



# Together we Live with Cancer!



*TLC is a "Supportive Community" that provides cancer survivors, their families, friends and caregivers with health and wellness opportunities for the body, mind, heart and spirit.*

TLC Supportive Newsletter - July, 2018 (Vol.18 , Iss. 7)

***"The real question posed to us is the effort we are willing to make."***

– Dr. George Sheehan



## July: "Survive, Thrive & Be Fit" Month!

By *Tim E. Renzelmann*

Earlier this month I deemed July as "Survive, Thrive & Be Fit" Month! In addition to the typical variety of activities

throughout the month, ST&BF was highlighted during this month's **Matthews Oncology Associates / Sheboygan Cancer & Blood Specialists TLC (Together we Live with Cancer) Survivorship Session** during which we heard from and recognized many of the participating survivor-athletes. Plus, we are holding the first **Adventure Weekend for Cancer Warriors** at Camp Y-Koda from July 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> (see attached for more details).

So far this year 65 survivor-athletes have participated in more than 80 ST&BF activities including **Gentle Yoga for Cancer Survivors, Steps to Survivorship, the Indoor Row Group, Hiking Along the Cancer Journey, Pickleball Play, the Active Survivors of Sheboygan Exercise & Activity Log** and more!

I hope the following article gives you a better idea of what ST&BF is all about... but even more, I hope that after you read it you will consider joining us at any of our upcoming activities to find out for yourself if ST&BF is for you! I am confident that, like most who participate in ST&BF, if you come once... you'll come back!



**Above: Current & Prospective Survivor Athletes Attending the July 17 TLC Survivorship Session:** (back row - standing): Sherry Becker, Althea Smith, Cindy Becker, Lisa Glander, Jill Pelnar, Jennifer King, Janet Sampson, Sue Zalewski, Maryellen Kloiber (middle row - sitting): Bob Hartig, (front row - kneeling): Tim Renzelmann, Carolyn Eiden, Diane Micoliczkyk, Kathy Burch, Beverly Leonard and Candy Meyer... many proudly "*wearin' the blue*" of Survive, Thrive & Be Fit! which they EARNED (we don't give those shirts away... survivor-athletes must earn them)!!!

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## **SURVIVING & THRIVING:**



**& Be Fit!**

# **The Making of “Survive, Thrive & Be Fit”!**

*By Tim E. Renzelmann*

## **How Survive, Thrive & Be Fit Came to Be!**

As many of you know, the **Sheboygan County Cancer Care Fund** is the brain child of **Dr. H. Marshall Matthews**. Shortly after he invited me to join this clinic (**Matthews Oncology Associates / Sheboygan Cancer & Blood Specialists**) in March of 2000 he shared his vision of a fund that could assist local cancer patients with the financial challenges of a cancer diagnosis. I feel profoundly fortunate to have had the opportunity to assist him in turning that vision into a reality. Providing financial “gestures” to area cancer patients and survivors remains the primary focus of the **Sheboygan County Cancer Care Fund** and, to date, we have approved well over \$1 million to help area cancer patients and survivors with a wide variety of financial needs!

In 2010 I approached **Dr. Matthews** and the **SCCCF Board of Directors** and suggested that we begin offering healthy-living and fitness-related activities for area cancer patients and survivors. With their blessings, **Survive, Thrive & Be Fit** was born.

I have long-believed that physical exercise and activity could (and in most cases *should*) be an integral part of a cancer patient’s treatment plan and a cancer survivor’s recovery plan; a belief founded on a growing volume of scientific evidence as well as my personal experiences including my own cancer journey.

## **My Life Just Before Cancer!**

It was February of 1992. I was 29 years old and just ran a personal best 2:20:39 at the Las Vegas Marathon in an attempt to qualify for the U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials (the qualifying standard, at the time, was 2:20:00 or better). Although I was disappointed at being a mere 39 seconds shy of this long-time goal I was in the best shape of my life and improving with each marathon I completed... so I remained hopeful.

As I recovered from this marathon, I decided to see my doctor about lump in my neck that I had noticed while shaving a few months earlier. Paradoxically, I was in the best shape of my life;

intensely training more than 10-miles a day and often more than 100-miles a week and setting personal bests from 5 miles up to the marathon; when I was told “You have cancer!”

Although I would quickly realize that my “failure” to qualify for the Olympic Trials was very much an event of good fortune (had I qualified for the Trials I would have continued with my training and put off going to the doctor) at the moment of diagnosis and during those early weeks I was reluctant to put my body through the rigors of cancer treatment knowing it would most likely mean the end of a dream!

At first, I felt as though my body had let me down but, as time went on, I would realize that the physical health and fitness provided by my active lifestyle would be one of the most important and effective resources throughout my cancer journey; a journey that included multiple recurrences over the next six years at which point I underwent an allogeneic bone marrow transplant. My brother Terry (also a runner/marathoner) was my donor and we light-heartedly dubbed it “The Tim & Terry MARROW-thon!” 😊

I am deeply grateful to have enjoyed the past twenty years with “no evidence of disease (I’ve never felt entirely comfortable or confident with the term “cured”).

## **A Balanced & True “Wellness Wheel”**

As I see it, there are four dimensions to wellness – physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. The physical dimension of wellness involves proper care of our bodies including exercise and diet. The mental dimension involves logic, reason and critical thinking geared towards keeping us healthy and safe. The emotional dimension involves the awareness and management of our emotions and feelings. And the spiritual dimension involves our search for meaning, purpose and fulfillment. Body, Mind, Heart & Spirit! These four components, in my view, are all equally important to living well. Together they make up what I refer to as the “Wellness Wheel” that we are challenged to keep balanced and true.

If it appears that I disproportionately emphasize the physical dimension of this “Wellness Wheel” it is not because I think it is any more important than the others but because I find that the body is, quite often, the best place to start and the most effective way to influence positive whole-person changes of body, mind, heart and spirit! It has been both my personal experience and

observation that a focus on the physical dimension of health and wellness not only offers greater strength and endurance for the body but enhances the mind's ability to think clearer, the heart's ability to feel more genuinely and the spirit opens itself to deeper meaning.

*"Sweat cleanses from the inside. It comes from places a shower will never reach."* – **Dr. George Sheehan**

### **My Life Before My Life Just Before Cancer**

It was November of 1978. I was a young high school distance runner when I read a book titled, "Running & Being: The Total Experience" by Dr. George Sheehan. It is a book that I have read and re-read umpteen times - it's pages now yellowed as much from age as from the yellow highlighter that marks many of its passages, including this (my favorite) passage:

*"Run only if you must. If running is an imperative that comes from inside you and not from your doctor. Otherwise, heed the inner calling to your own Play. Listen to the person you were and are and can be. Then do what you do best and feel best at. Something you would do for nothing. Something that gives you a sense of completion.... even moments when you are fused with your universe and your Creator. When you find it... build your life around it."*

You may not be a runner, but might I suggest that you insert "your own Play" (walking, swimming, yoga, rowing, golf, etc.) and I suspect you too may find these words to be both true and meaningful.

Dr. George Sheehan was a talented runner (in fact, he was the first over-fifty runner to run a sub-five-minute mile), a writer (he became well known as "the runner's guru and philosopher") and a cardiologist (although he gave up his practice to devote more time to running and writing about running). After reading "Running & Being" I would read all of his writings that I could get my hands on; every book, every column and every essay.

In 1986 Dr. Sheehan would be diagnosed with advanced inoperable prostate cancer that had spread to his bones. He was forced to cut back on his very active schedule but soon resumed his training and racing because, as he put it, there is "a healthy way to be ill." He also kept writing... and many of us kept reading and learning.

I was fortunate to have met Dr. Sheehan ("Call me George," he insisted) on several occasions.

The last time we spoke was shortly after my own cancer diagnosis when I felt so very alone – a 29-year old competitive marathoner undergoing chemotherapy. I no longer remember what words were spoken but I will forever remember an incredible sense of mutual understanding during our conversation that started with a handshake and ended with an embrace. On November 1, 1993, George would find eternal rest as a result of his disease.

George ran until he could run no more and wrote up until the very end. His final book, "Going the Distance: One Man's Journey to the End of His Life" was released posthumously. Although it may have been cancer and his approaching death that prompted him to author this final memoir, its message is about living life fully! George viewed aging not as a period of decline, but rather of growth and opportunity, "a game of verve and imagination and excitement." He believed that the very young and the very old shared two great yearnings: for love and for knowledge.

George taught me much while he lived and continues to teach me whenever I read or re-read his writings, through which I would find a powerful parallel between what he termed "the athletic experience" and what I refer to as "the cancer experience."

### **The Parallel Between Athletes & Survivors**

A couple years ago when **Dr. Bettag** presented a **Survive, Thrive & Be Fit** program titled "Climbing the Summit to Adventure" during which he shared some of his personal experiences and physical adventures, he made a few comments that caused me to develop a list of characteristics that I thought paralleled a successful athlete and a successful cancer survivor. That list sat forgotten in my computer until this article brought it back to my mind. I share this sampling of that list and ask you to decide for yourself if these characteristics are helpful for the athlete pursuing physical perfection, the survivor seeking to live his or her life to the fullest following a cancer diagnosis or, as I attest, BOTH!

- **IT** takes commitment to do the work that needs to be done.
- **IT** takes determination and a "never give up" attitude.
- **IT** takes adaptability to adjust to the ever-changing circumstances.
- **IT** takes self-control and an ability to control your emotions.

- **IT** takes humility to identify our own weaknesses.
- **IT** takes patience to work towards a well-thought long-term plan.
- **IT** takes teamwork and the support of many others.
- **IT** takes perseverance and the ability to pick yourself up after you've been knocked down.
- **IT** takes sacrifice and a willingness to give up that which is not helpful to the goal.
- **IT** takes an acceptance of what is beyond our control.
- **IT** takes self-discipline to act upon that which is in our control.
- **IT** takes self-confidence and a belief in yourself and your abilities.

*"There will never be a day when we won't need dedication, discipline, energy, and the feeling that we can change things for the better." – Dr. George Sheehan*

### **"Survivor-Athletes"**

As the number of survivors who have become active in SCCCF's Survive, Thrive & Be Fit program grows I find myself referring to more and more survivors as "survivor-athletes." I will often get a sort of "Who me?" look in response so, a few weeks back, I decided to send this question to those who regularly participate in ST&BF: "Do you consider yourself an *athlete*?"

Exactly half of the respondents said "YES" (they consider themselves to be an athlete") and exactly half said "NO." Not everyone explained their responses, but here are a few comments that I found insightful and interesting!

*"Yes! I challenge myself to be active as much as I can; however, I don't always participate in competitive sports. The physical and mental benefits of exercise are my prime focus; not necessarily being the winner in a competitive game. I can be a winner each day that I do just a little more to benefit my mind and body." – Cindy*

*"Sort of. I don't think of myself as an athlete but I do like to be involved with activities that get me out and doing things even if I am not very good at them. So maybe I am? Or will be some day?" – Jennifer*

*"Not really... but I do think I'm an "athlete want-to-be." I think of an athlete as someone who works hard to compete for a goal. That being said, I change my answer to "YES." I am an athlete as my goal is to be a healthier me." – Kay*

*"At first I thought NO. But then I thought about it more. I'm not a professional athlete that gets paid money, but I do work hard physically towards a goal. So YES, I am an athlete." – Lisa*

*"I never used to. I always thought of an athlete as someone far more accomplished than me. However, with that said, you've been calling us athletes for so long, you have me thinking that maybe I am. Maybe an athlete doesn't have to be someone like Aaron Rodgers, but someone like plain-old me. So, YES!" – Leah*

To me, being an athlete is mostly about making a commitment and putting forth an effort towards living a healthy and active lifestyle and less about your skill level or ability to perform.

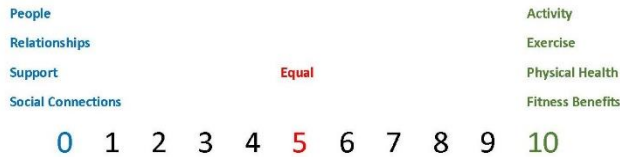
Earlier in my life I had the opportunity to co-coach college-level cross country runners alongside a good friend, great teacher and a fellow cancer survivor, the late Jack "Schnitz" Snyder. We worked with some amazing athletes... only some of whom were fast runners. The best athletes, in my opinion, were not necessarily those who ran the fastest on race day but those who showed up for practice every day, did their very best no matter the circumstances and learned from every win and every loss. More important than the time they posted on race day was the effort they put in throughout the season! If only there was a way to measure *effort*, then (and only then) would we be able to crown the very best athletes in the world and we might be surprised by who we would see on the next cover of Sports Illustrated or on the next Wheaties box!!!

*"What makes the athlete is present in everyone. No special talent is necessary. Being all you can be is making actual what is already potential inside you." – Dr. George Sheehan*

While preparing this article I decided to send out a second question to this group of survivor-athletes that read:

*I'm curious what draws you to ST&BF - the activities or the people. I suspect, for most of you (as it is for me), it is a combination of the two. So... allow me to present the question in the form of a scale... with the far left being "People / Relationships / Support / Social Connection" and the far right being the "Activity / Exercise / Physical Health / Fitness Benefits"... plot yourself somewhere along this scale. If, for example, it is an equal balance of "People" and "Activity"... plot yourself right in the middle (5). If you feel the people/relationships/support/social connections*

are slightly more important to your involvement with ST&BF than the activity/exercise/physical health/fitness benefits"... maybe a 4. If physical fitness is your only interest/concern... maybe a 9 or 10. Make CENTS?



The responses varied between 1 and 8 with about a third indicating they participate equally because of the two factors, a third leaning in one direction and a third leaning in the other direction and the average score nearly dead-center (5.05)!

Here again...I would like to share a few comments from the survivor-athletes that I find insightful and interesting:

*It is being part of the cancer community to be supportive doing an activity I love. Put me plop dab in the middle please. The people have become a really important part.*

*I like the social aspect, but feel the activity is the more important thing at this point. I enjoy the friendships I've made in addition to all the good health benefits of keeping active. I think I've told you before, this ST&BF group has been a real blessing to me.*

*I have other means to exercise but I enjoy exercising and connecting with the survivor group. It's a nice group of like- minded people.*

*When I first started it was for the exercise and I didn't know a lot of the people. But now that I've been involved for a while it's also because I've met some great people that I consider friends!*

*I do not want people to view me as having cancer so I try to look fit so people do not know my issues.*

*I don't rely on ST&BF for all of my exercise or activities... but it nicely complements my life. The "survivor-athletes" motivate me to work harder and live healthier even when I'm not with them. Plus, it's just a lot of fun!*

I would like to take this opportunity to thank, recognize and offer my deepest respect for all of the amazing survivor-athletes that are part of Survive, Thrive and Be Fit! Admittedly, we are an eclectic bunch: different shapes, different sizes, different ages, different abilities, different goals,

different priorities. And yet, we find common ground in activity and exercise.

I do think we are ALL athletes. As George stated, "Every one of us is an athlete. The only difference is some of us are in training and some are not."

What are we training for? Again, I think George offers the best answer:

*"It's very hard in the beginning to understand that the whole idea is not to beat the other runners, Eventually you learn that the competition is against that little voice inside you that wants you to quit."*

It's a bit of a surprise to me that George has become such an integral part of this article. It wasn't my intent when I first started writing. But now I realize that ST&BF wasn't entirely my idea (I'm not sure I have ever had a truly original thought). Instead, I think I was introduced to the first survivor-athlete, Dr. George Sheehan, long before my own cancer diagnosis.

I'll be thrilled if this article motivates and inspires even one cancer patient/survivor (or anyone else for that matter) to add more exercise and activity to their life. But then remember, the body is only one of four equally-important dimensions of the "Wellness Wheel" that I believe requires an equal balance of body, mind, heart and spirit.

*"I enjoy the self I have become. I no longer desire to be what I am not. My dissatisfaction is only in my failure to accomplish what is clearly attainable." – Dr. George Sheehan*

As for me, even though I am no longer the competitive athlete I once was... I still consider myself an athlete. And even though there was a time in my life when I would have said the activity was far more important to me than the people... that has changed. As one of our survivor-athletes put it:

*"I really enjoy the physical/exercise aspect. But without others to motivate, participate, and compete with it would just be a workout.*



*"Don't be concerned if running or exercise will add years to your life, be concerned with adding life to your years."*  
-Dr. George Sheehan