

# Battling Brain Cancer Gord Somerville's Story



*Cindy Somerville and Gord outside Sunnybrook on Brain Cancer Awareness Day, in October 2018, prior to first radiation treatments.*



*Friday night meet-up at Somerville's home. (L-R) Back row: Scott Horsbourg, Peter Lucas, Rod Speake, Richard Heffering, Kevin Holmes, Tim Colin. Front row: Mike Ettles, Steve Kajan, Tyler Ruest, Gord Somerville with his dog Nelson.*

*By Gord Somerville.*

It was a typical Saturday morning. I was puttering around outside in the yard completing my honey-do list, and I needed to move my truck over in the driveway. While I was backing my truck into the selected spot, I inexplicably made contact with a tree and then took out part of our fence. My wife wondered what the heck was wrong. I advised her that I did not feel well and that I was going to lie down for a while. After a short rest, I had the following symptoms: headache, nausea, a little confusion and a slight slurring of my words. A friend, who was visiting, suggested I proceed to the hospital to have things checked out. I certainly was feeling a bit off.

Once we arrived at the hospital a team of health care professionals said I was beginning to show signs of a possible mild stroke. I had developed mobility issues, especially on my left side. They performed a CT scan and then came the first wave of shocking news. It was determined that there was a tumour on the right temporal area of my brain, close to my ear. The tumour was between the skull and the brain. I would be sent to the Kingston Hospital Neurological Centre for surgery.

I was taken by ambulance from Peterborough to Kingston. I was medically sedated, so I don't remember the journey, but my wife was by my side and swears it was the longest two and a half hours of her life. Not 12 hours earlier, on Friday evening, my world was the same as any other fall evening, dinner, an outdoor fire and some beverages

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to start off the weekend. Now I was heading to Kingston for major brain surgery.

The surgery was performed on October 3, 2018 by Dr. Saunders. He informed me that he was able to remove as much of the tumour as possible, and that I would have to wait 10 very long and anxiety filled days for the pathology report. It certainly was nerve wracking, to say the least, but during that time I was recovering from surgery - half of the time I spent in the hospital and half of it at home. Did it ever feel good

to be home again! The piece of my head they had removed to do the surgery was healing really well and I was feeling pretty good.

Then came October 16th and the pathology report was in. We met with Dr. Saunders and he shared the diagnosis with us. Gord, you have Glioblastoma Stage 4 Brain Cancer. I didn't understand how this could be possible. I was perfectly healthy just two weeks earlier. I had never felt any symptoms and now I had Stage 4 brain cancer. We talked about treatment options and locations. I elected to receive treatment at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto.

We had our first appointment with the oncology team shortly thereafter. We met with Dr. Soliman and Dr. Perry, the most compassionate medical team I have ever met. They were very positive, and they felt confident that I would respond well to their treatment regime. I was encouraged by their words and anxious to get started.

My initial reaction to all of this was, *why me?* The oncology team did say that brain cancer really is just a matter of bad luck. There



*Gord and his wife Cindy, playing golf at Hockley Valley on their 30th wedding anniversary.*



*Gord and his son Andrew at Wildfire GC.*

really is nothing you can do to prevent it from a health perspective. In these cases, it is important to determine if the tumour is primary or secondary. In my case it started in the brain and was not an off shoot from any other source of cancer within my body. This was good news.

Did you know that 27 people in Canada are diagnosed with brain cancer every day? This is a startling statistic, not to mention all of the other cancer diagnosis that take place.

My treatment schedule was as follows: 42 radiation treatments over a six week period with weekends off. There was also oral chemo 150 mg per day during radiation and on weekends. Then one month off from radiation and a second treatment program of oral chemo to begin. This form of chemo is a heavier dose they call chemo top up: 300 mg per day, five days on and 23 days off. I was told this treatment program could last six to eight months depending on how well the treatment was working and my body's response. I would have a number of MRIs during this process to allow the doctors to monitor any changes in the cancer.

After the first stage of treatment and a follow up MRI the oncology team, or the "A Team" as I call them, were very pleased with the images and results. They reiterated that they felt they were going to talk about me for a long time yet. That was definitely a big boost for me and my attitude towards this whole experience so far. They told me that everything was shrinking and that there were no new growths. "No new growths" are the best three words a cancer patient can hear.

Chemotherapy weakens the immune system. One must be very careful not to be exposed to every day illnesses when in chemo. Unfortunately, I must have been exposed at some point as I ended up back in hospital for a week. I contracted Influenza A and Bacterial Pneumonia. It was a tough week, both physically and mentally, but I got through it. The steroid I was prescribed has an effect on blood sugar levels so while in hospital I was put on a diabetic diet to regulate this. I caught just about everything you could catch while in hospital. This was a very tough time, but I dug deep and found some

wit left within me to persevere and I recovered. There were some minor setbacks, but it was great to know that with a little medical assistance my body could fight off anything.

I believed, from the diagnosis stage, that I would get through this whole experience with wit, the power of positive thinking and a belief in modern medicine. I have also been showered with thoughts, prayers and positive vibes from friends and family. All of these things have helped me maintain a positive attitude.

I have also taken up meditation at the start of each day. I use it as an additional strategy to stay positive. I follow the teachings Dr. Joe Dispenza. I recommend following him as his videos and lectures have helped me immensely. Using one's mind to help heal the body through meditation is remarkable.

In difficult times, such as these, one worries about everything. You look for

those people who are going to be the rocks that anchor you. My son Andrew is one of those people, and he placed the call to my daughter Kailey in Vancouver. He told her that, *Dad has a brain tumour and you need to come home as he requires surgery.* This was a really tough call to make but he was incredible.

My daughter, who is a nurse by profession, has taken a lot of time off work to be with me and provide care and comfort. She has also been a rock through all of this, especially when she is not with me and has to deal with all of this from Vancouver.

I worry about my children and my wife, Cindy, and how they are coping with my health issues. I can't image what each of them is going through. I weep daily for them and what they are coping with. This is a scary time for all of us, but we are getting through it together and supporting each other.

I feel fortunate that the tumour was operable given where it was. Had it been within the brain it would not have been operable. The success of my treatment regime will keep the cancer at bay, and I am too stubborn to let this cancer return. I fully intent to get old and crusty, just like everybody else.

My medical experience and journey have shifted the way I think about everything. Things that mattered before no long matter nearly as much and things that I paid less attention to now receive my full attention.

I have enjoyed my career in the golf industry and other areas of the industry. I have made some amazing friends and their support as of late has been priceless and overwhelming. Thank you all. As I conclude my story my advice to friends is this: if there are sources of safety or protection you can utilize to protect yourself from any health risks, just do them. Practice them regularly to reduce the risks. It doesn't matter if you are a golf course superintendent, a painter, or work with LD50 products or whatever, protect yourself and pay attention to the most important things in your life—because life can change on a dime. Mine did. ■