



*Elayne Klein*

LUNG CANCER

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My journey with lung cancer began seven years ago when I caught the flu from my four-year-old granddaughter during an epidemic in California. I underwent radiological tests, and although I had already recovered from the cough, the repeat CT scans showed that a 1.7 centimeter mass was in my lung. A biopsy was performed showing non-small cell adenocarcinoma. I thought they had mistaken me for another patient. Then I curled into a ball in confusion and fear.

My thoracic surgeon performed a right thoracotomy with lower lobectomy and a mediastinal lymph node dissection. He soon informed me that the cancer had spread to my lymph nodes and therefore I had stage 3A lung cancer. I looked wide eyed at my husband and asked, “Was I just given a death sentence?” I immediately thought about my youngest daughter’s future wedding. I wanted to be there. I wanted to be there to see her children born. I wasn’t finished living yet! I was angry.

Soon after, I met with my oncologist who gave me the option of choosing between two chemo treatments. I chose the slightly more effective one which meant that I would lose my hair. She also explained the frightening survival statistics. Fortunately, the follow-up appointment with my pulmonary doctor helped me look at the diagnosis more positively. “Forget the bad statistics,” he said. “You could be in the percentage of people who survive. We will help you get through this.” He simply spent time with me. He asked me, “How are you doing?” When my eyes filled with tears, I realized that he had given me my first chance to verbalize and focus on the emotional and physical strain of having lung cancer.

## LUNG CANCER

Lung cancer is an abnormal, uncontrolled growth of cells within the lung. It’s the leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States, and it will cause more deaths this year than cancer of the breast, prostate, colon, liver, or kidney and melanoma combined.

- Lung cancers are generally divided into two major types, small cell lung cancer and non-small cell lung cancer. Small cell lung cancer tends to grow more quickly than non-small cell lung cancer.
- Causes of lung cancer include:
  - Smoking
  - Second-hand smoke
  - Radon or asbestos
  - Genetic factors
  - Air pollution

*Learn more: ATS Patient Education Series. “What is Lung Cancer?” New York, NY. 2008. [patients.thoracic.org](http://patients.thoracic.org)*

Later, I started 33 cycles of radiation. I had decided to empower myself by experimenting with green protein, energy drinks. I listened to meditation CDs, and I went for Reiki healing sessions. Fortunately, I found the National Lung Cancer Partnership, and their wonderful website of encouraging Stories of Strength written by survivors of all stages of lung cancer. The NLCP also provides funding for lung cancer research and offers a ton of helpful information. It was important for me to make lists about what I wanted to accomplish, like having fun (imagine that!) and walking along the Delaware River with my faithful Labrador retriever. My wish right now for all cancer patients is for a comprehensive post treatment plan to help us all adjust to our lives in the best possible way.

At present, I have a metastasis in my opposite lung, considered indolent. On a positive note, my original tumor was found to be EML4-ALK translocation—that's a good thing. My doctor and I have chosen not to treat the nodules or get a biopsy unless I develop more symptoms or there is a truly meaningful treatment down the road that will give me an extended quality of life.

When we received news of the cancer recurrence, my husband and I made the decision to follow our dream to be near our children, and so we moved across the country to California. I am now affiliated with Stanford Medical Center, and my hope is that there will soon be research that will help me stay alive.

*Elayne Klein was a patient speaker at the ATS 2013 International Conference in Philadelphia.*