

We Never Heard the Bullet Coming...

Death Lurks in the Sunshine

BY CHERYL JONES

A doctor's examining room. The doctor enters, sits down, foregoing the usual pleasantries, and flatly states, "This is serious. You cannot wait. It's malignant. You'll be seen at Shands Hospital in Gainesville on Monday morning." With these few words, our world changed. The hopes, dreams and plans were all now on hold. There might not be a tomorrow.

It was the usual summer, at least for our family. We've always been mobile, and when my husband Tim got a new job in May, the future looked promising. We needed to move closer to work and scoured the area for rentals. Tim found the perfect house.

Late July saw him working all day at Pine Meadows in Eustis, then unloading the car at the new house after work so I could reload it every evening. Unfinished remodeling of our new home made the big move both prolonged and stressful. Tim noticed that the mole on his stomach was raised, a definite change, but he assumed that it was from toting around heavy boxes in the 99-degree heat.

We survived the big move fairly well and began to settle in at our new house. One evening, out of the blue, Tim announced to me that his mole had changed, and he didn't think it was an infected hair. Right away my red flags went up — this was a major statement from a man who is by nature very quiet and psychologically allergic to doctors.

There was not big scene, no major nagging. He thought that maybe he should get it looked at. Out of three dermatologists in Lake County, the soonest he could be seen was a month away. This brought out a bit of verbal objection from me. I announced that I was going to take him to Orlando, because we weren't going to wait on this thing. He assured me that he was on a waiting list for any cancellation in Leesburg. I planned to wait one week, then haul him to Orange County.

Three days later, the phone rang. Would Tim like an appointment next Tuesday at 9:30? You bet he would. The dermatologist excised the mole and sent it to a lab, a standard procedure for anything that looked at all suspicious. We'd hear back in one week.

The following Monday was Labor Day. We took the kids to a nice park, acting normal on the outside while we both felt uneasy inside, waiting for the report that all was well.

Tuesday morning passed quietly. Tim called at noon — had I heard from the doctor? No. We both relaxed a bit. No news is good news. An hour later, the phone rang. "Dr. Chun wants to see Tim in his office tomorrow." Could it wait until next week? He had an appointment to get his stitches out then. "No. The doctor wants to see him tomorrow to discuss the lab results."

I knew. From the instant she said those words, I knew. The tears, the terrible fear, the pain all forced their way out of my subconscious. What was wrong with my husband?

The next day, Tim came home after his appointment to take us to Tavares. He wore his sunglasses inside the house. I knew, without a terrible doubt, that it was bad news.



Tim Jones

Our outing was quiet. He didn't want to discuss anything in front of the children. I was too petrified to ask — my mind did not want to hear those words. They came, however, when we returned home, settled the children in with a video, and he asked me to go outside and talk.

Tim got right to the point. No warm-up, no sugar-coated break-it-to-her-gently tactics. "The doctor says it's malignant..." The rest of his words were drowned out by the blood

rushing in my ears. I saw tears spill from his terror-filled eyes, and my world — my cozy, settled world — disintegrated.

That evening was the toughest to handle. We took turns retreating to the back of the house to cry, so as not to alarm the children. It was mainly a blur, but one memory stand out in particular. Our little girls were crawling on Tim's lap, happily going about their baby business near Daddy. I saw the look he gave them, one that wondered if he could be there as they grew up — would he be around to walk them down the aisle on their wedding days? He walked out of the room with tears in his eyes. Could this really be happening?

The days that followed were also a blur. I arranged for child care for our two boys, ages 9 and 11, and for the twins, who were 16 months old. Phone calls flew from coast to coast as I enlisted the help of every prayer chain, church, bible study group and Christian prayer warrior we knew. The Lord could provide a miracle, and I needed a miracle now. I could not face the possibility of life without my husband. If the Lord could raise Lazarus from the dead, surely He could get rid of these cancer cells in my husband's body!

Monday morning came. More in control and with the initial shock partially worn off, we drove to Gainesville. Perhaps the surgeon could excise this under local anesthesia and could go home the same day. We clung to each other.

The plan was changed to general anesthesia/let's do it big and get it all. The rest of this day was spent in Shands Hospital, doing the necessary pre-op tests. Tim's Uncle Andy and Aunt Jean, who'd driven over to be with us, left with a promise to return the next morning when surgery was scheduled. We drove home, picked up the twins, and spent another sleepless night. I searched my bible for comfort — reassurance — any word from God to indicate that my most fervent desire would be granted.

Matthew Chapter 21, Verse 22 kept popping up: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." This was my message from God. Letting Tim go, in faith, was hard. But I believed...

Tuesday came. We drove to Gainesville. We waited. I cried a river, then an ocean. Would God give me a second chance with this man, this dear, sweet man whom I'd for so long taken for granted? Lord, please give me more time with him. I love him so

Real men do wear sunscreen — at least those who love their wives and children and staying alive.

much. All the hurts and repressed grievances and marital problems of the past dozen years melted into nothingness. They were so petty, so insignificant. All that mattered to me on this earth was having the honor and blessing of having my husband at my side. Priorities straightened out fast.

During the previous week, as I had gone about mechanically doing "normal people" errands, a song had come on in the drugstore. It was John Denver's voice, but eerily it could have been Tim's words. "Lady, are you crying? Do the tears belong to me? Did you think our time together was all gone? Lady, you've been dreaming. I'm as close as I can be, and I swear to you our time has just begun..."

As the song went on to "promise to say right here beside me," I felt a panic well up inside of me and cut my shopping trip short. I wasn't dreaming, although I wished often to wake from this hellish nightmare. As I drove home, though, I wondered in this could possibly be God's way of telling me that Tim would survive this ordeal. I begged — I pleaded — I praised god for the time I had with Tim, and humbly relinquished my husband to God with a heart filled with desperate prayers too deep to voice.

Those same prayers, spoken with the bare emotion of my soul instead of words, flowed upwards to the heavens on the day that would change our lives forever.

Tim went into surgery at 12:30 p.m. The surgeon planned to take one centimeter radiating from each side of the excised mole site, tapering the nine inch incision near the ends in an elongated

football shape, removing all tissue down to the muscle layer. I cried still more, prayed even harder during the time Tim was in the operating room.

Then, suddenly, amidst my inner turmoil and anguish, the peace of God which passes all human understanding descended on me like a warm blanket. I knew Tim was going to be all right. Praise God from whom all blessings flow! The surgeon was the best at Shands, and he specialized in oncology. He was also a Christian. With Tim and Dr. Copeland in that operating room was the Lord, the Great Physician, protecting my husband and guiding the surgeon's hands.

A week later, we returned to Gainesville to have Tim's drainage tube removed and get the report from pathology. What a sweet, wonderful relief to hear that although the melanoma went deeper than they had thought, no cells were found to be straying towards Tim's lymph nodes. The Lord again had heard my plea.

This particular melanoma is gone. Tim will return every three months to be checked. The doctor explained that the skin is one large organ, and the cumulative effects of exposure can pop out anywhere on the body. Then the doctor said three important words: sunscreen, sunscreen and sunscreen. It's amazing how a person will pay attention when his life is on the line. For years I'd nagged, and I suspect for years he'd ignored.

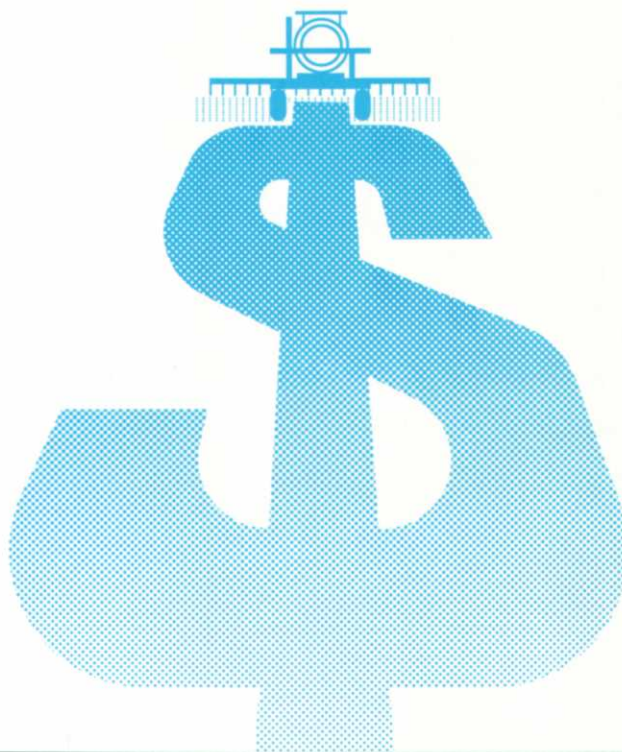
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cleanup pass around greens. I wish I had the space to chronicle Dr. Duich's contributions to our industry for the younger members of our association, because everyone of us has benefited from his work, and owe him our gratitude.

◆ **Dr. James Watson** - Another giant in our industry, and this year's winner of GCSAA's "Old Tom Morris Award." He echoed the need for the golf industry to take their environmental story to the public. He cited GCSAA's superintendent promotional efforts (*Par For The Course* on ESPN), and Ron Dodson's ACSP program as effective ways of doing this.

This was a super program, and the Everglades group did a great job putting it together. My thanks to Wayne Kappauf, Dale Walters, and the rest of the Everglades Chapter for the privilege of serving as moderator, and to Wendy Hamilton for her many courtesies (Wendy is the new Executive Director of the EGSCA).

Returning to the theme of this article, I think we have every right to feel good about the direction our industry is headed, thanks to the talents and dedication of people like those mentioned above. Let's just not get complacent and slack off when there is still so much to do!

Death Lurks in the Sunshine

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After all, I was merely a meddlesome wife. Real men don't need sissy sunscreen. They're tough. They're invincible. They're too busy. It's too hot and greasy — a million excuses. But you know what, guys? Real men do wear sunscreen — at least those who love their wives and children and staying alive. Tim is 36 years old. He's young, he's strong, he's incredibly intelligent — and he could have died. But for the grace of God...

Please, if not for yourselves, then for your loved ones, use protection. Wear a panama-style hat and sunblock every day, be it sunny or cloudy. You don't want your wife going through the soul-shattering agony of losing you.

Years ago in *The Florida Green*, I concluded an article about life at Lake City Community College by describing our marriage as "scarred, tested, strong." I didn't know then what those words truly meant. Now I do. I feel closer to my husband than I did on our wedding day. His being here is the greatest gift from God in my life. Every day I will thank God for this precious second chance with my husband.

The sun is not your friend. It may be great for your greens, but if you're not there to tend them, don't fool yourselves — another superintendent will take your place at work. But another husband and father can never fill your shoes at home. Take Dr. Copeland's advice to heart, and may God bless you all with a life free from the terrifying and possibly fatal disease of skin cancer.

Editor's Note: Recently Tim had another scare when he found some swollen lymph glands. Thankfully, examination determined that it was not a return of the cancer. I want to thank Cheryl and Tim for sharing their story of one of the real dangers of being a superintendent and the impact it can have on the lives of our families. Everyone, take care of yourselves out there!



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