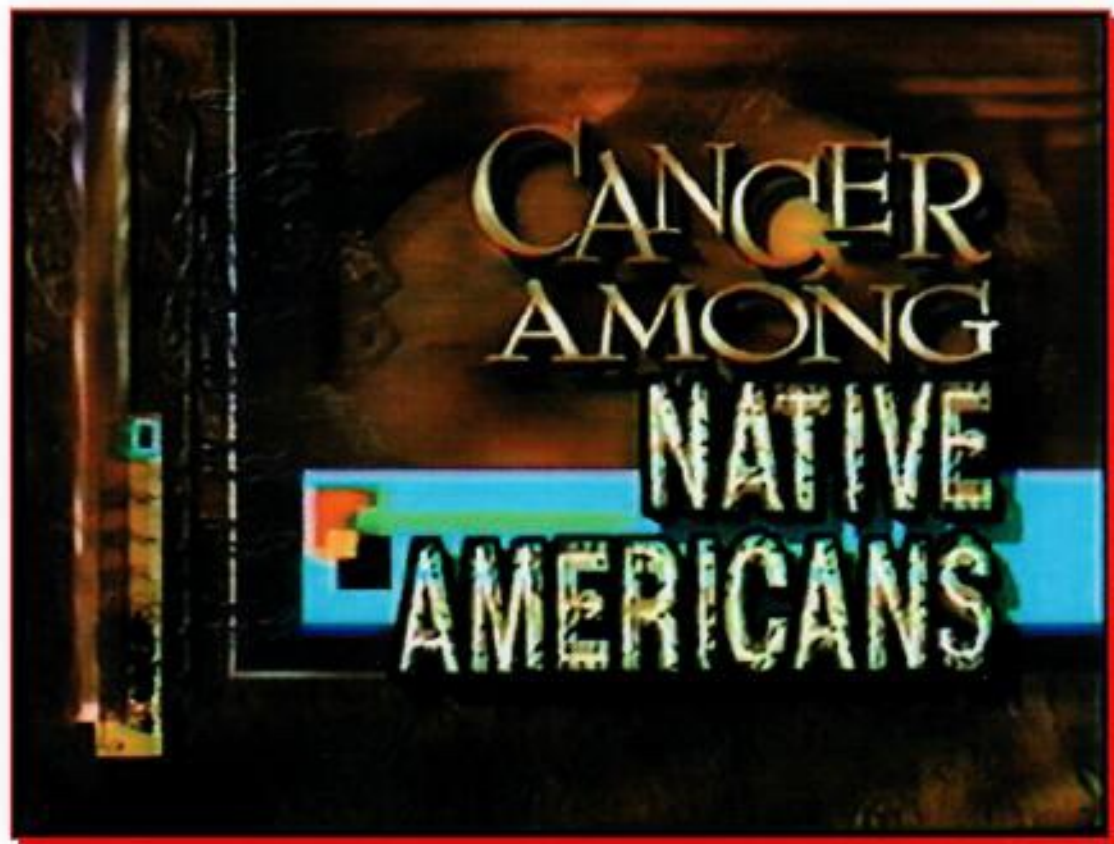


Cancer Among Native American Men



Native American Interviewers:

Mary Helen Deer Smith (*Kiowa*), Judith S. Kaur (*Choctaw/Cherokee*), Mary P. Lovato (*Santo Domingo Pueblo*), Angela Russell (*Crow*), Barbara J. Stillwater (*Yurok/Inuit*), Don Thornton (*Western Cherokee*)

Special thanks to our Native American "patients" for sharing their stories to help others through this experience.

Vincent H. Bointy - *Kiowa*
Abe Conklin - *Ponca-Osage*
Chuck Frederick - *Chippewa*
George Hogan, III - *Crow*
Thunderhand Joe - *Mescalero Apache*
Robert Judkins - *Cherokee*
Tobias Martinez - *Mescalero Apache*
Frank Mercer - *Tlingit - Raven Clan*
Michael Palfy III - *Oglala Sioux*
Doug Six Killer-St. Clair - *Cherokee and Shoshone*

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this booklet is to share stories of strength from Native men who have been diagnosed with cancer. The intended audience for this booklet is others who are going through a similar experience, and for their loved ones. Although we have made videotapes of these stories, for many Native families, print materials are easier to use. We have prepared these materials to help prevent anyone from going through this experience alone. Many Native American cultures discourage discussing personal health problems. But with a disease like cancer that is surrounded with so much misinformation (such as a cancer diagnosis means a death sentence), we need to help one another through the experience. By sharing such information for this booklet, the Native men wanted others to learn from their stories so that they would seek diagnostic services and if cancer is present, that it be diagnosed and treated in early stage of growth (while it is still curable). These men shared their stories to help others through this experience.

Our program had many delays in developing these materials. We experienced severe budget cuts and without the help of our current supporters (see the back panel of this booklet), we would not have been able to produce these materials.

It has been an honor to learn from these men.

Dr. Lynda Buckenatyanovi

Table of Contents

Cancer Risk Behaviors	.1
Symptoms	.4
Pre-diagnosis	.5
Diagnosis	.9
Personal Reaction to Diagnosis	.10
No Insurance	.12
Humor	.13
Treatment	.17
Surgery	.17
Chemo	.19
Changes after treatment	.23
Family Reaction to Diagnosis	.24
Family / Friends' Support	.30
Spiritual Healing	.32
Messages for Others Diagnosed with Cancer	.37
Outlook on Life	.42
Risk Factors	
Lung	.1
Prostate	.3
Colon & Rectal	.3
The 7 signs of cancer	.4
Symptoms	.5
Screen Tests	
Colon	.4
Prostate	.8

Cancer Risk Behaviors



**George Hogan, III - Lung
(Crow)**

[I was in another video] ... I was smoking a cigarette and drinking from a can of beer, whiskey and smoking and enjoying it and at that time, I really didn't even know I had cancer, and just a few months after that film, I was told I had cancer, mostly from smoking. Probably drinking had a lot to do with it too. That is really dangerous, smoking, drinking.

Risk Factors for Lung Cancer

- People who smoke (over 80% of all lung cancer is caused by habitual smoking of tobacco products). The risk increases with the frequency, duration, intensity of tobacco use:
 - The longer a person has smoked (e.g., started smoking at age 10 is more at risk than one who started smoking at age 25) ("duration")
 - The more cigarettes smoked per day. ("frequency")
 - The greater the cigarette tar content and depth of inhalation ("intensity")
- People who work in uranium and hard rock mines and their families
- People who live in areas of high air pollution (e.g., exposure to second-hand smoke, or polluted urban areas)
- Asbestos workers
- People exposed to radon
- People who are older (e.g., 50 years of age and older)
- People who have genetic or hereditary predisposition
- People who are deficient in vitamin A

**Tobias Martinez - Oral
(Mescalero Apache)**

I smoked a lot during the military. I mean it was a normal thing to drink and smoke, because everybody accepted that as an accepted norm. By coincidence I never smoked very much before I went into the military, and I never drank, my parents were very much anti-alcohol. Exposure and risk were not something that I, at a young age decided was important to me. Like every other young man, I think I'm going to live forever and it doesn't happen that way.



I contaminated myself well in advance for twelve years in the military with pollution from tar and nicotine, and alcohol. I don't say that it could have been any different because the hardest thing for me to do was to give up cigarettes. Even after I had my first operation from the cancer, I still was putting myself at highest risk, because it takes a lot to make you stop smoking cigarettes, literally life and death, most people can't do it even then.

When I got out of the military, I was forced to work a lot harder at a different type of job, and alcoholism leads to different types of shall I say, destructive addictions. When you're accepting one addiction such as tobacco and then you trade another one in, and alcoholism is just another form of addiction.

You're more prone to certain infections anyway in the mouth when you're doing alcohol and tobacco to the levels that I was, three packs a day, maybe a twelve pack of beer a night, plus any other spirits that were lying around.

**Chuck Frederick - prostate
(Chippewa)**

Guys are always in the bar and stuff like that, so I was doing a little bit of drinking on weekends with them and then finally I seen them getting sick and I



lost a good friend of mine then and then I thought "Well, then I'm going to make a change." So I quit drinking then, ten years ago, and I said "On January 1st I was going to quit", and this coming January will be ten years, so I just up and quit.

Risk Factors for Prostate Cancer

- Age - usually occurs in males over the age of 50 (occurs at an earlier age in African-American men)
- Race-African-American males are at greater risk for prostate cancer than are most other racial groups.
- Family History - Men with family history of prostate cancer are at an increased risk of the disease compared to men without this history.
- Diet - High fat intake
- Occupation - men who work with cadmium, zinc, rubber, and in oil refining
- History of sexually transmitted diseases
- Alcohol may be a risk factor (NCI, PDQ, March 1996)

Risk Factors for Colon and Rectal Cancer

- Hereditary conditions, such as familial polyposis, familial nonpolyposis syndromes, the cancer family syndrome (autosomal dominant)
- Hereditary site-specific colon cancer, and ulcerative colitis.
- Habitual user of tobacco products
- Personal history of adenomatous polyps (adenomas)
- Diets
 - High in total fat
 - Excess calories
 - Low in fiber (e.g., fruits, leafy vegetables, beans are good sources of fiber)
- Alcohol consumption (especially for large bowel cancers)
- Age - risk begins to increase after the age of 40 and rises sharply the ages of 50-55
- Sedentary lifestyle

(PDQ, NCI, March 1996)

Symptoms

Frank Mercer - colon (Tlingit - Raven Clan)

The symptoms began where I passed blood in my stool, so I went to the doctor, and they told me that I had hemorrhoids..... from the initial examination. So, they said they were going to cut them out. They wanted me to come back for surgery and they gave me a date to go there, so I didn't have any ill effects at all of any sort. I never had any clue to having cancer at all because I didn't hurt nowhere.



COLON CANCER SCREENING TESTS

- A digital rectal examination as part of periodic health examination.
- A fecal occult blood test (stool blood test) annually after age 50.
- At age 50 and every three to five years thereafter, a sigmoidoscopy.

(Printed with permission. Morra and Potts, CHOICES, Avon Books, 1994, p. 437)

7 Signs of Cancer

1. Unusual bleeding or discharges.
2. A lump that does not go away.
3. A sore that does not heal within two weeks.
4. Change in bowel or bladder habits.
5. Persistent hoarseness or cough.
6. Indigestion or difficulty in swallowing.
7. Change in a wart or mole.

Selected Cancer Site	Symptoms
Colon and Rectum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Changes in bowel habits such as constipation or diarrhea ● Dull, vague pain on the right side of lower abdominal area ● Gas pains, cramps, or bleeding from the rectum. ● Changes in stool color or shape (e.g., very narrow stool shape)
Lung	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frequently has no symptoms until advanced stages. ● Most common symptom is a cough or a hacking cough
Prostate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frequently has no symptoms until more advanced stages. ● Frequent urination, especially at night. ● Trouble starting or holding back urinating. ● A weak or interrupted urine flow ● Pain or burning during urination ● Blood in the urine. ● Continuing pain in lower back, pelvis or upper thighs. <p>(Printed with permission. Morra and Potts, CHOICES, Avon Books, 1994, p. 379)</p>

Pre-diagnosis



George Hogan, III - lung
(Crow)

Well, I heard of cancer but wasn't really into it. I really wasn't concerned about it, because I didn't really know how it affects a person's life.

**Thunderhand Joe - pancreas
(Mescalero Apache)**

A month before my first son was born, and it is due to him that I came to be checked out. See, he's my messenger. He was my messenger. If it wasn't for him, I don't think I would've ever been checked out. Who knows if I would be here today? I just got married. This is all in the first year I was married to my lovely wife.



Robert Judkins (Cherokee) - testicular



Two years ago I was diagnosed with cancer and I had a pain. I'm working, I'm one of those kind of work-a-holics that just keep going, pushing, pushing, pushing fourteen hours a day, I'm a single parent I come home, I do this, everything is just regimen. And I had this pain, I'm ignoring it, I'm denying it. Oh it's nothing, I'm 34-years-old it's no big deal. And it gets worse, and you know after a while, OK fine I'll go to the doctor.

Vincent H. Bointy (Kiowa) - bowel

We went hunting in Florida and when we got ourselves set up in a motel, we went out to the reservation out there in a remote area to set our sites of our rifles. It was nice and sunny and all at once I start shaking, like this, just like that. I thought what the heck, look what's happening to me. After a few minutes it went away, And then at night, well, I'm gonna take you fellows to a real meal and then tomorrow we will hunt in earnest. So we went up and ordered steaks, the works and everything and started to eat and it didn't taste right. Tasted like a rag or paper. So I took about two bites and I said I think I'll just go to the room, you fellows got to finish up. As



soon as I got to the room, I started shaking again, and it was warm, and I couldn't stop. Finally, I stopped when they came in, I said how about we cancel everything and go home? I said with this coming on, it's just not right, something is wrong. So we loaded up about 9 o'clock and we come home. We got to Anadarko where we were living at the time about 10 o'clock, drove straight through, and I got off and they went on and then about an hour later pain hit me, in here and it just kept increasing. But whenever you hurt yourself or you hurt somewhere, pain eventually reaches a peak, and that's what I was waiting for, it's gonna go away, and it wouldn't, it just kept getting worse all the time. It got so bad, and I called my daughter and I guess she thought her dad don't ever get sick, you better go get your mother, she's cooking for a church meeting. I said you better go get your mother. Go get your mother, something is wrong with me. But she didn't go, she went back in there and watched TV. I thought she went. The pain gets so severe and if I remember you make your insides come out backwards. That's how hard you pull and that's how hard the pain feels to terrific and when I fell in the bed, I couldn't get back off, because of the pain. Well, my friend came to see me, he found me, and rescued me and got me to the hospital. See, I don't remember it, but that's where they took me. I remember they steered me outside, that's all I remember. After I stayed there, I don't know how long, but they said they could do nothing for me.

Michael Palfy III (Oglala Sioux) - bone

When I was about 10 years old, there was this hot shot kid in school who is best in everything. He challenged me to an arm wrestling match; and you know how when you're young you gotta to do it right there and right then. I thought I had pulled some muscles, I started hurting. Told my mom, she took me to the



hospital, they gave me a couple of x-rays, and they drew a bunch of blood from me, and I can't stand the sight of blood so they had

called in some orderlies to draw the blood from me and I was taking x-rays for about half-an-hour straight, and they call me back a couple of days later, and told my mom what happened.



Tobias Martinez (Mescalero Apache) - oral

I think I had a lot of information, but like anybody else, unless you're exposed to it continuously you just ignore it.

Within six months after I went and was discharged from the military, I was having other problems with my throat. I was having a lot of different types of infections. I mean, I should have realized right then that some of these various infections I was having, chest infections, mouth infections, my teeth were literally falling out my head.

Chuck Frederick (Chippewa) - prostate

I didn't even know nothing about it. I never even heard about it before and then none of my family has ever had it and I never knew of anybody that had it.



PROSTATE CANCER SCREENING

A digital rectal examination is recommended annually for men after the age of 40.



**Doug Six Killer-St. Clair - lymphoma
(Cherokee and Shoshone)**

There was a lot of stuff going on, but I didn't understand it. My side of the bed would just be sopping wet at night. If I wore pajamas, it would be

like I got out of the shower with them on and climbed into bed. When I'd walk up a flight of stairs, just one flight of stairs, maybe seven stairs in that flight of stairs, I'd have to stop at the top and catch my breath, and I was a marathon runner before that, my personal record was 243, and so the stamina of walking up stairs was really, really weird. I'd try to run and I'd get tired real easy, or I wouldn't recover.

The way I discovered it, I guess, was that I went out for a run one day, and I just never did recover from the run. I went home after the run laid on the floor, tried to do everything that I used to do when I'd over exert myself, which I did quite frequently, and I just tried to do what would work and it wouldn't. So I decided to go to a health club to see if I could ride a bicycle, to see if I could just, a slow ride would help me calm down, and that didn't work. I went into a sauna, because I thought the steam would help, and that actually made it worse, went into a jacuzzi, and that didn't help. So I finally decided, well I'll just shower and go see my mother. When I walked into my mother's house she said, "You don't look right. What's going on?" So I told her, and I said "I think I'll try to work through this for the rest of the day." and she said "No." So she called the doctor and I went in, and three weeks later, I was in the operating room.

Diagnosis



Vincent H. Bointy (Kiowa) - bowel

Right here, that's the colon right here. It closed it up and otherwise if they didn't have it like that I might have gone maybe two or three years until anybody closed it up and they put a colostomy bag on there. I have to have for a few months, but like I said, it didn't bother me.

Types of Tests which may be used to Detect Cancer*

- A physical examination, including taking a full medical history.
- Laboratory tests, such as blood analyses, including tumor markers, and urine analyses.
- Endoscopy, inserting a lighted instrument into the body.
- Examination of sloughed-off cells (cytology).
- Imaging techniques, such as ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), nuclear scans, computerized tomography (CT), or x-rays.
- Biopsy, taking a piece of tissue to examine under the microscope.

*Printed with permission. Morra and Potts, CHOICES, Avon Books, 1994

Personal Reaction to Diagnosis

George Hogan, III (Crow Tribe) - lung

Well, I really was kind of shocked. I didn't really know what to do at the time. Since they said it was so small, the doctor told me that I probably, they'll just take the upper lobe [ed. ... of my lung] and it wouldn't affect my life too much. So, I was kind of relieved on what I heard, but after I came back around and was able to talk with the doctor, they said we had to remove your whole lung. It was bigger than we thought it was. That kind of shocked me. I didn't know, you know, I didn't know how long I was going to live and so forth, but they told me there is people that live with one lung and doing just as well, but they said you have to be careful you do not catch pneumonia or anything. So, I, that kind of shocked me. I can't do as much as I used to, because I get so tired so easily, and it really affects my life, but I didn't quit what I was doing. I thought I might as well go on and live a normal life like I used to. The doctor's told me to do a little something and just don't stay home and lay, but I just don't let it affect my life. I just go on.





Frank Mercer - colon
(Tlingit - Raven Clan)

They thought I had hemorrhoids. Anyway, when they took the biopsy, they didn't tell me I had cancer until just before the surgery. So, I really didn't have time to react to the news.

This all had been discovered at surgery, so I thought well, I got to live with it, I guess in the more severe cases, it is not comfortable, but I was pretty comfortable with it.

I went back to the hospital on the day that they were suppose to operate [for], so they prepared me for surgery. Just before they wheeled me into the surgery, the doctor came and talked to me and told me that I had cancer. The biopsy showed I had cancer. I really didn't have any time to react to "cancer." I thought about cancer before, and I have thought more about the prostate cancer than any other type of cancer, simply because a person my age is more susceptible to prostate cancer, and since I never had an examination for that type of cancer in almost two years, I was just thinking about I think it was about time I went and had an examination, and then that same night the symptoms appeared, and so, but it wasn't prostate. [it was colon]

Thunderhand Joe - pancreas
(Mescalero Apache)

I remember about my diagnosis. Oh yeah, I want another opinion. It's cancer. Whoo Baby ... I want another opinion. I figured if I kept going to get more opinions, more opinions, they'd say no it's not cancer. Three strikes and you're out, right? So I went to another one and finally they actually did a biopsy on it this time at my request and they found that "yes" it was cancer. Then they say okay, listen, we want to put you on the table, spread you out, and cut you up and get all that bad stuff out of you.





Robert Judkins - testicular
(Cherokee)

I am going OK, I'm just ready to let it go at that, now, I have two bachelors, a bachelors in biology and a bachelors in biomedical engineering, so normally when other people come to me and they are always asking me about medical things, and I say you should do this, you should do this, you get to do this. But when it comes to yourself, you don't do those things. So I'm still kind of denying it, it's like well, it's no big deal, I can get through it. It's like a muscle pull, keep going. I go in for a third ultrasound.

Doctor: "Well we got to take it out."

Whoa, what do you mean take it out?

Doctor: "What are you doing next week"?

I'm like um I don't know, but I don't want to do that, that's one thing I don't want to do. So at the time, I was working in television, I was helping develop the fashion channel. I'm on the road and I'm talking on my cellular phone and the doctor is calling me up on my cellular phone as I am going to meetings, and he says we got to take care of this. Then I start to realize, it's like whoa wait a second, if the doctor's really concerned about this, maybe I should start to look into this. So I don't have insurance so I'm trying to figure this all out.

No Insurance

So we finally got to this whole idea about finally getting insurance. I still don't have insurance and I know that, that's going to be a big ordeal. So I do the wrong thing, I go a year and just forget about it. And on television, I see the Jackie Onasis thing, I see the guy from the Raiders, and all of these people are dropping off like flies and I go well I gotta

figure out a way to handle this because, cancer is something that yes, in some forms of cancer there is pain, but in other forms there isn't any pain, so you don't know. So it can come and take you out just like that. So I finally acquire insurance.

Vincent H. Bointy (Kiowa) - bowel

They shipped me to the hospital and they said they couldn't do nothing for me. So then they shipped me to Oklahoma City, and that's where I found out. It just came to me all of the sudden, where we were sitting again, I was feeling kind of muddy from the hunting and I still haven't bathed yet. But anyway, they said it was kind of a lucky thing because if they didn't hit at that particular area, I might have gone maybe two or three years undetected. But this way I found it out a lot quicker, there's no being sick about it, there's not been bad feelings about it, it just happened, it just happened all of a sudden.



Michael Palfy III (Oglala Sioux) - bone

I don't know what happened. Doctor told me I got cancer. That's what it is, opened me up and checked the bone and everything. I didn't know what to think. It was a couple of months until my eleventh birthday. You're young, you don't know what's going on, somebody tells you you've got something. I wasn't really hot on the medical terminologies or anything. When my mom told me she started crying and told me I had to go away for awhile so I didn't know about that.

Humor

Me, I was always making jokes about it. I told my mom to get me some turtle wax for Christmas once, cause I was complete bald.

**Thunderhand Joe - pancreas
(Mescalero Apache)**

Now they are seeing me walk into the City of Hope with no hair and I got pissed off. And I come in and I says, "don't [mess] with me." I say, "I am having a bad hair day. I've got just one hair and I can't do a thing with it." That was kind of my attitude.



Helping another Friend with cancer and laughter



**Thunderhand Joe - pancreas
(Mescalero Apache)**

There is a friend of mine who had cancer, leukemia. Nobody wanted to talk to this guy. If you see somebody like this, 9 - 10 times a person is just going to walk around him. He looked like Beetlejuice. He did and that 's what I told him. Hah.

I sat down right next to him and he's like on the bench like this and he's sitting there and I went . He was looking at me going what are you doing. Nobody ever wants to sit by him. Nobody ever wants to talk to him. But I did. I says, Hey, this is not the City of Hope, what are in for? Like we were in jail. I says we're going to get out of this. One way or another we are going to get out of here. We struck up a relationship. Every time I had my outpatient therapy, he was there. What I am getting to is this thing about laughter. I used to make him laugh so hard. He used to make me laugh so hard. First of all, when somebody has cancer you know people tip-toe around things. Well, I don't know from one cancer patient to another. When I lived with him, I said you know what, you look like shit and he liked it, cause I was honest. I was always honest with him. And he laughed and we joked and joked. And he says you know you ain't looking that much better my man.

**Tobias Martinez - oral
(Mescalero Apache)**

The more doctors diagnosed that I had a problem, the more capable I was at self-destruction. The denial had completely taken over, I mean I was more apt to deny that I had a problem than to deal with it.

My doctors had put me on a pain killer program to try to keep me going. I didn't have the money for the therapy or the operation. The doctors in their wisdom decided that as long as I kept going, even in pain, at least I was keeping going, so they prescribed different kinds of Class 3 narcotics for the pain, unfortunately the faster the tumor grew, the faster the addiction grew and by the time that I was admitted to the hospital I was doing quite a bit of Class 3 narcotics, I mean of different types and then drinking on top of that and still smoking.

Everybody wants to throw pity your way, it's easy. But it's a very, very important point that I have to make is that you can feed off pity, you can do it for months, you can do it for years, you can do it the rest of your life, and then you never really end up with a complete recovery.

We have to learn how to talk to each other to learn what got individuals through these very difficult moments, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, drug therapy, I wrote down a lot of the things that happened inside of me, mentally and physically, and I'm still young enough to deal with putting it down on paper and helping someone else before I go onto the other side.



Chuck Frederick (Chippewa) - prostate

I didn't know how to tell my family that I had it so . . . then when I did go to the . . . Here I got a letter in the mail, the letter in the mail said I had cancer, and my kids were all standing around there. So I opened the letter, so then I called my wife and said I've got this letter here, do you want to look at it?



No, I'm not embarrassed about it, I've told other people about it. I mean I don't want them to feel sorry for me or anything, but I tell them about it because a lot of times I can't do the things that I used to do.



Abe Conklin (Ponca-Osage) - prostate

When you first hear about it, to me it was kind of a scary situation, because I never did ever believe that I would ever come to the point where I would have cancer. It kind of put fear into me. I knew then that I should have gone [to the doctor] earlier.

**Doug Six Killler-St. Clair - lymphoma
(Cherokee and Shoshone)**

I remember being focused on having to internalize and defeat this thing myself within two hours of the oncologist telling me that I had to do that, and I don't remember going through any kind of a mourning stage after that. I went through a discussion, and went through talking, but I don't know if that's part of the mourning process or not. But I just knew I needed to focus internally, and use all of my strength, and gather strength from my friends and family to help me defeat this.



The way my grandfather taught us, he taught us that things happened to us for a reason, and that we select these things prior to our existence because there's something that we need to learn out of this. That was my focus almost immediately too, not only did I have to internalize and gather strength to defeat the cancer, I had to celebrate the cancer too, because it was there for a reason, and I had to learn something.

My grandfather used to say, that if you're on the right path, you don't have to look, things just happen. So I think that was the message that I needed to learn.

Treatment

Surgery



**George Hogan, III - lung
(Crow)**

[I was diagnosed in] 1992 I guess. I go to a doctor, and they gave me a physical, and the doctor's been telling me there was a little spot on my arm, but they said "I do not think you have anything to worry about." I was told that, and after I was diagnosed with cancer, they told me that they'd probably just take the upper lobe, because it is so small, but after they got into it, they found out it was bigger than what they thought it was. They had to remove my whole lung on my left side.

**Thunderhand Joe - pancreas
(Mescalero Apache)**

So ten days after he (my son) was born I had surgery.



**Robert Judkins - testicular
(Cherokee)**

I go and have the surgery and they say well, you're gonna be in the hospital for five days, OK I think I can deal with that. I go up there by myself, everybody goes well you want somebody to come with you, I say no, I don't need anybody.

I'm trying not to listen because in PreOp there's other people on the other side having other operations, and they have families around, and I'm like this is going to be OK, I know this is going to be OK. And it's kind of funny, the surgery was supposed to last for three hours and it lasted seven hours or something like that. So my biggest concern, just like Joey, was you know my son, and my family and this was what helped me get through it. I feel that well you know something happens to me it's no big deal. You know, but I didn't want to leave them behind and go through all of that.

"Maxine" (Robert Judkins' Mother)

At 7 o'clock in the morning his sister and I, we had been there and by now it's 5 o'clock. So by 5 o'clock, I'm pacing, pacing, pacing, I'm ringing bells. "Oh, he'll be out in a few minutes." So when he finally does come out, he looks up at me and says. "Oh hi mom, I'm certainly glad that you could come." Now you must excuse me for what I said, I looked at him and said, "where in the hell do you think I have been all day?" And then Laurie looks at me and she says: "Does he know that we've been here all day?" No, by then Laurie looks at me, we look at each other, then the two of us begin to cry because we think, whew, well we got through that one.



Michael Palfy III (Oglala Sioux) - bone

It lasted about six months, and they finally decided to give me the surgery. During that time, I was on another type of drug called Cysplatinum. They said they used it mostly for the adults and everything. So, I was like the first child to do it, the drugs or something like that. And then that's when they stuffed the tube up to your groin all the way around the shoulder to this arm. And you've got to be awake the whole time. So, it's not necessarily the most comfortable feeling in the world. That's why I don't like the sun

feeling in my ear, cuz it reminded me too much of that. That's why I don't like hospitals. But after that, I went through surgery on March 21. I don't know what year. I think it was a couple of years ago. And I came through and everybody told me I looked like a hell. My eyes are all swollen and everything, and I couldn't even comprehend when somebody is talking or something. This has happened within the six-month period.

And in the hospital, I was addicted to morphine. I'd still be addicted to it if I hadn't looked at myself and I said, "Do I want to spend the rest of my life like this?" and I was wired out, just sitting there, vegging out, and doing nothing. I had this major surgery where they removed the bone and the muscle in my arm. They weren't expecting me to get up and walk around as quick as I did. Within two days of the surgery, I was up and walking, cause I couldn't stand being tied down. It's just not the way I am.

Chemo



Frank Mercer (Tlingit - Raven Clan) - colon

I don't think I got really used to it, but it didn't bother me that much. I think the only discomfort I had from chemotherapy was when they, they had a mediport in my chest which they inserted a needle and they, that was, just like getting a blood test done, but as time went on, I got a little sensitive, but I got kind of used to it, and I think the medication wasn't quite as strong as in some cases like my colon cancer, since it was caught in time, it is preventive measures that I went through that therapy. It was just to make sure there was no more cancer cells left in my system so, that is why on early detection, because the quicker they find the cancer in your body and isolate it, the less time you will spend in treatment. Like with me, I spent a little over a year, about 14 months, of chemotherapy. It didn't affect me that much.

Chemo - appetite

I still ate but not as well as I wanted to.

Chemo - "loss of balance"

The only effect that I noticed of which they told me was going to be present was my sense of balance. Once in a while I will stagger but I will be OK. But, that is the result of the chemicals.

Chemo - "loss of stamina"

I am just getting back my stamina. I could walk a long ways now, before I just walked a little ways and I got tired. Now I can climb a hill. I won't believe I am fully cured until I go deer hunting.

Thunderhand Joe - pancreas (Mescalero Apache)

I am the drummer for the group "Red Bone" and we work a lot and do concerts what not ... and the hair I had, is like the hair I have today. How do you like it? And, you know, looking pretty good and feel pretty good and I just had this wound in me and I know that I am going to have to go and have chemotherapy and I don't know how to tell the guys in the band. I don't think you know somebody until you have a chance to and they're are gonna believe you when you say, "Don't worry about it, I can make all the gigs." I didn't know how they would take it and I didn't want to lose my job so I didn't tell them. I remembered going up to Santa Cruz and I took my brother-in-law with me so he could set my drums up. I was walking like this. Just tried to walk nice and straight and stand tall. And I played the drums and in between sets I would go and change my dbandages and then put them back on.



Chemo

So.. it comes to the time when I am going to start my chemotherapy now. In life, if you are lucky enough to follow the sign that God created what's in front of you I feel lucky because I know I was gambling. But I knew I had to do this.

Chemo (losing hair)

Well, I went through my chemotherapy and I had to tell the guys in the band that now I am going to lose my hair. I am so thankful that God gave me a really cool looking head. Okay, now I was bald and I don't know, I thought it was okay. It wasn't as bad as I thought. But, anyway, so I cut all my hair off. I got it short about as short as Dawn's. Because I did not want to lose it from this. So I told cancer you can have my hair. That's all your getting. No more. Take my hair.

When I went into my next cycle, and this time my hair was starting to fall out. I mean really falling out. I mean I was in the shower my wife was rubbing the skin of my head and all of a sudden I like in the shower and I had all of my hair completely around me. I had like a freeway running down the middle of my head and I am like, Oh my God. That got me. I kind of lost it on that one. And I told my uncle to come over. He's a cosmetologist. And he always cuts my hair anyways. I just had him shave my head. And the thing about laughter. I look at myself and I still knew I was all right. It's like I knew this was gonna happen and this is okay.

Michael Palfy III - bone (Oglala Sioux)

I think they did talk to me about to me about it, but I was on too many drugs at that time, painkillers before they actually did the correct surgery. They told me I was going through chemo, and I don't know



what chemo was. They told me I was going through that, I was going to lose my hair. I don't know. My hair was a lot longer than what it is now but it's kind of freaky too cuz there you walk in there and everybody is old. Nobody, no kids got hair on their body or anything. You can always tell if they're new at the hospital or something cuz they're just barely beginning to lose their hair. It took me a month to lose mine, but I had a thick full head of hair. I still can't get over that.



Doug Six Killer-St. Clair - lymphoma
(Cherokee and Shoshone)

I had chemotherapy, no radiation, or other, just the chemo, and that was hard enough. I had eight different drugs for three weeks out of each month for six months. I had sixty milligrams of prednizone, which meant that I was climbing the walls, couldn't

sleep, could only sleep about one week out of the month I was able to get really good sleep.

I was sitting in a recliner in what they call the therapy room, and had the IV drip into my arm, and my long treatment days was six, six and a half hours, and then my short treatment was about four hours. And the nurses would come in and tell you what it was that they were giving you. And when you think about it, you can still taste . . . I can still taste the chemotherapy in my mouth, and the smell of the therapy room.

I was in the room long enough when I had the chemo, the chemotherapy. I wouldn't wear a jacket or anything because it was Summertime. But I'd always ask for a blanket when I got there, and they'd cycle maybe two or three blankets for me, because I was there long enough, and what they'd do is they'd put them in the microwave, they had a microwave in the clinic and they were nice and warm, and I always got chemotherapy in the same arm, and I able to just lay my arm on the warm blanket and it kept this arm warm on the left side. It's important that you drink lots of water, and fluids or whatever.

Chemo - side effects

From the first knuckle to my fingertips, I had no feeling -- I could have my fingers on hot coals or on a stove, and the only reason why I know they're there, if it's on and I'm not paying any attention, which I do a lot. I get so focused on something that I'm not paying attention to what I'm doing, I can smell it burning, and I look down and go, wooh . . ., but there's no feeling in there. I've got to keep my toenails really well trimmed, because if I'm walking any distance and their not, I don't have the sensation that I've cut my toes, and when I take my boots and my socks off, that's when I know. That's some of the lingering side effects.

Changes after Treatment



George Hogan, III (Crow) - lung

I can't do heavy work now or any kind of labor, my advice is to go on living, whatever they can do, if they are able to do some kind of work, manual labor if it is not too heavy if they can do it is just go on living.

Frank Mercer (Tlingit - Raven Clan) - colon

I went to Hawaii and I promised..... if I ever got out of chemotherapy, I was going to go to Hawaii, so I decided to go. So, I called an adult friend of mine and I told her that I needed a companion to go with you know just in case I got sick or whatever, but that was only an excuse to get her to go. Anyway, we went to Honolulu and we stayed there five days and then we went to Maui and we stayed there five days. I really enjoyed the scenario..... I really enjoyed the people. I felt that I was right at home there and those people that I met there,



Hawaiian descent fellows, one of, I am one of you guys. I told them I might have sailed away from here thousands of years ago, but I am home, and they thought that was neat you know.



Doug Six Killer-St. Clair - lymphoma
(Cherokee and Shoshone)

The open heart surgery, I had to deal with all of that before I could deal with . . . recovering from that before I could even address chemotherapy. So I had to go through learning how to cough, so that I could work my lungs, used the inhalator, blowing in and sucking out to keep the ball at a certain level so that fluids wouldn't develop into my lungs. And the pain of that surgery was incredible. I had to have a pillow so that you could hug, so that you could tolerate the pain when you would cough. I remember going outside on Memorial Day to a cemetery, and sneezing the first time, and not having the pillow, oh man, that was incredible, that took new heights to living with pain and understanding pain. The pain medications, and how the pain was still there. Basically what it did is it kind of deadened the awareness that the pain was there, but it was still there, really weird, I mean it didn't eliminate the pain.

Family's Reaction to Diagnosis



George Hogan, III - lung
(Crow)

At first they were kind of really concerned, but after talking with the doctors and so forth, they tried to, I know they were trying to comfort me by trying to tell me I didn't need to worry so much about it, but I knew

they were really kind of concerned. But I think Bertha went through a lot of stressing. She had to change her way of life. At home I couldn't do heavy work too much, and that I didn't like because I like to do work around the house.

**Frank Mercer - colon
(Tlingit - Raven Clan)**

I think I had pretty good support from them, and after my surgery, there were a lot of people I knew were pretty positive in their support, and I think it helped me a lot.



**Thunderhand Joe - pancreas
(Mescalero Apache)**

And you gotta realize what we were going through. I mean I came home after that biopsy, my wife told me that it's cancer and she's crying. It was malignant. She felt horrible and I don't know. I felt worse for her. I felt bad for her because somehow I just knew I was gonna be.... I knew that this was all right. It's not the end of the world. Well um.... I told the doctors. We agreed that after my child was born that we were going to do the operation.

**"Rennie"
(Thunderhand Joes' Wife)**

The doctor told me that he has developed the biopsy and has found malignant cells. How am I going to tell my husband that he has cancer, because [Joey] never told me, that the previous doctor told him, oh

pancreas, take it out. He never told me that. I didn't know what to do. I called my mom, I was crying. My mom told me that she felt the worst she ever felt was knowing that I was gonna have to go through what I went through with him, because she couldn't protect me from what was gonna happen.

Working, four days after his surgery [biopsy], that was the kind of thing he did. And I was like, Joey, you gotta lay down, you just had surgery, you can't do this. But he did it anyway. But so he comes home and we go outside and I'm gonna tell him, like what do I say? I'll tell him what the doctor told me, that he has malignant. At that time we didn't know what cancer was. So what does that mean, he didn't know, so then I had to come out and say; the doctor says you have cancer, you know. And you know at my first thought of course like anybody's was like, cancer, you're gonna die. But then he had the surgery and then it seemed so hard because we had the baby, he did help with the baby but it was just a hard time. Bringing home the new baby and have him have cancer. But after he had his surgery, it seemed like it was so long before they wanted to start chemo. We had to wait three months before we started the chemo, isn't the cancer gonna spread and go all over. That was the fear I had that the doctor seemed so calm, oh no we can start it in July.

Reaction to chemo

"Rennie"

(Thunderhand Joes' wife)

They are throwing up and all these horrible things, that's what you hear. I know that does happen to some people, but that didn't happen to him. But he went to chemo and came home fine and it was like, wait a minute this is not what I expected. And like he said, he just kept laughing.

“Maxine” (Robert Judkins’ Mother)

I knew he had a lot of pain, but he wouldn't tell me. So I figured if it hurts bad enough eventually he'll go to the doctor. So when the operation was over, the doctor comes out.

Doctor: “Mrs. Judkins.”

I said “Yes”

Doctor: “Oh, I just operated on your son, um your son has cancer.”

“What! You know that's the way they told me. So I went, ugh OK what is the prognosis”? And they told me.

Doctor: “The prognosis is like 95 percent curable” and tadah, tadah tadah.

“OK, fine thank you that is all I need to know.” I turned around, walked out of Cedars put my dark glasses on, do you know how big Cedar Sinai Hospital is? I walked around that hospital twice. I cried around that hospital twice. After I cried twice, took the Kleenex out and says, OK I've cried, it's over with— the kids gonna get well. He has to take care of me in my old age I'm expensive. So this is what he's doing and I keep telling him this, I'm expensive. Laurie, my daughter, knows that I am very expensive. My two beautiful grandchildren, they know that I am very expensive. So you know, I think Robert has done great. He's going to continue doing great and like I said, hey he's gotta take care of me when I get old. That's it.

“Laurie” (Robert Judkins’ Sister)

My little brother was ill and he had a hernia and they were gonna just take the hernia and so I came in and there was a message. “Well the operation is over and it's cancer.” And I just felt like my legs were going.

It's like my little baby is gonna die or something. So we try to get over the operation, it's such a long time, what is the matter? It is only supposed to be a couple of hours, it's been six hours now. But you know, he came out of it and you know, talked goofy. Thanked us for coming.

Vincent H. Bointy - bowel
(Kiowa)

Well, I know that there isn't any of them looked liked they was frightened much. They always talked to me and treated me like I was well, like I was before. They didn't make no kind of concessions for me because I was sick like other people did. That [other people making concessions] made me feel kind of bad. Sometimes they'd break down. Of course that's not good. But my own family never did. They never did act like I was sick even when I was in the TB hospital for three years. They said he never act like I was sick. It is tough to take when someone breaks down, comes in once in a while and they'll break down. It kind of makes you feel bad not because you're hurt or anything.



Michael Palfy III - bone
(Oglala Sioux)

I guess people cried for me, people worried about me, my sister got an A+ on a paper she wrote about me. Now it's always in the family and everything.

I guess it was a difficult time for my family cause I got five younger sisters, one younger brother, and my mom we came down from Idaho with nothing.

It was hard for my whole family to take it. Because they see it actually happened. They'd see me deteriorating. Before, I used to be bigger than this but not tall, but I used to weigh more and be a lot stronger. Then after that, they saw me deteriorate. They saw me go down to nothing. I went from 120 pounds to 96 pounds. I mean, that's got to be hard on everybody, watching a loved one just to disappear in front of them.



Tobias Martinez (Mescalero Apache) - oral

My wife could see that what was necessary was for her to take a hand. She grabbed me, we went back to the hospital.

I think what's important is that we always have to seek assistance, we can't get through it alone. You have to have a partner that's going to be willing . . . in my case, my wife was my miracle.

Chuck Frederick (Chippewa) - prostate

They felt kind of bad like you're going to die tomorrow, and that's the way that I kind of felt.

I know it has really affected my family, you know in a lot of ways, because they're still scared that something will happen.



Abe Conklin (Ponca-Osage) - prostate



My wife was very, how would you say . . . was very helpful to me. She stuck by me, she made me go to the doctors. She stuck by me when I went to the hospital, through surgery. So she was a very helpful,

caring person and I appreciated it. She stuck by me, always through it.

My children would come once in awhile, but not all that much. I learned to live with it all by myself, along with my companion, Vicky. I appreciate them, they always call up, you know. Because they didn't have transportation and any money to come and see about me.



Doug Six Killler-St. Clair - lymphoma
(Cherokee and Shoshone)

My mother was scared, because this was something that happened out of sequence. The chance of her losing her oldest prior to her leaving, is not something she wanted to happen, so she was really nervous. But when she saw the strength that

I was gathering, then she helped me and supported me by being there and offering more strength.

Other family wanted to be there almost immediately, and my mother said, "Well, why don't you wait, let's see what happens, we don't want to overburden the hospital." Because I come from a large family, my great grandfather had thirty two children, we're all close, so we're talking close to seven hundred people, in a family where you know all these people, and that would have just devastated the hospital. (laughs)

Family / Friends' Support



George Hogan, III (Crow) - lung

Some of them were good and some of them weren't.

I think [people] should listen to someone that says go through with it and support you in a positive way by dealing with it, but some [friends and family told me] not to, and that I think that kind of advice [a patient] shouldn't listen to. Listen to a doctor.



Thunderhand Joe (Mescalero Apache) - pancreas

I started in with my chemotherapy and when I told the guys they were like oh, my God. When you hear about cancer, everybody cancer has, of course, a big stigma. You've got cancer, you're gonna die. When you tell people, oh my gosh, so they thought the same thing. They thought I was dying. I said no, no, no, I am not dying. I got to go through these procedures. They says well what about our jobs? I says don't worry about our jobs. I'll be there. I said listen just give me a chance and I will be there.

Vincent H. Bointy (Kiowa) - bowel

Then I got there sometime after midnight, but they operated on me the next morning. I had a lot of visitors cause the whole area was full that's how come I knew something was badly wrong with me, they wouldn't [be] coming around if I wasn't ill.

People come in, I got telephone calls, they'd write, people would read Bible verses to me, all kinds of letters. There was all kinds of people coming to see me. It just never, ever dawned on me that I wasn't gonna get well.



Tobias Martinez (Mescalero Apache) - oral

I had good friends though, up at the VA Hospital my Disabled American Veterans, they literally dragged me out of the house, I mean that's what it took. My wife had to drag me several times, she even left the key where people could find it. This is the type of love you have to go through, you have to find somebody to partner you through it, it's not an easy thing to finds those partners though.

My biggest salvation was at the end, my sister decided that I needed to come home, I needed to be around my family, so as an incentive, my family offered me some plane tickets to come home as soon as I finished my radiation therapy.



Abe Conklin - prostate
(Ponca-Osage)

I would rely upon my companion and she's very helpful. And I think that's what everyone . . . if it's a son, or a father or a grandfather, I think you should be there for them, to support them in whatever they want to do, because this is a very serious disease and it's not something easy to live with because every little thing that comes to you, that happens to you, the first thing you think about, "Is this cancer?" And I think that a lot of help from the family would help them to get rid of these thoughts of these problems to have a better life for themselves.

Spiritual Healing



George Hogan, III - lung
(Crow)

I did a lot of spiritual work before my cancer and even after I had the surgery, I kept on with my spiritual work with the church, and it takes me along and helps me, and I look at it in a positive way. Spiritually I didn't have nothing to worry about, because I still have my life in the hands of God, go on living.

I've always believed, I've always really thought that there is a, like in Crow Indian belief, that there is an almighty God and that if we rely on him, that he changes things and deal with it that way, and I went to a lot

of these elders and they told me to go on living and don't let this disease get you down. Just go on and live like you always have. That helped me a lot. We count on God, our grandfather, like the Crow [ceremonies and celebrations], and that helped me a lot. I really enjoy the tribal culture and that, and I look forward to Crow [gatherings] from a pow wow that is coming on. It keeps me going. I enjoy life. I really didn't let this cancer get me down.



Tobias Martinez - oral
(Mescalero Apache)

I mean I had a good surgeon, I had a good set of doctors that were honest with me, but every time I went to see them I felt that they were pulling out their gun and shooting me with it. ["shooting my spirit"]

I never once paid much thought to some of the traditions that my grandmother had, or the Indians around me. But the spiritual aspects of helping other people started to play more heavily in my life. I needed more spirituality. I went to a man named Montu Smith, a man who is a traditional healer, he traditionally heals certain aspects of hurt people. I decided to try sweat lodge, to try a more traditional, healthier lifestyle. It became easier. [I had to learn that] those people were trying to help me. It was my wife who actually got me invited to sweat lodge, and it was her need to help me that got me a lot of the aspects of the traditional healing. I still needed mental health. I needed to focus certain aspects of my energy away from even helping people until I could truly help myself. I started to rely heavily on the simple fact that I had traditions I'd never experienced, My traditions didn't come actively being participated in until I started reading books during my recovery. I mean I was doing a lot of volunteer time, I was doing special olympics and junior olympics for wheelchair kids, quadriplegic rugby games, everything that made me feel better, but I still hadn't learned how to give back to people.

I smoke so seldom now, it's for a pipe ceremony, or to share a pipe with

my friends, and that's it, and that was from three packs a day. I had no idea, and yet now that these things happened I feel satisfied that he gave me hope, the Creator gave me hope, traditional hope, not just medical hope. I mean nowadays people are so prone to push you away, Indians don't deal with cancer, it doesn't happen in our society, it isn't something that we talk about if it does happen. Most of us are outcasts because it happened. A lot of people believe that traditional medicine is a bad thing in Indian way of life and in actuality we have to learn to embrace the simple fact that they go hand in hand. I don't pretend now-a-days, I brought the cancer on, I knew all the symptoms, I ignored them so completely that when it came full circle my ignorance is what almost killed me. I never really realized how important traditional types of healing were until I started going to a recovery group in the mountains and Ron Chrisman was the sweat leader, or the spiritual leader. The most important part of complete recovery is that you have to work at it. I went to sweat lodge, cleaned myself out, started eating better, started looking at what was happening inside of here (his hand over his heart) and the focus was not necessarily on getting well, but approaching a point of wellness. My wife and I both had experienced the sweat lodge together and Indian retreats, spiritual retreats where people just help each other get through their physical and mental problems, these were ideas I never thought to embrace during my medical part of this cancer therapy because spiritual retreats aren't usually performed in a medical setting, the aspects of the spirituality of it became more important to me as I allowed myself to become more spiritually aware of what the people were offering me around me.

When you walked into the doctor's office and he told you he's going to take something out of you, you can darn well bet he took part of your spirit with you. It was like a gasp of air that rushed out of me, I felt the hole that he shot in me, and then I went to six or seven doctors and they all shot me full of holes too. The spiritual part of closing those wounds is as important as the physical part that the medicine doctor did. But if you never know how to get to that point, you'll never reach that point in

your life. The cancer will be rampant in your spiritual life, it will tear you up, it will literally never mend, because you're not dealing with the lack of spirituality that you have.

Chuck Frederick - prostate
(Chippewa)

And then the kids felt so bad, going to church, but now they do a lot more towards religion I noticed than they did before. I don't know if you're familiar with Indian sweats and stuff like that, they had all those and a lot of the friends I had, they even went to those for me and they had masses said and the priest called me up there and anointed me.



Abe Conklin - prostate
(Ponca-Osage)



But you've got to have that inner faith in yourself, let your body help you heal yourself, along with your doctor and whatever they ask of you to do. That's the way I tried to be. I'm a great believer in prayer. I rely on the Creator along with my doctor too, both goes together, they work together.

And it never did stop my participation in the [ceremonies], or in the pow-wow world, or competition dancing. It never has affected my participation in my ceremonial, or spiritual ways. I go up to the Sundancing in South Dakota, and I go with the medicine man up there. And I had my healing ceremony for me. All this all together along with your spiritualness and faith, never give up on that along with you doctors help, they go together. If you use both of them, they will help you.



Frank Mercer (Tlingit - Raven Clan) - colon

No, it was suggested, but I didn't pursue it at all. I imagine that the traditional medicines that were practiced by various different tribes are effective, and one of the things about medicine, whether it be Western medicine or your traditional medicine. If you believe in it firmly, that will do it. If you don't believe it will do it, then it won't. You only, it is only effective if you believe it is going to cure you. I think that applies to everyone.

Doug Six Killer-St. Clair

I'm a little bit more traditional than a lot of other people, and I don't make the decisions that impact my life. I always look to the oldest female that's there, and the doctors were getting very, very frustrated with me, because I'd always look to my mother, and they would tell my mother to leave the room. So we had a little pow wow with the doctors, and I told the doctors that they needed to talk to my mother, and then my mother would talk to me and then she would tell me and she would advise me. So we were able to educate the doctors a little bit to be a little bit more culturally appropriate.



The other thing that we tried to educate the hospital on is that if something had happened while I was in the hospital, is that there would be a drum come from Red River Reservation which is really close to Greeley Colorado. My father was from Red River, and out of respect to me, that drum would sing the sun up, and sing the sun down, as long as my body was at that hospital. And that hospital had to allow that drum to be there in close proximity to my room on the outside of the hospital. That was an education process. The fact that there was burning things inside the hospital room was an education process for them too. A lot of people make the assumption that because you live in an urban area that you don't do these things. It was rapidly changed when I got into the hospital.

Messages for Others Diagnosed with cancer



George Hogan, III - lung
(Crow)

I think that if they need surgery that they should have it as soon as diagnosed with cancer. They should get on it as soon as they can; because if they let it go, it will spread. Some of them I've heard that they diagnose cancer and they let it go for almost a year before they have this surgery, and I think they should get on it right away. Chemical therapy, and I think they should get on that right away. That is my advice and don't be scared. Go through with it. Some of us come out healed, they go on living, because they got on it right away. Some of them let it go and they die from it. That is my advice. Soon as they are diagnosed, do something about it. Listen to the doctors and if they feel that they have something, that any kind of a little pain in the lung or anywhere, they should tell the doctor, because they get it early. Before, I didn't even think nothing of it. It has cost me a lot.

Frank Mercer - colon
(Tlingit - Raven Clan)

Well I think the thing that each man must bear in mind that the possibility of prostate cancer and, he should be [screened] every year like they recommend, because I know a lot of men don't like it. You get examined for prostate cancer, but it is your life. I think you should be concerned about it. I'll be 76 in about another month and a half, so I think I..... I take better care of myself.





Thunderhand Joe - pancreas
(Mescalero Apache)

But the chief of the Pequot Nation, that was when we were up in Connecticut, saw me and saw how I was living, what I was doing. They said there is no way you could have cancer. It's impossible that somebody could have cancer. I think I broke all his stereotypes about people with cancer. And that's what I hope to do today. I hope to share with you a story that there is a life beyond a disease, beyond anything that makes you [sick].

I guess the underlying thing ... when it's all said and done you don't have ... no one knows what the heck's going to happen. Diseases, accidents, what happens in life ... and that's all a part of life. All you can do is to do your best, keep spiritually strong Myself, I had a wonderful spiritual family around me praying for me and I prayed for them. And I just have this belief that no matter what happens, it's going to be okay. Three years later, I've got my health, my hair back, and I'm doing concerts again. I guess, just keep your faith, keep your strength, laugh a lot, and continue on your road. Whatever that may be.



Robert Judkins - testicular
(Cherokee)

I think that the key is to have a positive attitude. I mean it really brings something to the forefront, that all of the other problems in the world, in Bosnia, your work, everything else really doesn't matter. You know you just, you take things in stride and know that everything is going to be OK. The one important lesson though is to learn that not to deny or if you have a pain, if you have a lump whatever the case might be, go and have it checked, make sure, and definitely go through all the treatment, because you want to make sure that you're okay.

Vincent H. Bointy (Kiowa) - bowel

I mean, what I'm trying to say is we really don't have a way where Indians will get concerned where they will get checkups. That is what I would say to do but Indians are Indians. Everybody get a checkup every once in a while. Don't show any sadness around those who are sick.



**Chuck Frederick - prostate
(Chippewa)**

Well, I think that they should get a check-up but that's something that I never got. I think that that's what most guys do when something happens like that, they wait too long, and I'm just glad that I caught it right away.

The only advice I'd have for men is get your check-up often and then go to a doctor.

I can honestly tell you when people say they went through cancer, they were scared to talk about it. They'd say I went through cancer down here or something, an operation down here, . . . I go out and tell people what it is. People are scared to talk about it. It's not inherited I don't think, and it's not caused by overworking and it's not caused by not enough sleep, I said it just happens to a person. And it's nothing to be ashamed of because it's there. It's not a disease that you caught by coming in contact with it. That you can talk to people and everything, they can't get it, I said. And so now I feel free, I talk about it everyday to my wife, or to different friends or stuff like that I talk, now I know that a lot of the guys are curious, "How did he come across it?" So I wasn't afraid to explain it to him, I explained it to him and told him what happened. And he said, "Well he's getting in that age over forty", so he said, "Maybe I should start getting check-ups." So I said "Well it would be good."

**Abe Conklin - prostate
(Ponca-Osage)**



You always want to check with your doctor. If anything comes up, I'd go to my doctor and he would give me this test. I go to him every month every two or three months, he'll take this blood test. And he'll take it out and he'll check it out. So it's good to check with your doctor, anytime, any problem, because you can always rely on him to help you.

I used to remember those old guys back there, especially my father-in-law at that time. He had to go to the doctor, and you know he would not go to the doctor, them old fellers that age. He said, "Because if I go to the doctor and he tells me something's wrong with me, then I will be sick, but they had that attitude, them old guys. I guess in a way we were kind of that way too. "Maybe it will go away itself", but these things like this, cancer or diabetes, or anything we might get, it's just very important to get to the doctor to get these things taken care of . . . give us a little more life.

I think that's what a person should do over fifty: should have their prostate checked every six months, because that thing can slip up on you, and you don't even know it. Just like this one came up on me the first time, it came up and I didn't even know it.

You've got to find these things out early. Like I said, have these check-ups, get this blood test at least every six months that they can tell whether you've got prostate cancer or not. And it's really a good test. And I think the family should encourage him, because a lot of people get discouraged, "Oh what the heck, I've got cancer, it's going to kill me anyhow." You get this kind of feeling once in awhile, but then you let your spiritualities in yourself bring this back out, "I'm going to bring it . . . have more faith in myself, that my body is going to heal myself." That's what you should express to your loved ones. Let your body help yourself, along with your doctor. Don't forget your Creator. Don't be ashamed to do anything that would help yourself. That's what I'd do. I do that.

Be sympathetic with them, but don't let them know that our feelings are hurt so bad that you're feeling sorry for them. You want to be sympathetic with them but show your respect of what they do for themselves. But be helpful, be respectful for what that person is going through, because it's a scary situation, I can guarantee you that. It's not something that everybody has to go through. And I wouldn't want anybody to go through what I had to go through. But yet, look how long I've lasted, but through spirituality and through the health programs. I have come a long way, and I'm very thankful that I was able to be able to help myself. And that's what . . . you've got to help these people to help themselves, if they don't . . . if they give up, there's no way they could last too long. I think that's my own personal belief. But if you can help them to help themselves, along with spirituality, along with the doctors, I think everything will go well with them.



Doug Six Killer-St. Clair - lymphoma
(Cherokee and Shoshone)

It's okay to have fear, because the person that's facing it has fear, and if you mask that fear, they're worried about why you're masking that fear instead of focusing internally on what's going on in their body to gather the strength to fight it. So I would say go ahead and have the emotion that you need to have, and celebrate it. Because there's something out of balance, or you wouldn't have it, and it's a way to get back into balance.

Don't ignore the signs, I mean they're real clear. I was eating like a horse, and I was still losing weight. When I went into the hospital, I was probably a hundred and five pounds, but I was eating just enormous amounts of food. I wasn't exercising very much because I didn't have the stamina to do it. When I'd walk into a room where people were smoking, I'd just go into a coughing fit and wouldn't be able to stop coughing, and it was a very deep, deep cough, but not productive. The night sweats.

Just all of those things together, there's a pattern there, and you've got to recognize, and we know our bodies better than anybody else, so I guess that's the message, listen to your body and trust it, trust what it's telling you, you're out of harmony, out of balance, and it's telling you that you've got to get back into it, so listen to it.

Just accept it, let it flow. And if you do that, your family will see you doing that and then you can help them do that. Because they're going to have the perception that they need to be there and do things for you, when in essence, you need to be there and do things for them. You've got to be able to preserve some energy so that you can preserve yourself and maintain that harmony and balance in whatever situation you're in, so that the cancer doesn't come back.

Outlook



Thunderhand Joe - pancreas
(Mescalero Apache)

And I felt really bad for the people around me that have had to watch me go through this. But I really didn't feel that bad. I mean I really didn't feel like this was the end of the world. And I came to the understanding that if I was going to die then that's okay too. I didn't put any pressure on myself or did I give any more weight living or dying. It's all one and the same. You're going to live and to die. But I says it's not up to me. What's up to me is today, to live and be happy and what I want to do today. If I want to cry today, I can cry today. I never wanted to cry, I always wanted to laugh. I think my chances were better at laughing so I laughed through my whole treatment of chemotherapy and everybody around me completely busted up with me.

Who the hell is gonna tell you different? Death is a wonderful advice. The fact that you know that you are going to die tomorrow what are

you going to do today. Shit! I am going to live. You know. I want to do everything! And that was my attitude. So they weren't going to stop me from going to play.

It's because of [my wife] I was able to get the kind of good treatment and it was because of her giving me a child that I was able to take the course that I eventually took. Had my cancer taken out and it was because of her that we had a second child after which we were never going to have another child. I'm the confirmation to the cure. The doctors do not know everything.

I'm happy that that is the way my path went or is going and I know that it was going to go there anyway, but you can't change anything, I wouldn't change anything. To me, I think it's really made me a more enlightened person. I'm getting to do the things that I always wanted to do but I'm trying to make them happen now because like you say it's like death is an adviser. If you knew that you were going to die tomorrow, what would you do today, so every day I want to live my life like that. I want to start my own career with my music. I want to be the best father that I can, be the best husband that I can, I still have to work on that right honey? [his wife smiles].

**George Hogan, III - lung
(Crow)**

The Indians really get scared of it and just try to shut it off of their life. Don't worry about it, it will go away attitude. That is what killed a lot of us. They let it go, and once they are told they are dying of cancer, they even quit going to the doctor. They don't want to hear it, and they just live that way until they die. [I am] making the Indians realize that cancer is a deadly disease, and they have got to deal with it, and I think it is good that there are some people going around dealing and going to homes like this, what I am doing now to help them to deal with their cancer.



Robert Judkins - testicular
(Cherokee)

I thought like to me this was a journey, and once I started this journey, I had to complete it. I didn't want to get off the horse in the middle of the street, so if you make a conscious decision, this is what I think is maybe a good taste of life, make a conscious decision to do something when you follow through.



Vincent H. Bointy - bowel
(Kiowa)

I don't know the answer, but it don't worry me, maybe I got so much faith in God, that it just don't worry me. It don't bother me.

Michael Palfy III - bone
(Oglala Sioux)

No. It was just something to do. Cause I am always looking for new challenges and stuff cause life is boring if you just sit there. You need something interesting to happen. Mine just happened, I had cancer. I took it out as a big joke. I'm often annoyed but sitting there and kind of flopping my elbow up here and resting my chin on my elbow. About the middle of my therapy and everything. Another kid came in, with the same thing except that his was further up in his shoulder. They wanted me to tell him about it. I wasn't able to tell him about it. I didn't know what to think of it. It's just there.



I found out that no matter what you do, you gotta set your mind at doing something, and you can do it. Cause I have seen cancer patients, little cancer patients able to do stuff. And you've got all these people out here

who say they can't do it just because they got a twisted ankle or something. I mean it sounds foolish. That's one reason why I don't like getting help from anybody cause when I had cancer everybody helped me out. They all wanted to make sure I could do it, that I could make it on my own. I beat a friend up because of that. I was jumping on a roof and I was almost up to the roof and he reach down to help and grab me by the back of my jacket and hold me up so we can climb in front of him. Told him don't ever help me again, not unless I ask for your help.

I mostly like to write. I'm just an average U.S. Native American Teen. Well, a little bit more than that. I'm me. I go run around with my friends and explained to them that I'm Mike. He is the guy with the arm. He had a lot of bad stuff happened to him in his life but he still a good person.

You face it each and every time you wake up in the morning, each and every time you go to sleep. It's just something new, just a new way of facing it. I mean I've seen people die. I've seen things dies. It's just something new, just a new way to see it. I guess that's what makes me live the way I do now. I live without a care cause the next step may be my last. That's the way it's always been. There are people who say that I was foolish, but I learned responsibility when I was really young. I was adult before I was supposed to be at 11. That and I figured right now I might die so let's get out there and just be free, cause I'm still free at the moment.

Getting on with life

I am a carpet layer. It shows me that I can do it. Who cares what people think of me. I can do it. That one reason why I wanted the job in the first place, is to prove to myself that I can do it. Even with the one arm, I can do it. Although I cut myself quite often, but I still can do it.

I'm still carefree, live life while you can. Live at the present, and I'll probably be doing that till the day I die. It was something that was meant to happen to me. I wish I could get this across to everybody, even those people who got those high-paying jobs. You can die right there. And that's what cancer made me realized, that I can die right there, the next

heartbeat I'm dead. Maybe you can call it being selfish or a teenager, but I live life for now, and that's the way it should be.

I tried to make it easier for them, show them that I can do it. I'm here, I'm happy, I'm still able to walk. I'm not dead, am I? There is no reason to shed a tear for me. I still don't think she [mom] realizes that. Still treats me like I am little baby. Still makes me happy to know I am still here.

Chuck Frederick - prostate
(Chippewa)

Now I feel a lot better about it, I guess I'm still just as ornery and stuff. But I guess it's something that I've got to live with, you know now I know I've got it and I've got to live with it. Well I already feel like I'm already cured from it. I listened when you [Dr. Kaur] told me it was all gone, I felt it was all gone. I took your [Dr. Kaur] word for it. To me it's all gone.

We never had a will or anything so it's kind of brought that up to go and make the will. A couple of weeks ago we went and had a will made.

I said "I don't like to drink or smoke", and I like to get to rest now, where before I was working day and nights and now I want to make sure that when I get too tired, I want to take time out and rest, instead of trying to keep going and going and going.



Project Supported By:

The Graham Foundation, Colorado Springs, CO
Colorado Cancer League, Denver, CO
Native CIRCLE, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN
Native American Cancer Initiatives, Inc., Pine, CO



For further information, Contact

Native American Cancer Research
Corporation
3022 South Nova Road
Pine, CO 80470-7830
Webpage://www.NatAmCancer.org

(Do not type www in address)

Layout, Graphics & Photo Enhancements by: Rick Clark
Morning Dew Computer Productions, Pine, CO

Cover Graphic: Neil Thompson

Transcriptions: Lisa Castro (Denver, CO) and Lisa Baethke (Mayo Clinic)

Organization, Coordination, Refinement: Linda Burhansstipanov [Western Cherokee]

In Honor & Memory of: **Abe Conklin** [Ponca-Osage]
George Hogan, III [Crow]