

## ‘Compassionate Warrior’ Enjoys Life, Helps Others, 21 Years After Prostate Cancer Diagnosis

**Jim Kiefert, Ed.D.**, learned he had prostate cancer in 1989, when surgery and radiation were the only treatments available. When they failed to stop the cancer, one doctor said Jim had only a few years to live and told him to get his life in order.

But Jim didn't give up. Now, 21 years later, he's still happily alive and hopes his story can inspire others with prostate cancer. He and his wife, Maureen, started their first support group soon after his diagnosis and have facilitated groups ever since. They've been active in the prostate cancer support and education organization Us TOO International ([www.ustoo.org](http://www.ustoo.org)). Jim served on Us TOO's board of directors for seven years, four of them as board chair.

People who know Jim call him a “compassionate warrior,” and he is — a warrior against prostate cancer and for men and their loved ones who are fighting this disease.

**B**efore my prostate cancer diagnosis, I considered myself to be a typical, healthy male. Athletic and strong, I almost bragged about the fact that I hadn't seen a doctor in 20 years.

All of that changed in 1989. Back then, I was superintendent of a small school district — and in small districts, the superintendent does *everything*.

I couldn't find anyone who could back a school bus onto a ferry, so I told my school board, “I used to drive a semi, so I'll get my bus driver's license and do it.” Fortunately for me, a physical exam was required for the license.

During the exam, the doctor mentioned the new prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test, and I agreed to have it.

When the doctor called and said my PSA level was 39, I didn't know what that meant. I

was shocked when he recommended a digital rectal exam to check my prostate, and when the exam revealed firmness on one side of the prostate. A needle biopsy was next.

When the results came back and the doctor said *cancer*, that's the last word I heard. Fortunately, Maureen was with me, and she told me what the doctor said after that.

My Gleason score at diagnosis was 7, meaning the cancer was fairly aggressive. I studied my options and chose surgery.

After the prostate was removed, my PSA level should have dropped to near zero — but it didn't. The cancer had spread. Doctors then used radiation to kill cancer cells in nearby tissues, but the PSA level still didn't drop to zero. That's when the doctor told me I had maybe one to three years to live.

You know, men don't like to admit it when they're depressed, and I thought I was handling everything well. But when I bought cheap retread tires for my sports car, Maureen jumped all over me, insisting that I take the damned things back and buy ones with a 100,000-mile warranty!

That was an “aha” moment — I realized I had been thinking about dying, not about living. I needed to look at what was going on in my mind, to think about all the options available to help me, and to plan as best I could to survive.

I knew I needed a purpose in life to keep me going, so I decided to use my skills as an educator to help others with prostate cancer. I also kept working, finally retiring in 2001.

With Maureen, I studied the power of positive thinking and began using guided imagery. In my mind, I picture my immune system's killer T cells ravaging the cancer.

We changed our diet to nearly vegetarian since high-fat red meat supports prostate cancer. I began an exercise regime, and at age 72 I still exercise faithfully three days a week.

I also use meditation and believe in the power of prayer and the power of hope. Hope has kept me going all these years, researching the next treatment to control my cancer, and then the next.

My PSA level began rising again after the



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radiation treatments, so I researched androgen deprivation therapy and began it nine years later, when my PSA level reached 39 again. My PSA plummeted with the first round! I used the therapy intermittently for 12 years, until it lost effectiveness.

Next, I qualified for a clinical study of Provenge, the first vaccine designed to treat a cancer. I had served as a patient representative to the Food and Drug Administration's review committee for Provenge, so I knew about the vaccine. I received Provenge infusions in April 2010, and my PSA stabilized.

I'm now researching several options to try if my PSA level creeps up again. That hope, that feeling of some semblance of control, keeps me encouraged.

Meanwhile, each day is a gift. I tell my family I love them and treasure their support. I share information through my support group and through presentations to civic clubs. I talk by phone with people from all over the country, giving them information, encouragement, and hope. My life brims with service to others, and I am really, truly blessed! ■