

Prostate cancer is the number one cancer in men. Often there aren't any symptoms in the early stages of this disease which makes it hard to diagnosis. Also, the symptoms may be different for each man and any one of the symptoms could be caused by other conditions. This happened to Jim Gifford, this year's Village Walk for Cancer Research honoree.

Jim Gifford is your typical guy that loves to hike. This love for hiking is what brought him and his wife, Becky, to Hot Springs Village in 2000. They bought a beautiful home on a Lake DeSoto, which they call home. Both of them love to travel and have hiked all over the world. In January, 2012, Jim considered himself to be a healthy person in the prime of his life. He hiked Mount Kilimanjaro which is 19,000 feet above sea level, not an easy feat.

In the summer of 2012, Gifford had his annual physical and found that his PSA score was high. He remembered his doctor telling him not to worry about it, however, his PSA had doubled in one year. Since his father had prostate cancer, his doctor (Dr. Don Bodemann) sent him to an urologist in HS to repeat the test based on his family history. The test came back with the same answer and Jim agreed to a biopsy to be on the safe side. The biopsy results came back with bad news. Out of 10 samples taken, seven were found to be cancerous, with four of the cancers very aggressive. He needed treatment and needed it soon.

Jim told his wife Becky that for the first time in his life he was afraid. He was given the treatment options and had to pick between surgery and radiation. He talked about the treatment being worse than the cure but because of his age, knew he had 20-30 strong years of life ahead of him. He opted for surgery. The night after the surgery, he questioned whether he made the right decision. He had a 6 inch incision in his abdomen, and

could not roll over in bed without help. He knew that his idea of hiking in 6-8 weeks wasn't going to happen. He did heal from the incision but it took him until this year, 2016, to regain his full strength.

The postoperative biopsy confirmed his cancer was very aggressive and had already consumed 50% of the prostate. The good news was that there wasn't any evidence that the cancer had spread. He got up as soon as he was allowed and started walking with the aid of a walker. When everything was functioning as it should, he was released from the hospital four days after surgery.

He went home with a catheter to urinate for six (6) weeks. Since they took the prostate out, the tube had to grow back. It was an unpleasant six weeks living with a bag and learning how to walk again. Becky was very supportive and suggested keeping a diary to record his progress. This helped Jim see how much ground he continued to gain each day.

Six (6) months later, he had a hernia and noticed he was losing hand strength. This resulted in another trip to see a doctor, this time a neurologist, who discovered a problem with the vertebrae in his neck. Just over a year after prostate surgery, he had surgery to remove the affected disks and had artificial spacers put in, held together with eight (8) titanium screws.

Through all this, he continued to walk in the Village Walk for Cancer Research with Dr. Peter Emanuel, Director of the Cancer Institute. Jim met Dr. Emanuel in September 2008, the second year he walked, and has been walking with him ever since. He is looking forward to walking the Balboa and Hernando Trail this year, keeping the tradition of walking with Dr. Emanuel going strong!

Jim is also hiking again and can again do the 10 mile hikes with no problem. He feels that his wife played an important role in his recovery. Jim and Becky weren't 'kids' when they married and have been married 30 years. They have traveled all over the world, including trips to all seven continents. He has fond memories of all the places they have been and plans to continue to travel.

Jim said that there is a lot of talk about PSA false alarms. However, he encourages all men to get a PSA (prostate specific antigen) test with their annual physical, particularly if there is a family history of prostate cancer. He said, 'You need to know your risk factors and family history.'

Jim is a cancer survivor and believes in the need for continued research to find a cure. You can also help us help others by getting involved in this year's walk.

The 15th Annual Village Walk for Cancer Research begins at 7:30 a.m. (rain or shine) on Saturday, September 24th at the Balboa Pavilion, 476 Ponce de Leon Drive. You will find sponsorship and walker registration forms on our website walkforcancerreach.org. The early registration fee of \$30 ends on August 12th and will be \$35 up until the day of the walk. Each walker registration includes a t-shirt.

Our goal this year is to raise \$50,000 for the Bone Marrow Transplant Program. Plan on joining us as we celebrate the lives of cancer survivors and remember and honor those who have lost their lives to the disease. You can make a difference by helping us help others! For more information, contact Melanie Pederson, chair, at 608-692-0458 (cell) or email chairman@walkforcancerresearch.org.