

Riding High into the Future

By Francis 'Bud' Sanzone



Bud recently retired after 56 years at a family-owned beverage business. He resides in West Palm Beach, Florida, with his wife and has a passion for intrepid travel.

Halloween 2004:

The doctor is all business, unsmiling, staring at my chart. "You have stage 4 colon cancer that has metastasized to the liver and lung."

Cancer. This insidious disease has one singular purpose: to reproduce, take over, and destroy.

He goes on, "You have maybe four to six months to live."

"I am not going to die," I tell him.

It may have been Halloween, but I do not fear monsters. I knew that my best chance was to find a cancer center where there was a clinical trial and a skilled, dedicated physician who'd be willing to accept my case.

Enter Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and Dr. K.

After seven months of chemotherapy to shrink the tumor, I was scheduled for surgery to remove two-thirds of my liver and a foot of my colon. During those

seven months, I denied being sick and refused to let cancer control me. I was very tired at times but I never missed work and ate a full breakfast each morning before I went for chemo.

I prayed as though everything depended on God and lived as though everything depended on me (with help from the "angels" at MSK). I also laughed, which was, as it's often said, good medicine. When someone said, "Nice to see you, Bud," I replied, "Nice to be seen." I still say that.

The surgery was successful and all was well. I remained on chemo for a few more months. The following spring, my scan showed a new site: cancer again. The monster had returned. Chemo resumed but was not working. My surgeon told me to go home and enjoy Christmas because it would probably be the family's most memorable one and my last. He felt that surgery was not an option because there's always more there than shows up on the scan. I explained that I was not going to go home and die. I would rather die on the table trying than just give up, go home, and wait.

I said, "Operate. If I don't make it, I promise I won't tell anybody that I talked you into it."

He was reluctant at first and I knew I needed help. I went to my advocate, Dr. K. Soon, she was back with good news.

"Yes," she said, "he will operate."

After the surgery, the surgeon proclaimed a success, "I'm rewriting the book. I got it all. It had not spread!"

Halloween 2013:

I just returned from my checkup, where I received a clean bill of health. The monster never got me. I owe much to God, my MSK doctors, and my family. They supported me all the way.

I enjoy each day, embrace new adventures, and challenge the future. I'm proud to report that I went from the end of my rope to enjoying zipline rides across Honduras. I'm alive, well, and riding high.