

MY EIGHT WEEKS WITH KAREN

Dedicated to Karen and staff at the Nevada cancer center in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Well, here is another MRI-looking machine, the third one in two days. The latest blood test showed that my P.S.A. (prostate-specific-antigen) is now up to eighteen, so my doctor ordered a biopsy. The biopsy came back showing that I have prostate cancer, so I was given my options for treatment. I can't handle dye in my veins or needles coming at me, on top of that, the ones that always get me through that kind of thing aren't allowed to be in the same room with me. My wife is in Ohio visiting her mother, and our good friend Anne was made to wait in the other room because of the radiation from the M.R.I. Oh great, there is the guy that put the stuff in my veins yesterday.

“Lay down on your back right here,” he said. He seemed like an okay guy, but I didn't know what was coming next.

As I did what I was told, a young girl walked up to my left side. She looked young enough to me to be my daughter, which seemed at the time to be unusual.

“Hi I'm Karen, are you alright?” she asked. “There will be no dye or needles in your arm with this procedure.”

The tone of her voice and the message in her eyes caused a peace and calmness to come over me and I felt totally at ease. Then she told me she would be with me for the next eight weeks, for all forty treatments. If after sixty-seven years on this earth I want to believe that God puts people in my path as needed, then I need to believe that this girl Karen, was put here right now because she was needed. I just said thank you to myself before I answered Karen's question.

“Yes I'm alright,” I told her.

“We're going to put three tattoos on you today,” she said, “you will hardly feel anything.”

Then I don't remember what she said or did but we were both laughing, and for a minute I forgot why I was there and what I was facing. I do remember her touch was that of someone who cared about me, and her eyes kept saying, “you're okay, and I'll see to it.”

It was over soon with no pain just like Karen said. That afternoon I drove back to my home in Pahrump, Nevada, to wait for the phone call about starting radiation treatments for prostate cancer. A long two days went by, then, Wednesday the call came saying to be at the clinic by eleven in the morning. Thursday morning came, I got up and out of the house, and started my seventy-mile drive into Las Vegas, wondering what was next.

I arrived early like I do everywhere I go. After finding the right door I went in and checked in with a nice lady also named Karen. She assured me the Karen I was asking about would be in to get me soon. In a few minutes, in walked the Karen I was hoping for. There she was, with the same look on her face and in her eyes that said, “let's do this and make you better.” She took me out of the waiting room, down the hall, right turn then

left turn, to a room with a locker in it. I finally got the stupid robe on she had handed me, and we walked down a another mass of hallways to a room with lead walls and a door that looked like a vault door in a bank.

“There’s the table and your machine,” she said, “lay down here in this mold we made for you Monday.”

She arranged my robe where she could see the tattoos. As they began, she explained exactly what they were doing. She introduced me to another lady in the room, although I didn't learn her name that morning, because my focus was on Karen and Karen alone.

The machine looked to me like something out of Star Wars. Karen gave me what resembled a large pacifier ring to hold with both hands so that I would not move from the position she put me in.

While putting her hand on my shoulder and speaking with a real soft tone of voice, I heard Karen's words. “Noel, here we go, your number one treatment will soon be over. We're going into the other room now, but I can see you, and hear you, it won't take long and you won't feel a thing.”

At this point I had complete trust in Karen and what she was saying. So, with a tear in my eye, I just said “okay.”

The machine made a humming and a sort of clicking noise, and something from outer space started going back and forth over me. It was over soon, just like she said, and in she walked.

“Are you alright?” she ask, putting her hand on my shoulder and giving me that look of caring in her eyes that I was starting to look for.

“Yes,” I said, “that was easy, is that the way it will be every time?”

“Yes it will, and you will get more and more relaxed as time goes on,” she promised.

Getting me off the table and standing up without me ending up naked was a “fun” job on Karen's and the other ladies part, but they were good at it, and the way they handled it made me feel comfortable and safe.

So now back down a hall with Karen to the dressing room I went. I was never watching where we were going, just looking at Karen and asking her one question after another. Letting go of her hand I started to go in to that little dressing room. As I walked through the door, suddenly a feeling of fear and anxiety came over me. As my eyes filled with tears, I turned and put my hands on Karen’s shoulders, and said, “Do you know what the problem is?”

“No,” she replied, “can you tell me Noel?”

“Okay Karen, I will try. I was born in 1942. I'm from the generation that grew up with the mind-set that cancer meant death. It was a death sentence to anybody that got it. I even remember as a child a couple of my parent's friends got it and died. So cancer was a real dreaded word and disease, and now here I am being told that I have it. I know, Karen, that things have come a long way since I was a kid, but in my mind, cancer means death.”

I stopped talking for a minute almost like I forgot what I was saying.

“Are you alright?” she wanted to know. When she asked my eyes instantly filled with tears. I started to hug her and realizing what I was doing, I pushed away. She said, “it’s okay,” so I just hugged her for a minute and cried. She whispered that it was good for me to just let it all out. My heart saw that look in her eyes again. I could plainly see that Karen was so much more than a lady that’s going to put me on the radiation table five days a week and throw the switch. Karen was a real caregiver, consoler, and much more. She was a true friend that wanted me to be okay and whole again as badly as I did.

A few more days of treatment went by without too much anxiety or worries. While letting me hold her hand (after always giving me my hug) she would walk me to the dressing room and then to the treatment room. I would visit with her and tell her jokes or stories as we walked.

I got up one morning probably four or five days into my treatments and suddenly realized what my mind was doing with this so-called death sentence. Looking in the mirror while shaving and combing my hair, I said out loud to myself, “I'm not going to the cancer center for radiation treatments, I'm just driving in to Las Vegas this beautiful morning to visit with my friend Karen.” At that moment the inspiration to write this story came to me, “My Eight Weeks with Karen.”

The next day my wife returned from visiting her mom in Ohio. I had an idea to put a circle of friends around me like we learned to do when we worked at our church. So we prayed and talked about who would be in that circle. It may seem funny to some that my wife and I came up with all women's names, but everybody knows women are more spiritual and caring than men. When they pray, God listens. So we ended up with five women around the circle, Anne, Mary, Tina, Tammy, and Patricia, with Dorothy and I in the center.

My better half getting home was a good thing for me. She started watching over me and taking care of me like a saint. She fought the fight all the way with me and for me, but always let me fight it my own way and gave me space when I needed it. A few days before my first treatment they gave me a hormone shot and told me that I would need one every month for maybe a year, That’s why Dorothy gave me space, I was driving her nuts already. She was always there every treatment day, Monday through Friday, wanting to drive me, or ride in with me, to the cancer center. I would joke with her saying my gas mileage went way down with her in the car. The truth of it was most days I used the drive in as my time alone, just to get my thoughts together. I would play a CD of Gospel songs

that a friend recorded for me, drive a little under the speed limit and try to relax, but she would always drive me in when I needed to see the doctor.

The first person in our support circle is Anne, a long time friend we met when we served in the church. I had the privilege of baptizing her years ago when I was a volunteer minister. I don't think I would have made it in one piece if Anne had not been there in the beginning before Dorothy came home. She was with me through all the body scans and tests. She was there when the doctor told me that I had cancer and needed to choose the type of treatment I wanted right away. Anne lived close to the clinic, right off the highway I came to town on, so I could stop in and get her if I needed to, or I could rest at her place after my treatment if needed. If I played my cards right and was hungry she would take me to lunch. I remember one time after having a bad day, the day before, she asked me how I was feeling and I said, "I don't know. How do I look?"

She said "incredible!" When I heard her say that and saw her funny little smile I felt incredible.

Next in our circle is Mary. We have only known Mary a short time (under a year) she is listed in my cell contact list as "dance teacher." My wife and I like to go country dancing on weekends, that's how we met Mary, a great dancer. I mentioned to Karen that Dorothy and I like to dance and she said dancing is really good therapy for cancer patient. She also explained that learning anything new is good for a person when going through this. Mary became a good friend almost instantly, and I asked her if she would try and teach me some new dance moves. Her soon-to-be husband Rodney said I'm a slow learner. I guess he was right because she is still trying to teach me to dance. An example of how Mary dealt with a friend going through a stressful situation happened the morning she drove me in for my treatment. As we came into the parking lot she asked me where I usually parked.

"Away from the building and other parked cars," I said.

"Good," she laughed.

After we parked and started walking across the parking lot, she took hold of my hand. I should have known something was up, because Mary never held my hand before except when we were dancing, but thinking she was just trying to get me to relax I held her hand. Then the surprise came.

"Okay now we're going to waltz to the door," she said, with a smile.

The fun started, people were laughing, horns were going off, we got in peoples way, the whole bit. My mind was not thinking about cancer that day, that is for sure! The next day driving home from my treatment I called and told Mary there was a sign in the parking lot that said, "no dancing." Like I said, Mary is still trying to teach me to dance. Dorothy and I are blessed to have Rodney and Mary's friendship.

Then there is Tina. We met Tina shortly after we moved to Pahrump, about eight years ago. She never had a dad that was a father to her. Her biological dad wasn't around very long in her life, and she doesn't really remember him that much. Then there came several step-dads through the years. We met Tina one night when Dorothy and I were out to dinner with some friends. Tina overheard us saying that we had nobody to take care of our horse while we were visiting family in Ohio. She walked up to our table and offered to take care of our horse. That was the beginning of our friendship. For some reason, maybe there is a sign on my back, I don't know, she started looking at me as her dad. Today if you tell her I'm not her real dad you will have a fight on your hands. Tina would go in with me on her days off if I asked her to. She would always have to drive me home if we stopped at my favorite place to eat lunch, a place that served hot wings and cold draft beer. She would let me order one beer. I was told one beer on occasion was okay, and would not affect the radiation treatments. So it was fun for me to get back home and tell my wife that I had a beer for lunch with my daughter, even if I didn't drink the whole glass. Having Tina drive me back home was fun too. She is the only person that I know who can get a ticket with the car set on cruise control.

Next to tell you about is Tammy. We have known her for about eleven years. Like Anne, I baptized her when we worked in our church. My wife and I saw Tammy through some rough times in her life, and now I guess she sort of looks at us as her second parents. Tammy lives in Kingman, Arizona and because of her work was not able to make it in to see me while I was going through my treatments, so she never met Karen. However Tammy was on the phone with me almost every day and would have come in to be with me if I had told her that I really needed her to.

Completing our support circle is Patricia. We have known her for over thirty years. She refers to me as her other dad every now and then. Because of living in Phoenix, Arizona and having a very demanding job, I never asked her to make the trip in to see me, but she would have been on the first plane out if Anne could not have been with me before Dorothy got home. I could call Patricia anytime day or night and she would pick up the phone. Patricia has always been there for me whenever I needed a special friend to talk to. She is one of the most positive people in my life. I wish with all my heart that she could have been my biological daughter.

So that is our inner circle of friends, five very positive people who can be trusted with feelings and emotions. When you are going through a "not so good" situation in life, you have to surround yourself with positive people. Like I mentioned, I learned the concept of an inner circle of friends when I served as a counselor in our church. My friend Patricia reminded me over the years about the benefits of having positive people in my life. Karen took it one step further because of my situation, and as you may see I took it even further, let me explain.

Our daughter went through a divorce while I was going through the last six weeks of treatments. Karen told me not to get involved and let Dorothy handle it. She told me to try not to talk to my daughter or son-in-law, and that if I answered the phone and it was one of them to give the phone to Dorothy. She encouraged me not to listen to anything

negative that may cause me to worry or stress.

Sometimes that would not work even though I told them both that I was told not to talk about their pending divorce. As soon as I would get off the phone with one of them, I would call somebody in my circle and just talk about anything but “bad stuff.” I found that would clear my mind. After that happened a few times I made a list of friends that were a little negative most of the time, not just about what I was going through, but about life in general. We all have those kinds of friends and we love them, but sometimes we have to put them on hold until we can deal with their problems without tearing us down. So I avoided any conversation with those folks. The next thing I did, one by one, as I talk to people outside my circle, I would tell them that I didn't want to discuss my health until I was cancer free. Most of them understood. I'm sorry to say family members were the worst.

Now let me tell you again how great, smart, and just the best my main caregiver was, and is. Karen interacted with the ladies in my circle, remember she met three of them. On Mondays she would ask if Mary taught me any new dance steps over the weekend. On any given day she would ask if Anne and I were going to lunch, or she would ask me if I had talked to Patricia. If she saw that Tina drove me in she would remark, “Oh so we get wings and beer today, right Noel? Take it easy on the beer.” I think you get the picture. Karen became part of the circle and we all knew it. I don't think that was part of her job but she knew and did what it took to make sure my treatments were effective, and that's what she wanted, and we all knew that too. The caring and concern shown by Karen for me was very plain to see by everybody. I think that had a bigger part to play in getting me better than I really know.

I felt close to Karen through the whole thing, second only to my wife. Karen gave me no choice than to get better, it was just a given. You will go a long way before you will find a caregiver like Karen, but if you get to know the people that are taking care of you and aren't afraid to talk to them, you just might help some one to be more like Karen.

When it was day ten of my eight weeks with Karen, like always, she walked up to the radiation table to help me down.

“That's number ten, thirty more to go, I'm one-fourth done,” I told her.

“No” she tried to tell me, “You have thirty-one left.”

“No Karen,” I responded, “ You said forty treatments and I just did number ten.”

“Doctor Nagy told me that he has decided to give you forty-one treatments, that's the maximum you can have,” she explained, “He wants to do everything he can to make sure we get it.”

“Well, that's just great, do you have any more surprises today Karen?” I asked.

“There is something I need to tell you Noel,” she said with a look on her face that I hadn't seen before. “I have to take three days off next week, but Kristi will be here.”

“You what? Then I'm taking three days off next week,” I answered.

“No, no you can't do that,” she pleaded, “You do not need to miss any treatments.”

“Why, would I have to start over?” I asked jokingly.

“No, but it's just not good,” she said.

“I always miss Saturday and Sunday, how would the cancer know it's not the weekend?” (I thought I had her for a minute but I didn't).

“You need to come in those three days, please don't miss them, do you hear me?” I could see another look on her face that I hadn't seen before.

“Okay, I guess I will try, do you promise that you will be back in three days?” I asked.

“Yes I promise,” she replied.

The weekend went by before I knew it. Sunday night my wife asked if I wanted her to go in with me in the morning.

“No, I'm good,” I told her.

“Okay, remember Karen won't be there, are you sure you're alright with that?” she asked.

“Yes,” I responded, but I really was wondering how the morning was going to be without Karen.

The Monday morning drive was great. I knew every curve and bump in the road by now. One thing I never explained, when I go in for treatments I need to have a full bladder but yet not have to go to the restroom. Try that sometime when you have nothing else to do, it's fun. So I know about how much water and coffee I can drink and still maintain, and I know all the emergency stops along the way just in case. I made it that morning in good shape. Walking in the office door I saw Karen, no not my Karen, remember the nice Karen in the front office at the beginning of the story? Everybody knows that old saying, you don't see the forest for the trees, that Karen was always there but this is the first time I really saw her. I realized her smile was always the first thing I saw every treatment morning, and I also realized the kind of smile that was on her face told me how the whole morning was going to go. She was also the last person every morning to say, “have a good day, see you in the morning.”

So I'm inside the front door, just standing in the corner thinking. I could see that Karen

was on the phone. As she was hanging up the phone I heard the words from a smiling happy looking Karen, “well good morning, glad you made it in.”

I didn't know it at the time but some of the staff was worried that I might not show up knowing my main caregiver was missing.

“Let me call Kristi for you, remember Karen's not here today,” she said.

“Yes, I know,” I said in a low voice trying to hide my anxiety.

“Well here is your first note from Karen.”

“First note, what do you mean?” I wondered.

“Karen wrote three notes for you, one for each day she is gone.”

My first thought was, “I can't believe Karen would do that,” my next thought was, “ yes I can believe she would do something like that, that's Karen.”

The word came down from the radiation room to go on back.

Remember me saying at the beginning of this story that I never paid attention where Karen was leading me because I was too busy talking to her. You would think that after the tenth time there I would know my way around. But no, I could not find the dressing room, the restroom or the radiation room. I met somebody that I didn't know in one of the halls and asked where the dressing rooms were? After I put my gown on I was able to find the bathroom, it was right around the corner. Now I said to myself, “where is the radiation room?” That's when Kristi found me. I was trying to hang on to the backside of my stupid gown and walk at the same time.

“Come on are you lost?” she asked.

If anybody reading this can find out who designed those gowns let me know, there will be a reward for you.

I was in Kristi's hands now and for the first time I started to realize what she was worth. She was always smiling, always soft spoken and professional, and always handled me with kindness. One of her jobs was to make sure my hind side was covered when I got off the table. She did that well. She would always give me space if she could see that I wanted a word with Karen. I felt safe that first day alone with her, and said to myself, “she is a real part of the team, my team.” I started to see that one reason Karen was so good at her job was because everybody she worked with was so good at theirs. Karen not being there for three days was for me, in a way, a good thing. I was able to appreciate everybody more and I could see more reasons why this cancer center was so great. The Karen up at the front desk and Kristi back in the radiation room were two people that were vital to the team of people that were trying to make me whole again. I'm glad that I

realized that.

I went back home that day feeling lucky that I had such good people around me. The next morning I started to get myself ready to go in for day two without Karen, when I said to Dorothy, “I just don't want to go in today.”

“Why?” she said with a worried look on her face, “you had such a good day yesterday.”

“I know, Honey, I just feel down and a little depressed this morning. Honey you know those hormone shots can do that to you.”

“You need to just get yourself together and go,” she pleaded. “You know that Karen would feel so bad finding out that you missed a day. She would blame herself, and I know you don't want that, so go in for me and for Karen, okay?”

“Alright I will,” I said.

“Good,” she said. “Do you want me to go with you?”

I told her no, “ you just stay home and rest, I'm fine.”

That day at the clinic went well and I was back home before I knew it. The next morning rolled around, and I wanted to go in just to get it done so I could start to look forward to seeing Karen the next day, and give her a good report. The third day things seemed a little slow and laid back around the clinic, so Kristi and I had some time to just talk.

“There is something I want to try and explain, Kristi, can I?” I asked.

“Sure go ahead Noel, what is it?”

“Okay here goes,” I began. “The day this all started and I was told that I have cancer, I was scared to death. Doctor Nagy ordered a hormone shot and a twenty-minute I.V. for my bones. My friend Anne was sitting with me when they started to take me to the chemo room. The doctor told Anne to go with me. The nurse that worked on me seemed to have a bad attitude and was a little rude. She hurt me with the I.V. and she hurt me with the shot, and I think she was making fun of me for having Anne there. The whole thing was just bad, and like I said I was scared and wondered what was next. What was next is I had to come in for a body scan and get the tattoos on me, so when that day came I was scared and uptight and didn't know who was going to be doing it, maybe that same nurse. That's when I met Karen, and I instantly bonded to her. To me she saved me that day and I didn't want any one else doing anything with me. Does that make sense Kristi?”

“Yes” she replied, “I understand, and don't blame you.”

“Well, Kristi, I hope that I didn't make you feel bad or hurt your feelings during any of my treatments because I know Karen was the only one I was talking to when it all

started.”

“No, that can happen sometimes,” she told me. “We are glad Karen was there for you. The important part, and our goal is getting you well.”

I went home that day feeling good about talking to Kristi. That night at the house while watching television with Dorothy, and thinking about the next day, I said, “Honey, do you know what I’m going to do tomorrow?”

“No,” she replied, “there is no telling, what?”

“I’m going to wear my black suit and tie when I go in for my treatment.”

“You what, why?” she asked.

I laughed, and told her, “Just to welcome Karen back.”

Remember earlier in my story I said that Dorothy let me fight the fight my way? This is a good example.

With out any hesitation she got up out of her chair saying, “let me go get it ready for you.”

She shined my shoes and ironed my favorite white shirt. The next morning with shined shoes, black suit, white shirt, and blue tie, out the door I ran. I was not thinking about cancer that day, just thinking about having some fun with my friends.

Through the door into the waiting room I went. Karen that worked the front office, my greeter every morning, saw me right away.

“Wow look at you,” she shouted. “Don’t you look sharp?”

She got on the phone and here came the head nurse, Marlene.

“Where are you going today after your treatment?” she wanted to know.

“Well Marlene,” I explained, “I’m going back home. I just wore this to welcome Karen back.”

“We have never had anybody do that before,” she said somewhat astonished, “You look really good, you must be feeling okay.”

“I’m feeling great and having fun,” I answered. I felt even better hearing myself say that.

About that time my main caregiver Karen, came in the room to get me.

“What are you doing Noel?” she asked. “You look really handsome this morning. You and Dorothy going some place special today?”

“No,” I told her, “I just put this on to welcome you back.”

The look on her face was priceless. She just kept looking at me and shaking her head. After my treatment I asked Karen if she had ever put anybody on the radiation table wearing a suit and tie before?

“No only you would think of something like that,” she answered, smiling.

Like I said earlier I did not have cancer on my mind that morning I was just having fun with life. I must have looked funny on the table with my dress shirt and tie on with black socks and a hospital gown.

The next four weeks or so went well. I got into a routine and just rolled along day after day. One Friday it came time to have another hormone shot. I went to the head nurse and told her about my experience with that one nurse that gave me my last shot. I was nice about it, said maybe she was just having a bad day, but I would rather have someone else this time. She told me not to worry that she wouldn't be giving them to me anymore. Then I was introduced to a nurse named Jonelle. When I got my shot that day I didn't even feel it, and Jonelle's attitude and kindness was the same as my caregiver Karen. My wife said I got along fine with her because she is so pretty, but I'm sticking to my story that she is just good.

Some really good people came into our lives in the next few weeks, I think God does that sometimes as needed, and if you are trying to hang around positive thinking people I think that draws even more of them into your life. I was on a nine-ball pool team during most of my treatment. We played once a week. Some young people that were on another team made friends with Dorothy and me. They were and still are a real blessing to us. I think if you want to feel young and stay young you need some young people in your life.

Pahrump is what you would probably call a small town, so a lot of people that dance to country music know each other. One night when we were out dancing, we were introduced to a lady, whose name is Carol. She was sitting at the next table with some friends of ours. I ended up asking her to dance, so Dorothy and I got to talk to her and found out that she at one time made a living teaching people how to dance. One night we had her over for dinner and she worked with us, one-on-one, on our dance steps She told us she already knew that I was trying to learn new dance steps, and that I had prostate cancer, and was receiving radiation treatments. Then she explained to us that her daughter was going through treatments for breast cancer. So Carol, Dorothy, and I made a real connection. Later on we got to meet her daughter Renee, when she came to visit from California. Carol always had a pink bracelet on her wrist for Renee. One night I noticed a second bracelet on her, and I asked what it was for.

“That's for you Noel,” she smiled!

We stopped dancing and I just hugged her for a minute. That meant so much to me. That day had not been real good for me so far, but at that point it was one of the best.

The days and nights kept going by and before I knew it my last treatment, number forty-one, was to happen in the morning. Dorothy and I were talking about how the next day was going to be for us. Of course she was going with me and she had something to give to both Karen's. Our granddaughter, who was living with us at the time, came out of her bedroom to say goodnight. She had on a robe that we gave her, which was fine, but the slippers she had on were something else. Dorothy and I both laughed at once. They were funny looking to say the least. They had all different color strips running through them, red, yellow, and green. And if that wasn't bad enough they had toes in them, they were what young people would call "far out." Do you remember me saying that I keep my socks on when I'm on the radiation table? Soon as I saw them I asked her if I could borrow them the next day so I could wear them during my last treatment. She said, "I guess" but asked me "why?" My wife joined in, "Yes dear, why?"

"I want to see Karen's face when I come out of the dressing room with that gown on and these socks," I said. "She won't forget my last day."

Morning came and Dorothy and I headed in. I think she forgot about the socks but I had them on inside my cowboy boots. Karen was called and came up front greeting me with a big smile.

"Well this is it," she said. "We made it to the last day, and you did so good the whole way, I'm proud of you," she went on.

Dorothy, Karen, and I walked together to the dressing room. They talked while I was getting ready. In a minute I walked out with my gown and striped toed socks on. Karen went nuts. She laughed so hard she cried and yelled for anybody that could hear to come look. Dorothy had forgotten about the socks, when she saw them, she lost it. Karen could hardly get me on the table, it was like she forgot what to do next. Kristi who seemed to take it in stride helped her. I know that I said it before, but I was not thinking about cancer that day, I was having too much fun.

After that last treatment, (number forty-one) Karen and Kristi helped me off the table and the three of us stayed in the radiation room for a little bit and just talked. It was like saying good-bye to old friends but at the same time knowing we would see each other again. And it was like the three of us just completed a task and did it well.

That morning walking out the door of the cancer center was emotional for me as well as Dorothy. Everybody was giving us hugs and saying good job. I had to come back for two more hormone shots, making a total of four instead of a possible twelve, as I was told by the doctor in the beginning. After my number four shot, my P.S.A. dropped to .01, and I was pronounced cancer free. My strength is coming back daily now and I'm feeling great.

I would just like to point out a few things, as this story comes to a close. First of all, I

don't want to sound like this clinic is the only good one in the world. I'm hoping this story will help to point out things that one might want to look for in choosing a clinic or cancer center, or any facility that a person could go to for healing. You need to do your homework and find a place best for you. The most important thing is having and keeping a good positive attitude. Then on the top of your list should be to always make sure you keep positive people around you! Do not allow anybody to say anything negative to you, or at least don't let them say it twice. As I pointed out, family can be the worst.

I did not have to receive chem- o treatments with my prostate cancer, just radiation and hormone shots. The radiation did not seem to affect me, I didn't have any of the side effects that a person can have. The shots made me feel tired and took away muscle strength. Also those shots affected my manhood, but that's already coming back so I feel it is well worth having the shots. I'm cancer free now, and that's what it is all about.

I was told by my doctor and by my caregiver to keep doing all the things that I normally do. So, I kept riding my horse. I stayed on the nine-ball pool team. I worked in my yard almost every day. I kept dancing and learning new steps, (remember I was told to learn anything new). I was told not to sleep too much during the day but to take a short nap after a treatment if needed.

I need to say that writing this story turned out to be good therapy for me. With chem- o some of this kind of activity would not have been possible, so I was lucky. Always talk to your doctor and caregivers about things, they can help, like the misfortune with that one nurse. If there are things going on at home or with family that's not so good, talk about it and stay positive. It may sound funny to hear, but during my "Eight weeks with Karen" and the rest of the staff, I had a lot of fun. My wife and I of thirty-three years feel even closer now to each other. We made new great friends that will stay friends for the rest of our lives, and we are closer to our old ones. "Life is good."

Let me close by telling you what the last note that I opened from Karen said. It read: "Remember to smile today."

This healing of mine took place at the Nevada cancer center Las Vegas Nevada. My main Doctor is Doctor M. Nafees Nagy, M. D. followed by Doctor John D. Sayler, P. A. C. and Doctor Robert C O' Laughlin, M. D.

Noel Smithers