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# Another Day, Another Metastasis

## Part 1

By: Cynthia M. Ciaschi, MS, RN, ANP-BC

**M**y words? No, in fact, they were his words. Words which he would later give me permission to share. Let me start by saying, when I first met Shaun I was struck by his persona, which included, his fishing hat, sunglasses and a Hawaiian print shirt. Upon entering the exam room in the out-patient medical oncology clinic, I was faced with a young man in his 50's with Stage IV rectal cancer, coming in for a pre-chemo visit. He was anxious to receive his treatment that day so he could return home in time to resume child care responsibilities for his young son. This day would be no different than many others. Parameters were met for treatment. Appropriate prescriptions were written and provided, follow-up was scheduled and off he went! I was certain he would be home in time to retrieve his son from daycare and I was touched by this father's caring and joy to spend time with his son. Future visits for Shaun would be marked by delays in treatment due to medication side effects, re-staging scans, progression of disease conversations, and treatment decisions. One visit in particular comes to mind. This visit Shaun was complaining of headache and visual disturbances. An MRI of the brain revealed a clival mass and more radiation treatments followed. A couple of weeks later, I was walking down the corridor on my way to clinic when I was met by Shaun. We exchanged greetings and I inquired as to how he was feeling. He responded with, "Oh, you know, another day, another metastasis". From there he literally waltzed in to the exam room. No despair, as one

might expect for being dealt another "bad hand". He was just delighted to show me how he had jerry-rigged his eyeglasses with a piece of cardboard to help with the double vision! On the outside he didn't have a care in the world.

I shared a story with Shaun about someone he reminded me of on television. His "doppelganger" was a young man, walking along the esplanade with his lovely wife by his side, smiling and jubilant. Little did I know at the time I was "transferring". That was who my mind's eye saw him to be this day. Although this was just another pre-treatment visit, things would soon change. Shaun developed a complication requiring hospitalization and chose to forego treatment. Palliative care consulted and was instrumental in helping Shaun and his wife transition to Hospice.

I received word that he had chosen supportive care. That Friday evening, I made what would be my last visit with Shaun. I shared my feelings as to the impact he had on me and my perspectives of caring for oncology patients, of how I perceived him, his spirit and the grace with which he lived through the highs and lows of his cancer journey. Shaun had a presence and was a force to be reckoned with. I reminded Shaun of the legacy he leaves to his young son whom he so dearly loved and the peace he provided to his wife who allowed him to be Shaun. Shaun was in control of his destiny that day. I was also reminded of a quote from Dame Cicely Saunders, "You matter to the last moment of your life and we will do all we can, not only to help you die peacefully, but also to live until you die".



**Cynthia M. Ciaschi, MS, RN, ANP-BC** is a Nurse Practitioner, III working in GI Medical Oncology with Dr. Hitendra Patel at Moores Cancer Center. She credits her interest and need to write about patient experiences to her colleague Alok A. Khorana, MD, Director of the Gastrointestinal Malignancies Program at the Cleveland Clinic, who uses "fiction as a method of catharsis".

As a Nurse Practitioner with 20+ years in Oncology, I often find myself asking what is it that keeps me motivated to seize each and every day? I recently reached out to a colleague to provide perspective. He often writes about patient experiences and finds it helps to provide balance to those experiences. He reminded me, it is a privilege to be part of our patients' lives. We learn and grow from each encounter. It was a privilege to care for Shaun and his family.

Another day, another metastasis? I think not. Thank you, Shaun. My words.