

Jerry D. Kline: A Survivor's Story

February 2010



This story begins in January 2004, when I began to experience a series of severe headaches. I had not had significant numbers of headaches up to that point, no more than other people get now and then. But the headaches that started on January 8th were a different matter. They would come out of nowhere and subside just as quickly as they came - lasting only two or three minutes. My wife and I initially thought they were sinus related or tension based, but as the headaches persisted and as I moved up the food chain of specialists, I eventually found myself carrying MRI film to a neurologist's appointment. It was on 30 January 2004 that I heard the dreadful words "I'm sorry Mr. Kline, but you have a brain tumor."

Hearing those words was like hitting a brick wall at 90 mph – your whole world comes crashing down in an instant while you stand by helpless. I immediately went to see neurosurgeon Dr. Sam Finn, and heard my first bit of good news within a couple of hours of the bad news. "Yes, you have a brain tumor," Dr. Finn said, "but it is eminently operable." He started me on 32 mg/day of the steroid Decadon to reduce the swelling being caused by the tumor. The Decadon also dismissed the headaches and it felt great to feel great.

On 02 February 04, I received a prayer pager from the First Baptist Church of Richardson. When a person prays for me, they call my pager's number and enter "777#", the universal code for "someone is praying for you." Zip Codes are often entered in place of "777" and this is actually preferred, as I can lookup the Zip and see the origin. This pager continues to be a tremendous source of encouragement and comfort, even to this day. I have received thousands of pages at all hours of the day and night, wherever I go.

The tumor was removed during a three hour procedure on 04 February 04. The medical staff at Baylor in Dallas was nothing short of brilliant. They inserted several "ports" into my body and while we conversed, they began to take me under. The next thing I remember was the chief anesthesiologist saying "Jerry, we're done." All I could say to him was "fantastic, fantastic." Two days later, I had an MRI and was pronounced clean by the radiologist and the medical staff. That same day, I went home with strict orders to rest for one week. After a follow up meeting with Dr. Finn, I returned to work nine days after the surgery.

Having learned that my tumor was a grade 4 glioblastoma multiforme (gbm), I began to research brain cancer treatments and to try to figure out how to approach this whole situation. Having the tumor removed was a "no brainer",

given its location slightly above my right ear, but what should I do after surgery? With the help of my wife Kathy, my mother and my brother David, we developed a plan. Our approach was "total war" with no holds barred, no mercy shown, no prisoners taken. We decided to be as aggressive with this traitor as my body would allow.

The first post operative treatment consisted of six weeks of conformal radiation therapy with concurrent Temodar chemotherapy and Celebrex. My blood was checked every week during this time. A significant percentage of my hair fell out, but I didn't mind too much because I retained good energy levels.

After this, Kathy and I visited MD Anderson, Duke, and UT Southwestern to identify follow on treatment options for the long haul. We also consulted with gbm survivors, like Donna Ferrer and Dr. Ben Williams. I read articles and books. I spent hours on the internet. I beseeched the Lord for wisdom and direction.

I eventually ended up at the office of Dr. Virginia Stark-Vance, a truly remarkable oncologist with offices in Ft. Worth and Dallas who takes an optimistic view of things, even a gbm diagnosis. The plan we elected was to take 14 days of Temodar (a pill), then stop the Temodar for 14 days. I also took Accutane with the Temodar. We then checked my blood to see how my system is holding up, and then the cycle was repeated. Every two months, a MRI was performed, and by the grace of God, I had 21 consecutively clean scans over a 40 month period. One scan was a PET, the others standard MRIs.

A spot was identified from the MRI on 01 June 07. We began hitting this small, suspect (< than .25" x .25" x .14") area on Monday, 04 June 07, followed by monthly MRIs, and as of the scan of 08 Sept 07, the beast had vanished! Two more rounds of Carbo and Avastin were therefore administered over the next two months, and the monthly scans remained clean, so I returned to bi-monthly MRIs and halted the chemo and Avastin in November 2007.

Another spot was identified from the MRI on 13 March 09. The bombardment of this very small area with chemo began on Monday, 16 March 2009. This spot was eliminated with just one chemo infusion. Two more months of chemo and clean scans followed, but this time I decided to stay on chemo for a fourth cycle. The idea was to keep Carboplatin in my system long enough to kill the tumor once and for all. I am taking a proactive chemo stance, rather than waiting to react to a third tumor occurrence.

Prior to June 2007, I had often considered the possibility of performing MRIs every three months, or four months even just twice per year, but I am so glad that we stayed the course, because we caught the 2009 recurrence even sooner than the 2007 recurrence, which was orders of magnitude smaller than the 2004 tumor.

Through all of this, I have enjoyed the unfaltering support of my family, several churches, friends, neighbors, co-workers, cancer survivors. More than this, I have seen the Lord at work as never before; mostly working on me and my fears. He is my strong tower, my Good Shepherd and my Abba Father who treats me with compassion and tenderness. I would not want to go through this again, but my faith now has an experiential component that provides a validation of the Bible that I have been studying most of my life. I bow my knees and thank the Lord Jesus Christ!

The film on the left is from Jan 2004 (pre-op). The right image is the first recurrence (June 2007). The bottom left shot is a clean MRI (Nov 2008) and the second recurrence is shown in the bottom right.

