in nature, Dana was given only a few months left to live.

To further attack his cancer, Dana underwent gamma knife radiation for his brain and a second round of more aggressive chemotherapy for his adrenal gland. Despite these efforts, the cancer grew rapidly. Pivoting treatments, chemotherapy was replaced with several weeks of radiation therapy. Thankfully, the adrenal gland stabilized.

Soon later, Dana was confronted with another frightful truth - the healing of his brain post-gamma knife radiation did not go as predicted. After gaining forty pounds as a side effect of steroids, the benign edema tumor in his brain required removal. The outcome of his surgery left him completely paralyzed on his left side. At the time, he was told that he would never walk again.

Faced with this upsetting news, Dana encountered many tough weeks as he began the difficult journey of rehab therapy followed by months of out-patient therapy. While incredibly trying, what began as a few short months of survival turned into over 10 years.

Dana credits Jennifer Kulus from his first Urgent Care visit to saving his life.

However, he is more than a survivor, but also a thriver. Today, he enjoys volunteering with A Breath of Hope to help support and care for the healing, both physically and mentally, of those currently living with lung cancer. He finds great joy in life and takes hope in the fact that his scans currently show no evidence of disease. Just as he was told, he takes every opportunity to encourage people that if you’re breathing, there’s hope.

