

Cancer and Me By Erich Longie

Niikaanag (My brothers, my friends). Anishinabeg (Original Man) and Ma'iingan (The Wolf) walked the Earth and come to know all of her. In this journey they became very close to each other. They became like brothers. In their closeness they realized that they were brothers to all Creation...The Creator said, "...you are to separate your paths. You must go different ways. What shall happen to one of you will also happen to the other. Each of you will be feared, respected, and misunderstood by the people that later join you on this Earth."

In the winter of 2008 I remember driving home from Grand Forks, North Dakota. I saw a deer crossing the road. As I came closer, I noticed it was not a deer at all, instead it was a wolf. I was sure it was a good sign. My name is Dr. Erich Longie. I was born, raised, and still reside on the Spirit Lake nation. I raised three boys and one daughter as a single parent. Once I sobered up, I became extremely ambitious. I got a college degree, became a teacher, a tribal college president, and then a consultant. My days were long and weekends short. I liked it.

I was hardly ever sick and I never knew what it was like to be tired until 2000 when I started getting flu-like symptoms. It turned out to be a prostate infection. 8 years later, my doctor ordered a biopsy. The results came back positive for cancer. I was devastated; I knew what would be in store for me. My life would change dramatically. The hardest part was telling my children. I told them many men survived prostate cancer and that I probably would too. They still took it hard. I hugged each and every one of them in turn as they cried. Then I went to go visit my mother and my son's grave. While I was there, I was overcome with self pity. When I finished crying I made a promise that I would never cry again. I asked my mom and son for strength. During my operation it was discovered that the cancer spread, I had to undergo 37 radiation treatments. Every day when I walked into the cancer center, I saw a sign 'Life is measured in years but when you live with cancer...it's divided into moments.' At first I didn't see the wisdom. But after seeing the hopelessness, pain and sorrow caused my cancer, the wisdom of the words became apparent. 6 weeks later I went back to the doctor who told me I had 5 years to live. I was in disbelief and in shock. My thoughts returned back to the wolf. 'Boy was I wrong when I said the wolf was a good sign?'

One evening when I was alone and feeling down, I thought about my son in the spirit world. I had a sense he was in the room with me although I did not physically feel, hear, or see him, I swear he and my mother gave me a hug. After their visit I put my depression behind me. At the next checkup my PSA was 0.09 I quickly calculated that meant a good possibility of living several more years. The wolf was a good sign; he is known for his courage, ferocity, perseverance, endurance, and strong will to survive. These were exactly the characteristics I needed to win my battle with cancer. My life has changed significantly. I do not sweat the small stuff and my cancer does not scare me anymore. I don't ask the Creator to win this battle for me, instead I ask Him for the courage to put up a good fight. I know the outcome will take care of itself. I accept that dying is part of life. I am still alive in this world and there is much to do and enjoy. Life is good.