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Everyone in life is affected by cancer in some way. However, over the last decade, cancer has ravaged my life in every aspect. I have lost loved ones, coworkers, shared therapy with my two-year-old nephew, stood by one of my best friend's side as he battled a very aggressive brain cancer, and had my own 9-year battle which eventually led to the amputation of my arm. Throughout it all my family has been there for me and the gift of this vehicle would be a huge blessing to them and myself for a year in order for us to recover from the financial hardships that a decade-long battle with cancer has created. It all began in the spring of 2010 when one of my best friends was diagnosed with a very aggressive form of brain cancer. He was told throughout his battle that his days were limited, and he should ready his family for life without him. We had coached football together for many years and as he underwent his surgeries and treatments, I stood by his side by driving him when he couldn't and taking on the reins of the football program until he was able to return as the head coach. I am happy to say that despite the doctor's warnings of a limited life he is still battling on and leading kids in the classroom as well as on the field. About a year later, in the spring of 2011, a month and a half after my grandmother passed away, my grandfather was diagnosed with colon cancer. He was the one that modeled how rewarding a life in the field of education could be and eventually led to my being a teacher and principal. Throughout his battle with cancer he demonstrated determination and extreme faith in order to stay positive for those he loved at the age of 89. His battle with colon cancer ended about two years later. Shortly after my Grandfather's diagnosis I received my own personal diagnosis of an extremely rare form of cancer called a Myxoid Liposarcoma in my right axilla/arm-pit. I was told that there was no one in Alaska that could treat this disease because of its complexity and within two weeks of receiving the news that my life was going to change forever I was referred to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. Once at Mayo the doctors confirmed what I had been told in Alaska and laid out a treatment plan. Because I was only 33 at the time the doctors, my family, and I agreed that we would attempt a very aggressive treatment plan. I spent the summer at Mayo undergoing radiation every day and two rounds of chemo. The treatment worked and the tumor shrunk by half, so I was able to retain my arm for the time being. During the next three years I traveled to Mayo every three months in order to go through an MRI to make sure that the tumors hadn't returned. Unfortunately, the tumors did return, and I underwent another resection in order to try to save my arm. The surgeons were able to remove as much of the tumor as they could but during the post-op appointment told me that because of a botched biopsy that initially occurred in Alaska in 2011 there was just too much cancer in my shoulder and I would have to eventually lose my arm. We developed a chemo plan in order to give me as much time with two arms as possible. Over the next year and a half, I traveled to Mayo in Minnesota in order to receive a trial chemo drug that was hoped to shrink the tumor in order to allow the nerves in my shoulder to function. However, that drug actually led to the tumors growing and the doctors at Mayo telling me that they did not have any other options at their disposal. It was then that my treatment shifted to Seattle Cancer Care Alliance in Seattle, Washington. Once there I was enrolled in a trial program that meant I had to travel to Seattle every week in order to receive the injections that were hoped to help shrink the tumors relieving the pressure on my nerves. At this point I had transitioned from being a teacher to the principal of the largest Middle School in the valley. I would travel down to Seattle on a red-eye flight Tuesday night, receive my treatment in Seattle all day Wednesday, and then catch the evening flight back to Anchorage in order to go back to school in the valley Thursday morning. This process went on for about a year and initially the tumors were responding well but then began to grow again. It was at this point that I received one of the most difficult phone calls of my life when my brother informed me that his two-year-old son had just been diagnosed with a form of cancer that had created a grapefruit size tumor in his stomach. He too was going to receive treatment in Seattle at the Seattle Children's Hospital. My visits to Seattle became even more hectic as I would fly down, receive my treatment, Uber over to the Seattle Children's Hospital to play with my nephew in order to provide his parents a little respite during their long days of staying by their son's side and supporting him with loving care. As I transitioned from the trial program to a very aggressive chemo program it was decided that I should try radiation one more time. This meant I needed to be in Seattle for two weeks in order to receive radiation twice a day. My nephew's treatment also included radiation and we are probably one of very few uncle/nephew combinations in the world that occupied a radiation suite at a hospital together. These were long days, but we supported each other, and I am happy to report that his battle, although very long and difficult, with life impacting changes to his spine and hearing, is over and he is currently a cancer-free kindergartner. Unfortunately, after two years of my chemo regimen, which I was eventually able to receive in Anchorage rather than in Seattle, the doctors discovered that the tumors were again growing. It was at this point, in the spring of 2019, that my doctors informed me that I had no other option but to have my shoulder and arm amputated in order to hopefully free my body of cancer before it entered my bloodstream or lungs. The doctors in Seattle offered to do this rare form of surgery but it was decided by my family and I that I would again change doctors and travel to Denver, Colorado. This decision was made because a cutting-edge operation referred to as TMR (Targeted Muscle Reinnervation) was being offered in Denver. This procedure would hopefully remove the cancer from my body, allow for as little phantom pain as possible after the amputation, and possibly allow the nerves in my body to heal in a manner that could support very sophisticated prosthesis. The hope is that the prosthesis could give me some function of an arm and hand eventually. I underwent my life changing surgery on April 11th, 2019, under the direction of Dr. Hopstein, Dr. Reynolds, and their team. The surgery went well but I awoke to the reality that I only had one arm and since then I have traveled back to Denver multiple times in order to undergo OT/PT in order to learn new techniques of how to function as a one-armed person. I am also working with a company called Handspring to develop a one-of-a-kind prosthesis given the level of my amputation. This work has been done in Denver as well as New York. I am excited for my future working with these people in order to help my own situation, as well as develop techniques and prosthetics that will help others that have undergone a high-level upper arm amputation. However, because of the complexity of this work it requires my continued travel to Colorado and New York to work with the technicians. In addition to all of the people that I have spoken of during this time, my mother and father have also undergone treatments for skin cancer and my aunt is currently undergoing cancer treatment as well. I have lost a fellow principal and one teacher to cancer, supported a classroom aide as she underwent breast cancer treatment, and just supported another classroom aide as she helped her mother through a short battle with cancer that she just lost. My family also provided encouragement and support to my wife's secretary during her short battle with cancer that she just lost. Cancer is a reality in my life as well as the life of my wife and kids. Everywhere we look we are affected, and we truly believe it is part of our calling to help support those we know that are going through it as well as model positive thinking and mental toughness. I hope I have been a positive role model to all the middle schoolers at my school over the years and shown resilience in the face of adversity. As you can see my journey has been long and painful for myself and my family. I have continued to work throughout the entire process in order to provide as much of a "normal" life for my wife and kids as possible. My two sons, 15 and 12, have become mentally strong because for most of their lives all they have known is dealing with friends, family, their teachers, and their father, as we have undergone cancer treatment. My wife is the strongest person I know because throughout it all she has stood by my side and loved me through this roller coaster of life. It would be an extreme blessing to our family to receive this one-year gift because of the financial hardship that cancer has caused our family as we battled my own personal illness in addition to providing support and love to our family and friends throughout their battles. Please consider my family for this very generous gift and know that it would be very much appreciated.



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