

## *Stories of Strength*

# TONY MAGALDI

March 2016

Would you ever thank God for pneumonia? In October, 2014 I did because that diagnosis caused my physician to take an x-ray of my chest which revealed a 5-inch mass collapsing two thirds of my right lung (for reference, a softball is 3.5 inches). My name is Tony Magaldi and I hope your faith is strengthened by the testimony of my journey. While I didn't know Karen Neeley personally I feel there is a bond, almost like a "club", that those with cancer join when diagnosed. Participating in the b STRONG event this past year was my way of showing love and appreciation for those traveling the same journey Karen and millions of others have or are currently walking through.

Hearing the diagnosis of cancer when you are traveling 70 mph down the interstate is probably equivalent to driving impaired. I remember a dense fog covering my eyes when I was told I had cancer. It only lasted for a moment, but there was instant disbelief because I wasn't sick nor did I have any symptoms of cancer. I went from driving in a fog to exhilaration knowing that I would be with Jesus soon. There was a part of me that was excited because I know without a doubt where my destiny lies. I was reminded in the Bible when the apostle Paul cried out that he would rather be in heaven with Jesus than here on earth but he knew he still had a purpose to fulfill here on earth. I then realized what a selfish thought I had because my wife and kids still needed me. Death doesn't scare me because the emotion of fear comes from fearing the unknown. Why would someone want to travel this life journey not knowing where they will spend eternity? I believe many people believe the lie that they will live forever even though 150,000 people woke up today not realizing their last day on earth had arrived. One of the questions I would ask people as I was going through this journey with cancer was, "If you had 6 months left to live, what are three things you would do before you died?" (I challenge you to think of your own three answers before reading on).

Sometimes, once we recognize our own mortality, we can then start to prioritize our life according to what matters most. I received hundreds of answers to the 6-month question, and the most common answers were: [I would] ...get right with God, spend more time with my wife/kids/grandkids, tell people about Jesus, get right with friends/family, etc. These are the things we know we should focus on but we fall into the lie that we have time to focus on them tomorrow. I was challenged to focus on those things that matter today. After experiencing a journey that brought me close to the cliff of death, I was given the chance to rearrange my priorities and to share the same with those around me.

I don't want to give you the impression that I had it all together and that this journey was a piece of cake because the pain I experienced produced in me the perseverance I needed. Someone once said, "You never know how strong you are until being strong is your only choice." There were many times where my only comfort was holding my wife in my arms and speaking little reminders like, "I Love You" over and over again. Crying, squeezing harder, and laying there restless without knowing what was coming next. I learned to appreciate those that lack energy to do anything. There were literally times when I was sitting in my chair and all I wanted to do was to sleep and escape the pain; but my wife was there ALL THE TIME to make sure I had what I needed to continue my journey, whether it was water, a banana, or my pills. She provided for me in ways I could never do for myself. The cliché words we recite during our



The Magaldi Family at the b STRONG event last July.

wedding vows of, “for better or for worse,” came to light in those moments when my wife did for me what I couldn’t do for myself. As a man it is very humbling (to accept help for things you can normally do), yet I was so thankful for the woman I married who took those words, not as a cliché, but as a promise “until death do us part”. Thank you Tammy Magaldi.

After receiving the diagnosis of cancer, I started a deep discussion with God questioning why. Why me? Was there something I did that caused this? I felt like I was doing the best I could to follow Him. I finally asked Him, “Why me,” and He replied, “Do you trust me?”. I said, “of course,” and He said, “then let’s do this together”. That’s when my faith in God provided me with a peace that only those trusting in God can understand. I had a peace knowing that nothing takes God by surprise and me having cancer didn’t cause him to wring his hands in anxiety. One of the foundational verses that I was constantly reminded of was Philippians 4:6 “Be anxious for nothing.” Do you know what the Greek word for “nothing” is? I don’t know either, but I’m pretty sure it means NOTHING. If I truly believe that He knows my past, present and future why should I be anxious for anything? God has my best interests in mind, and whether I’m here on earth or with Him in heaven He will always take care of me.

Fast forward to February 2015, after going through chemo and radiation (where all the uncomfortable stuff happens), the doctor was finally ready to surgically remove the Neuroendocrine Mediastinal tumor in my chest. He removed it completely, without cutting into any of the organs it was pressed against (lungs, heart, esophagus, diaphragm, and coronary arteries). He was able to respect the tumor entirely, leaving a clean margin of .5mm. This margin of .5mm is the width of a pencil line drawn on a piece of paper. The tumor was larger than anticipated at nearly 7 inches, but the surgeon was able to remove it as one mass. His comment, “as I cut, it fell into my hands.” After surgery, none of the cancerous tumor was left in my body, so I was scheduled for routine follow-up exams. My first CAT scan was 3-months post-surgery and the results were clean, no cancer. I was reminded that I had a unique cancer that tends to recur, especially within the first two years. I then went back for my 6-month CAT scan and nothing once again. On the morning of my 9-month appointment, I had this feeling in my stomach, that “what if?” I then went to God and asked Him what happens if they find something today, and his reply was priceless. He said, “Do you trust me,” and I said, “Of course,” then He said, “Let’s go!” All that to say that my 9-month checkup was cancer-free, but what I soon realized was that no matter what this world throws at you, God will always be by your side. He will NEVER wring his hands in worry or let you be by yourself, but He will ALWAYS hold you right where He wants you. For this I know, I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39). I am truly thankful for my faith in God that helped me walk through this journey of my life, and look forward to walking through the years that will follow trusting Him.



Lucas ringing the bell at the top of b STRONG Hill. The volunteer you see assisting with the bell is BHS graduate and cancer survivor, Dylan Shumaker.



Tony & Tammy Magaldi



Lucas Magaldi finished the b STRONG 5k in 3rd Place with a time of 18:30.

# SATURDAY, JULY 30TH 2016

Proceeds to Benefit:  
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and  
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