



FRED – MÉTIS CAREGIVER

My name is Fred Shore. My wife has suffered from cancer three times in her life. She had breast cancer 10 years ago. Three and a half years ago she got diagnosed with a colon cancer, and a year and a half after that it was again colon cancer. So she's a three-time survivor. I lost a daughter six years ago to colon cancer. I can't count the number of friends I've lost. My brother passed on from cancer... so it's been a thing in my life for a long time.

Fred and Lucy

Lucy and I have been together for a long time. And about 10 years, 12 years ago she came home, she had been to see a doctor, and... the diagnosis was breast cancer. So holy moly, I mean ... suddenly, it just — changes your whole world...

My Saviour

It was pretty, pretty terrifying. I found it like, suddenly I felt like about as useful like a third wheel on a two wheel chariot because there really is not much technically that you can get involved in. You're not going to take the chemo or the operation or the... you suddenly have to do things like keep an eye out for what she's doing, if she needs something or something like that. It was tough. I mean it was, you know, suddenly your partner, the person close to you is like in danger of dying. I mean it's the bottom line on it. So we managed to get through it but I got to be honest, it was a tough thing. I found it really stressful in that it kept me awake at night and stuff like that. Yeah, I felt kind of helpless, you know, and I don't like feeling helpless, never have.

Support

I didn't want to talk to her about what I was feeling because I figured she had enough on her plate on her time. I was lucky in another respect in that some of the people at work were really supportive, so this one particular place where I was working St. Paul's College, two of the staff members came up to me the day they found out Lucy had cancer. They gave me a big hug and one of them was a survivor and we, we talked about it. It was good, you know, to let it out. And I'm the kind of person that likes to talk about things so... but I didn't want to talk with Lucy because I figured the stress levels she was under were high enough. So I had other people. The reality of the matter is though there's still times there though that you, you get ticked off at the world in general, because why did it have to happen now? You know, what can we do about it? Nothing. You get frustrated and angry and stuff and those kind of things you have to just kind of eat. They'll drive you nuts if you let them get to you.

Coping

When she ... when we went through the breast cancer, when we first found out about it we did a... I got a couple of Aboriginal elders in to do a sharing circle. Right here in this room. And that was really something. We also hosted a couple of other sharing circles with other people who had cancer. Lucy also talked to the social workers and stuff...Very, very good relationships with

the doctors. A lot of that I think comes from the fact that if you show the sign that you're interested in knowing what they will share with you, you know. If you don't, they just do what they have to do and don't tell you anything so. And that's difficult because I know a lot of people — Aboriginal people — just won't ask questions, you know, they figure it's not their right to do that. Knowledge is a dangerous thing but it's also highly useful.

A fine balance

There comes a point when you're a little too much: 'Oh, don't do that. I'll do that,' just 'Don't carry that. I'll carry that.' 'Don't do this. Go lie down, you're tired,' that kind of thing. After a while it just.. it causes the frustration level in the person that's getting helped, if you will, to go up. And I didn't realize that you know? So when she said, 'Look — take it easy. I'm all right!' 'Oh!' So I kind of felt a little upset, you know. She was not willing to have me help her all the time. But then I realized, yeah. You know... I guess it could get to be a bit much. So it's called smothering. And it's a natural habit. I went and checked it on the computer and looked it up, got a pamphlet on it. Oh yes, it's true. Apparently you can really overdo this to the point where this person...gets so angry at you for doing this that it negates anything you are doing that's good. So I'll learn how to back off, you know?

Melinda

What happened basically is, really came as a big surprise, our oldest daughter's got, was not feeling well in the summertime, July and August, and just flu-ish type, you know, symptoms and things. And she was getting really tired. She was also in a position where she was just about to become an assistant manager at a big store here in the city. And she thought that it was the stress of that and everything else like that and so. So anyway, she started at the new place. But then she found herself going to work and sitting in the office unable to get up and do anything, just no more energy left, really not feeling well. So her mother and I both started getting a little pushy about getting something, you know, see a doctor about it. So eventually she did. And the surgeon put her in the hospital that same day and not only put her in the hospital but had her on morphine before the hour was out. And she was diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer. And there were three major tumours and all of them had really... they had metastasized everywhere...it was in her liver and everything so... that was September 25th and she died on November 12th. And that was tough. As a parent watching a child dying is not fun. There was nothing we could do. And the only thing we could do was make her as comfortable as possible and, you know, by and large just have to tough it out. We had a lot of friends that were there ... And there was nothing we ... didn't have time to get angry, just — it happened so damned fast. And the reality of the matter was, one day she was dead and that was it. And she died on November 12th. November 11th is my wife's birthday. And we always said she waited until after, you know, midnight. Knowing Melinda she probably did.

Community

Melinda's friends showed up from different parts of the country and stayed as long as they could. And they were all actually present when Melinda passed. And that kind of a collectivity thing really worked well. Like I said, our family's... we're small, but we're close. I come — well, a little bit of dysfunction in my family background and stuff so this one here, it's not perfect but you know we tend to... we watch each other's backs very carefully and ... yeah... the best source of help was our family. And that's a very Aboriginal thing too, you know, because very often you look around and someone's sick — they're in the hospital, there's 30 people in the

room and it drives the nurses and doctors nuts, because the visiting rules say two only, you know? Well, no. In the Aboriginal people, someone's sick we all got to be there, you know, help them out and stuff like that. And it works. Drives the doctors nuts but then that's what happens.

Removing the mystery

One of the things too that we are really, really conscious of is getting the push to get the testing done. So we've been blunt about it. It's embarrassing, I suppose. You know, the whole concept behind it. I've gotten to the point now where I, I'm blunt about what it is. So somebody asks me 'What is it?' Well I say 'It's a plastic tube, about four feet long, five feet long, and they put it up where the sun doesn't shine,' you know? 'Ohhh, I'm not going anywhere for...' And so on and so... but, if people talk about it and get to know about it eventually it removes the mystery around it you know. Like mammograms, you know. I happen to know what a mammogram's about because I went and looked it up and found out about it. But I bet you there aren't too many guys that do. Or young men finding out what the basic test is for prostate. 'You're gonna do what?' That kind of thing, so it's, you know. A young guy goes in for his first overall physical and they want to check his prostate, well... a lot of guys look upon that, really, really embarrassing. And it's stupid. You're going to die from the embarrassment — is what it boils down to. So I can be pretty blunt about it when I get out there and, you know, if someone asks me I'll tell them.

Tattoos

I'm not a big tattoo fan, but I got this one. It's a gerbera daisy. That's Melinda's favourite flower. The pink ah... is for pink...is for breast cancer. The dark blue one is for colon cancer. So I figured if I got this people would be you know, 'Wow, that's amazing Fred. You got a tattoo.' And I could say, 'Yes, it is. My wife had breast cancer. My daughter had colon cancer and died from it — get yourself checked.' So it was kind of a teaching thing, you know, people would see it and ask the question. Lucy's is up here on the shoulder. And it works every now and then somebody asks me and I tell them, 'Go and get yourself tested.'

Living with cancer

It's now a part of our daily life, you know, we just accept that, that it's there. I don't want it to do any more damage to us, you know, I really don't. But it's always in the back of the head that it could, you know? I refuse I guess to spend all my time worrying about that factor. If it's going to, it's going to, you know, and then we'll deal with it. But again the last thing I want to see happen is one of my grandchildren, you know, suddenly gets something serious. And it can happen, you know, there's all different kinds of childhood cancers that could come up and that I think would be horrible. But again — what are you going to do about it? Spend all your life worrying about it? Or deal with it when you can? Take those steps you can, to avoid having, you know, to suffer through it. So colonoscopies and rectal exams and all those other wonderful things, mammograms and stuff you know, and do what you can, you know, but at the same time... life goes on.