

Dream Warrior



My Red Road

by
Tobias Martinez

My name is **Tobias Martinez**. I am a cancer survivor. This is my story, my **Red Road**.



I was born on May 10, 1953. I am one of a family of 15 children. My grandmother was Apache (Mescalero). I am sure our birthright as Native Americans died with her. She was stolen from the tribe and grew up in the Colorado and New Mexico area. A church fire destroyed all record of her Birth. Her traditions, our traditions as a family live on in me. I was born on the same day as she. I felt a special closeness to her. She held me dear when I was a child and as a man before the Creator took her home.

My parents loved us all and live even now as Spiritual Human beings. They recently celebrated 50 years of marriage. They have many great-great-grandchildren and blessings only life can give a loving couple. At an early age all my brothers and sisters were given the best education money could buy. Catholicism, sharing, family unity and hard work were what was stressed in our lives. I seemed more preoccupied with how things worked than with putting them back together most of my life growing up.



My health problems started early when I burned thirty-five percent of my upper body in an accident involving gasoline & matches at the age of thirteen. On Friday the 13th, three days after my birthday (I call that "Black Friday"). You see at that point I felt different, left out, burnt out and burnt up. I still found a way to be special early in life. A scholarship to the priesthood led me to believe my calling to be a Preacher. I felt close to the Creator even then. I almost killed myself in the flash of a match. I survived the physical damage. Often I wonder if my mental health was the price of my survival.

At an early age I was out of the house and away from home. I grew up fast in a naive way. Shy and timid from my burn scars, yet that true basic nature of a Taurus bull. I bulled my way through adolescence and married at the early age of 17. Vietnam was the topic of concern in those days. My Grandfather was a Silver Star recipient. My father is a Purple Heart recipient. My older brother served two tours in Vietnam and is a decorated veteran. My younger brother served in the Air Force during Desert Storm and also received the Legion of Merit and National Defense Ribbon. He retired from the Air Force after twenty-one years. I received my Sea Service Deployment Ribbon, National Defense Service Medal, Meritorious Unit Commendation, Good Conduct Award, Battle "E" Award (2). Warrior deeds from Warrior blood.



I joined as the last few years of the Vietnam War



counted down. Mescalero Apache warrior, the ones who never gave up. I loved the Pacific Ocean from the first time I saw it. I joined the United States Navy for 13 years. I grew up. I moved away. I saw the world and all it could show a Nuclear Trained Machinist mate.

In my 13 years of service I learned about alcoholism, addiction, loneliness, divorce, and above all patriotism. I also learned life has a peculiar way of waking you up.

The Cancer

I realize how important the message I am now prepared to give is, so please bear with me as I now endeavor to deliver it.

When I was first diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma of the tongue I felt as all cancer patients do, angry, denial. I look at it now and realize what happened is that I felt the doctor had shot a hole in my spirit. You see as cancers go, this type is quite deadly. The place on my tongue, as well as the severity, required immediate attention by the doctor and myself. I do now believe that my initial reactions aside from the shock and fear are what got me through this ordeal. I knew I could get through this test and live.

There were various aspects of this reality that were immediately overwhelming. It takes money and time to deal with this disease, both of which I was fresh out of. To keep me going and able to deal with my tongue

cancer, the doctors gave me pain killers. At first the pain was minimal, as the tumor grew the pain also did in startling rapidity hand-in-hand. By the time I found out what pain killer addiction meant, I was doing upward to one hundred Class 3 narcotic pills every two weeks, and more. My alcohol addiction was at its worst. I still smoked a lot. All in all, I was a mess. I had come full circle. The cancer was in control. The pain, misery, despair, all much like the cancer itself, were eating me alive.

Sure I had heard of the warning signs of cancer. I ignored them. I did not believe this could happen to me. Yet I was putting myself at highest risk. Smoking, alcohol, drug abuse, denial of all I knew instinctively. Still I could find no relief in sight, I did not even know where to look.

I know you all like to believe this can't happen to you. I still had hope that I would wake up and this nightmare would go away. It got worse. The pain, the denial turned out to be cancer of the lymph nodes, another



hole in my spirit. Put there by me, but explained as the next worse turn of events by my doctors. I was in danger of death unless something

was done, now. The hospital at that time needed cash up front just to remove the tumor. No insurance, no cash, no life. I was in a panic. My strength was my woman. We went to charity. No help, no life. We begged for aid. No help. The hospital physician agreed



to do the operation cheaply. I needed x-ray therapy sessions to assure some chance of survival. No help, no life, no chance.

The answer to my prayers came from out of my past. I was so busy and stressed out, I neglected to approach the Veteran's Administration (VA) Medical Center in La Jolla, California. You see I am a service connected vet. But not for cancer. We went to them, they saw the tumor and immediately responded because of my finances and need. Also, the fact that the VA and my previous hospital doctors were in sister teaching institutions saved the day. I had no idea the cure was as bad as the disease.

The Cure

The hard part of it all was behind me now, or so I believed. The harsh reality is that the operation alone was very difficult. I could possibly lose my ability to speak. I was going to lose all my teeth and at least half of my tongue. Potential lymph node contamination and the operation to eliminate that possibility could severely damage my left arm, my neck and shoulder. Possible paralysis were explained to me. X-ray exposure at the levels needed to complete the cure could cause further complications, and it did.

The old saying "the cure could be as bad as the disease" comes to mind. It was. You see it was twenty-three hours of operations I needed to remove what was

necessary to give me a chance. As well as many days of radiation treatment. I had no idea that x-ray's could be so devastating. Yet I had trained in the nuclear field in the Navy, still I was not ready for what was to come. The cure was as deadly as the disease. I went from weighing 192, all the way down to 125 in a matter of weeks. Not my favorite form of weight control though. But once I realized it had to be done, I lived up to my end allowing my doctors full control in my therapy, it was, after all, my only chance at survival.

Operations, x-ray's, and nerve damage, all came down to one final complication, I was further diagnosed as having Adams Stokes Syndrome (ed. "sudden fainting"), and now permanently disabled, the worst was over.

There is one thing that I feel should be discussed while I am on the subject of the cure. It is that chemotherapy/radiation therapy are very powerful and because of that, they have powerful after affects. I would say that I had decided more than once not to go back to my next session. They were only a few seconds of X-ray radiation at increasing levels. The reasoning behind that is to force the cells into constantly rebuilding themselves. The first real noticeable effect is the dryness of the mouth and redness. The soreness and lack of taste combine to keep you not wanting to eat. Everything seemed to taste like cardboard. I lost part of my salivary glands in





the operation, so the ones I had left were being irradiated and it made for a miserable experience at meal time. Loss of weight is inevitable. It happens so quick you feel tired all the time, and it drains all your energy reserve. I hated this part so much, at the end, my Disabled American Veterans drivers had to drag me out of my house more than once. Radiation affects your whole body even though it is used in a centralized dose, unlike chemotherapy, which is whole body doses. I was sure that my oncologists were trying to kill me. Radiation affects your whole body and mind.

One other affect is X-ray burn. I was literally being fried alive. I never thought food and the taste of it could be so good. My face looked like the worst sunburn alive. My cheeks and chest soon blackened. My face is better, my teeth look better and I can taste everything. All in all, I am alive because I always moved forward. I didn't give up. I still love to eat. I taste all of the Creators gifts, and I thought I never would again.

The Therapy

It is my belief that the one most important aspect of my complete recovery was the people involved in my post cancer therapy.

Sure, the actual physical therapist, my wife, doctors and family played heavily, it is only natural. But the people I am talking of is my friends and my spiritual leader or medicine man. You see it took seven long hard years of devotion to my recovery for a doctor to say you are cured. You see I was ready to give up. Cancer alone is enough to destroy your life. Then again cancer and cure can run hand in hand. I didn't see that until one of my friends took a chance in my recovery and asked me to reach out of my self-pity to see that I still had a lot to offer life and those around me.

I started doing volunteer work, as well as my scheduled recovery therapy. My voice came back, my head and neck problems began to vanish. My Adams Stokes Syndrome got better even though it will never go away. I worked with disabled children and quadriplegic, and I slowly saw my self esteem and health returning. I was no longer just a statistic or another victim of the 20th Century fears concerning cancer. Yet this was not enough. I still had holes in my spirit, many and deep. I had no idea how to heal these.

I still needed medical help. I no longer needed pain killers, my pain ended. I no longer needed self pity. I had no idea what I needed. The pills were easy to give up, my alcoholism was not.



My addicted personality needed a crutch. I needed to believe in something. My wife could see me floundering. I had no direction, no life after cancer.

The spiritual leader or medicine man I finally came to know was Ron Chrisman. His ways, his traditionalism, his patience, his family, his healing sweats. My need to find something my grandmother had given to me early in life all came to play in the healing of those holes in my spirit. Now I dance, I sing, I live a better life due to my friend the Kumeaay, the Sioux, the people the Dineh.

Spirit Mending Therapy

I seriously have thought about what things kept me deeply involved in my search for spiritual peace.

I know how certain aspects and symbols in life have helped me grow and kept my outlook healthy. One was as fragile and simple as the feather. Our lives are consistently drawn to certain concepts from our past. This one gave me great health and even wealth. Not as one might expect. For money and feathers are not the kind of wealth I am talking of. I left the one eagle feather I ever was blessed with at my grandmother's gravesite. I felt my one would come back as many. During my recovery I had friends come and go. Others were like sun on my face. I shared ideas and they came back to me as those feathers of love.



Feathers of love, power, strength all wrapped in

friends and extended family. My own relatives and many friends shared in the feathers that came my way. I did as my heart said, I shared, I gave the feathers from my head and more came my way. I shared more. I shared sweat lodge for the first time I felt my spirit sing. My feet felt the rhythm of the drum and I felt the need to dance. I was at ease. I felt and saw those thousands of faces over the years honoring me. I felt the people as they sang those honoring songs and I knew I had found the path, my red road.



Aspects of all those things I had read in my seven year recovery were coming to the point where I could understand them. Spirituality, give-and-take. The Creator's plans for me started to play heavily in my decision to live, love and laugh.

I did less and less drinking. I was too busy. I did it later. Then later never seemed to come. I still wanted things in life, but that seemed to be happening around me, instead of me searching blindly for them. Acceptance, respect and growth took place actively as I accepted my part in it all.

I felt the power of the eagle feather. I was blessed to touch the buffalo. No, not a dead animal. Alive, strong animals. My brother-in-law has a small herd of buffalo.

More images and visions came to pass and become my realities. More strength, sharing, caring. My spirit holes were closed. I felt complete. I had direction. I am alive.

My Art, Visions from The Creator

When I was in recovery from my cancer, part of my therapy was recreational. At first I did those things that were very un motivating and inspiration was not involved at this time, I was still very much into self pity. My wife gave me literature and books that helped to bring my artistic ability into a focus. Visions are only important if you understand them. During my radiation therapy I had many. Crying for a vision is one concept I understood because of the books I read. Though the visions were very personal I would like to relate them to my cancer therapy.

When I was sickest from the affects of the radiation poisoning, I had the strongest visions. It was as if the Creator gave me hope from within my own spirit. My vision of my art bringing me blue ribbons were hard for me to believe. My visions of my hands full of eagle feathers were beyond anything I could understand. These words being shared both in writing and speech were hard to see me accomplishing. All these have happened and more. My health has returned. I am honored by many people for my path that has even today been directed by those visions. Even in my worst moments, I never lost sight of the blessings cancer gave. Don't give up.

Epilogue

I suppose real miracles are hard to find in anyone's life. The miracles I found were in my wife. You see during all this, she was my rock, my strength. She broke her back during my recovery and it is one of the reasons I am what I am today. We lost a lot as far as material things go, but we gained more spiritually because of the blessing called cancer.

It took modern medicine, a competent medicine man, and so many people in my life to make recovery work. Though it is difficult, cancer can be cured, and recovery can be only as complete and rewarding as you find it. Reach out and get to recognize the symptoms, not only of cancer, but of addiction, mental abuse, self abuse, and perhaps listening to your instinctive body reactions. Get a check-up often. Be real with your traditional and modern doctors. Above all, trust the Creator will give you the courage and strength he gave me.

Yaho - Thank you, with a sitting

Dream Warrior

I AM AN EAGLE

In Nature I Symbolize these features:

I am Unique, I am Majestic, I am Powerful,
I am Devotion, I am Greatness, I am Noble,
I am Protection, I am Self-Reliant,
I am a Defender, I am a Provider.

To the Native American I Represent these Qualities:

I am Confident, I am Proud, I am Strong,
I am Courage, I am Bravery, I am Patience,
I am a Hunter, I am a Vision,
I am a Spirit,
I am a Warrior.

To my Country I portray this Image:

I am Trust, I am Freedom, I am Liberty,
I am Justice, I am Valor, I am Peace,
I am Honor, I am Loyal, I am Victory,
I am a Patriot.

To My Family and Friends,

I am all of these things and more:
Remember ME
I am an EAGLE
I am Tobias!

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