

Hunt of a Lifetime

ONE MAN'S PURSUIT OF A CURE

The air is crisp and dewy and the hike up the mountain seems like a race in the dark, especially in the thin Colorado mountain air. We need to get above the elk before daylight's warming air drives them to higher, cooler altitudes. We split up and my partner begins to cow call; instantly there is a bugle from below. He calls only sparingly and the bull answers every call—seemingly closer each time. Then, unexpectedly, I feel the breeze coming down the mountain across the back of my neck and I never hear the bull again.

It's September 2002 and I'm experiencing my first Colorado elk hunt. This is truly what I believed to be the hunt of a lifetime. Everyday is filled with new experiences and challenges that exhaust me both mentally and physically as I find my way through foreign surroundings in search of elusive elk in a wilderness much different than the Michigan farm country with which I'm familiar.

It's hard to believe that just two Septembers ago I received the phone call that no man wants to get. My urologist called to tell me that the biopsy confirmed what an elevated PSA reading had indicated. I had prostate cancer and I was

only 45! My father's family propensity for the disease had crossed into the next generation. That phone call started quite a different kind of hunt for me, the REAL hunt of a lifetime—the battle to beat the enemy living inside of me.

Because of my family history with the disease, my doctor had been performing annual exams and checking my PSA each year since I was 40. As a result, we caught the disease early, and because we caught it early, the cancer had been confined to and localized in the prostate. It hadn't spread.

The initial shock, anger and fright are impossible to fully describe. You feel as if someone hit you in the stomach with a baseball bat, and while you were doubled over, they socked you again with a sharp uppercut right between the eyes. Those initial feelings, for me however, were quickly replaced by a determination to make a treatment decision; little did I know what a daunting task that would be.

My partner for this 'hunt' would be the person I started bow hunting with 15 years earlier, my wife Judy. This was going to be the most intense experience of

our lives, not exactly a pleasant October bow hunt or pheasant opener. We talked to doctors, read the books, researched the Internet, and read magazine articles until our heads hurt. The amount of data that had to be sorted, analyzed, and comprehended was overwhelming. It amazed me how exhausting a one-hour consultation with a doctor could be.

One solid month of research culminated with "the decision." I was going to have daily radiation treatment, five days a week for six weeks, followed by a month of recuperation before receiving radioactive implants.

This was all too much to digest. I desperately needed to clear my head and make sure my attitude was in the right place before treatments started. Judy and I spent almost three weeks splitting our time between bow hunting and following our Brittanys through the pheasant cover. I've never found a better way to clear my head and sooth my soul than spending time in the field during the crisp, colorful days of October. My attitude adjustment must have worked because the treatments went quite well and I only missed two days of work.

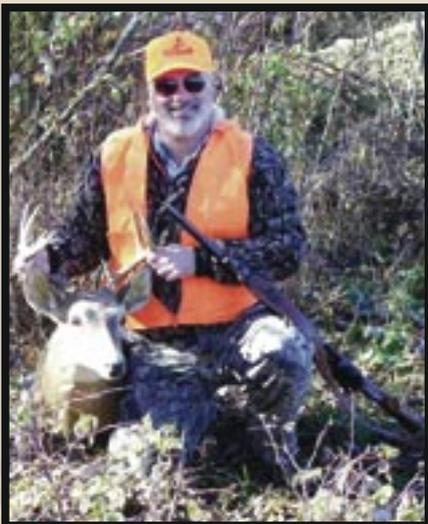
Husband, Father, Hunter, Outdoor Channel Viewer, Prostate Cancer Survivor

It's now October 4, 2003 and I'm sitting in a ground blind watching deer at the far end of a clover field. I can't do it. This just isn't going to work. I'm far too distracted by the pain I'm experiencing and my thoughts keep wandering back over everything that has happened since I came back from Colorado.

This past spring I found out that the radiation treatments had failed—the cancer was still alive. Once more though, we had options because we got the news early—we had stayed on top of it, and even though the cancer was more aggressive this time around, it was once again confined to my prostate.

Knowing all the risks involved, I decided to have surgery to remove my prostate and therefore, the cancer as well. In June, doctors tried their best but found that damage from the radiation treatments was so extensive that it prevented them from being able to remove my prostate. My surgery ended with six weeks of recovery and the knowledge that I still had cancer.

Now I'm sitting here only five days after my cryotherapy on September 29. This is crazy! I have a catheter and a leg bag, I'm sitting on an ice bag in a full-size chair just because it's opening week of bow season. I'm fidgeting and I'm sure I stick out like a sore thumb. But the woods are bright yellow, the does are gray and their fawns are still showing a bit of summer red. I guess I'll enjoy this afternoon and just take the rest of the season one day at a time.



If my experience can be used to save just one life—oh what a gift that would be! Regardless of your family history, this can happen to you. If you're 45 years of age (40 if you have a family history of prostate cancer or are African American), tell your doctor you want to “establish a PSA.” In fact, there is a good chance that I wouldn't be here today had I not done so myself. One simple test makes all the difference in the world. Do it!

The more I think about this experience over that last three years, the more it seems like chasing those elk in Colorado. When you're hunting elk, you can be complacent about the direction of the wind. You probably won't be successful

at bagging an elk, but it isn't a fatal mistake. Don't be complacent about your health. Establish a PSA today; that way you'll be around next season to chase that bugling elk.

Meanwhile, Judy and I will continue this hunt for a cure. We've moved on them three times now, we're approaching the top of the ridge and I think I heard the herd bull bugling down below. I guess we'll check the map and the wind and take a slow walk to the top to see what's over this next ridge.

Know Your PSA

Prostate Cancer is one of the most common men's cancers. It is estimated that nearly a quarter million new cases appear per year throughout North America and the number will further rise in years to come.

Prostate cancer is *not simply a disease of old men*. It can—and DOES—affect men at any age. In its early stages, prostate cancer typically has no symptoms. But new diagnostic methods and changes in men's attitudes due to increased awareness of the disease mean that more and more prostate cancers are found at an early stage, when treatment options are more effective.

Take the following six steps to monitor your prostate health:

1. Consider establishing a 'baseline PSA' value—even by age 35 when the likelihood of problems is very low—against which your future values can be compared.
2. Schedule an annual prostate examination with your doctor, starting by age 40 for African Americans and for men with a family history of prostate cancer, but not later than age 45 for all other men.
3. Get BOTH a PSA blood test AND

a DRE (Digital Rectal Exam) as a part of your annual exam. Prostate cancer survivor (Retired) General H. Norman Schwarzkopf had a low PSA test result, but his doctor felt a lump during the DRE exam. Further testing confirmed the presence of prostate cancer, and his subsequent treatment was successful.

4. Schedule your annual exam on a memorable day such as your birthday, Father's Day or during September, which is Prostate Cancer Awareness Month.
5. Keep a record of your exact PSA test result and know 'the score,' not just that it is “in the normal range.”
6. Track your PSA from year to year, so you will know if it has increased too much since last year. A rise of 0.75 or more in PSA within a year may require further investigation. The rate of change can be more significant than the number itself.

For more information

Visit www.ustoo.org, or call the Us Too! Prostate Cancer Hotline at 800-80-UsToo (800-808-7866).

