

Headlines

Spring 15

A newsletter for brain tumour patients and their families

MY STORY

Spirituality and Happiness

By Bob Molavi



Life was going well

THEN IT HAPPENED. On September 13, 2013 I was admitted to Vancouver General Hospital with a brain tumour which, according to the surgeon, was the largest he had operated on to date. The size and location of my disease within the brain left me with significant permanent problems.

How was I affected and what happens when you get hit with everything all at once?

My brain cancer, grade three, required chemo and radiation.

My thinking and memory have been affected and I have difficulty telling time.

I have lost vision 50% in each eye. This has introduced limitations to previously valued activities like driving, chess and running. Fortunately, my cane allows me

to be somewhat mobile.

I have problems reading and understanding words, including simple words and numbers. My reading ability has for the most part been taken away. As a voracious reader, this was challenging for me to accept. What might seem surprising is how my disease affected my writing abilities. I can comfortably type or write a thought, but if I come back to see what I have written, it's very difficult to read it.

Through this, however, I still believe that inner freedom is not just a gift for a privileged few, it's accessible to everyone.

The remarkable compassion, love and support from close family and friends pulled me through this challenging period in my life. Nurses, doctors, teachers, and other practitioners remind us of our higher calling. The seeds of empathy open up to kindness and compassion.

Having helped others find joy in life in my work as a happiness coach, I was now personally faced with disabilities beyond anything I had imagined. A positive attitude and willpower may help in some situations, but mine felt so complex and overwhelming that it required a different approach and a deeper

investigation. As a society, we tend to be driven by work, rushing from one thing to the next. Sometimes it is helpful to engage qualities such as stillness, empathy and compassion, for ourselves and others, in order to find meaning in life's challenges and to discover who we really are. This deep introspection has helped me to find my path to a new real life adventure and I hope it will continue to guide me in the days ahead.

For other stories from brain tumour survivors, see *Headlines* editions: Winter 2007, Spring 2008, Spring 2009, Summer 2010, Spring 2011, Fall 2011, Spring 2013, Summer 2013, Spring 2014



To hear an interview on Global News with Bob Molavi, see the attached link: <http://globalnews.ca/video/1901830/international-day-of-happiness>

EVENTS



Brainiacs Yaron Butterfield and Paul Chapman

Ride to Conquer Cancer 2015

OVER \$ 1 MILLION has been raised by team Brainiacs to support world-leading research at the BC Cancer Agency through initiatives with the most promise to advance patient care. As founders of team Brainiacs, Yaron Butterfield and Paul Chapman are leading the charge in helping to advance brain cancer care at every level. Currently, there is ongoing research in psychosocial oncology as the Agency's neuro-oncology team works towards a goal of seamless patient care. This research is critical in developing evidence-based practices that guide the team's efforts to build the best care delivery model for brain cancer patients. Over the Ride's six years, donor support has already helped to enhance clinical care with a dedicated neuro-oncology counselling program for patients and their families. Ride dollars are also committed to projects that are looking at the underlying genetic drivers of brain cancer and identifying pathways for new treatment options. By supporting the BC Cancer Agency's Genome Sciences Centre, the Ride has a tremendous impact on the work of scientists as they discover the genetic mutations responsible in the development and evolution of cancer.

For more information, or if you'd like to join Paul and Yaron this year, please see:

<http://brainiacscycling.com>

http://www.conquercancer.ca/site/TR/Events/Vancouver2015?team_id=71890&pg=team&fr_id=1524



For other stories about the Ride to Conquer Cancer, see *Headlines* editions: Fall 2009, Summer 2010, Summer 2011, Summer 2013, Fall 2013

MEDICAL UPDATE

Medicinal Marijuana

MARIJUANA, also known by its plant name, cannabis, has been used for centuries for a variety of reasons. The plant's complex mixture of chemical compounds varies in potency from plant to plant and according to delivery method. Of the many active molecules in cannabis, the two best known are the cannabinoids: tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the molecule responsible for cannabis's

psychoactive effects; and cannabidiol (CBD), which appears to have the principle pharmacological effects of cannabis.

The use of cannabis as an intoxicant, a medicine, and a fiber (hemp) has been described in the writings and folklore of India and China for thousands of years. Throughout this time, controversy has existed regarding marijuana's dual nature as a useful plant which also has the potential to be harmful. It was not until

the mid-nineteenth century that Western medicine became acquainted with cannabis's effects on pain, muscle spasms, diarrhea, nausea and a host of other symptoms. By the 1930s, standardized extracts of cannabis were marketed by a few drug companies for use as a pain medicine and sedative. However, more effective synthetic drugs like aspirin soon replaced herbal remedies like

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Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada Spring Sprint



EACH YEAR THOUSANDS of walkers and fun-runners across Canada raise funds through these events to support The Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada's efforts to fund research and provide programs and services that directly impact the 27 Canadians diagnosed with a brain tumour each day.

Contact Suzanne Lanthier,
National Special Events Manager,
Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada

slanthier@braintumour.ca

1 800 265 5106 or 519 642 7755 ext 229
or see: www.springsprint.ca

City: Victoria

Date: Sunday May 24, 2015

Time: 8:30 am to 12 noon

Location: University of Victoria, "Parking Lot 10"

Route: 2.5km or 5km walk or fun

http://www.springsprint.ca/site/TR?fr_id=1217&pg=entry

or email: springsprintvictoria@braintumour.ca

City: Vancouver

Date: Sunday June 7, 2015

Time: 8:30 am to 12 noon

Location: Burnaby Lake Rugby Club

Route: 2.5km or 5km walk or fun-run

http://www.springsprint.ca/site/TR?fr_id=1216&pg=entry

or email: springsprintvancouver@braintumour.ca



Medicinal Marijuana

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marijuana. The use of cannabis persisted as a "recreational drug" and was cited as a cause of crime and mental illness. As a result, pharmaceutical companies ceased manufacturing cannabis products for a time, and ultimately, laws were passed to restrict its use. These are being challenged today.

Some of the reports regarding cannabis's usefulness come from "anecdotal evidence," that is, stories from individuals who find it beneficial. For safety reasons, health care professionals tend to rely more heavily on rigorous scientific studies when prescribing medications. However, in recent decades the active components of cannabis have received renewed scientific interest. The

brain and spinal cord have numerous cannabinoid receptors, especially in areas that control movement, memory, response to stress and complex thought. When cannabinoid molecules bind to these receptors, they have a range of effects. In palliative care, the cannabinoid molecules' effects on the perception of pain and the control of nausea have brought it into the mainstream of therapeutic choices, although other treatment options also exist.

Further research has looked at the role of cannabinoids in cancer treatment. In particular, some of the molecules appear to have an inhibitory effect on tumour cell growth and metastasis. To date, studies have focused on effects on tumour cells in lab dishes and lab animals. In scientific research, this is considered to be very

early evidence as there are hundreds of examples of studies which show similar early promise but ultimately fail when used in humans with cancer. Cannabinoids may in time prove to be useful for some types of cancer, but at this time there is no proof of clinically useful anti-cancer effect in any kind of cancer.

At the same time, there is increasing scientific evidence regarding the harmful effects of smoked cannabis on the lungs, the heart, the blood vessels, the immune system and the brain. As a result, health care professionals continue to recommend cannabis cautiously and only in special cases for the treatment of symptoms. Inhaled cannabis should be avoided. The evidence to date for the treatment of cancer, including brain cancer, remains preliminary and inconclusive.

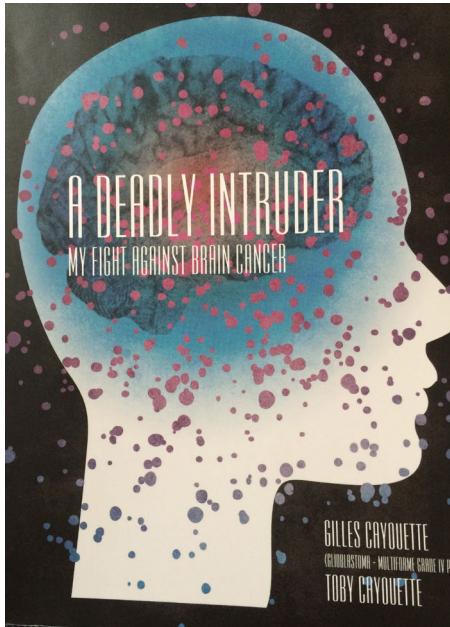
A Deadly Intruder – My Fight Against Brain Cancer

by Gilles Cayouette, Toby Cayouette.

Québec: Celestia Lwms Corp. Editions, 2008.

ISBN: 9780981047515

Review by Yaron Butterfield



I FOUND THIS BOOK INSPIRING, easy to read, and well written.

Four years after his diagnosis with a glioblastoma, Gilles Cayouette describes his experience living with a brain tumour and includes his techniques for dealing with the diagnosis and its treatment. For example, he writes about very practical

things that helped him, such as having his wife with him when he met with an oncologist or nurse. This allowed him to relax and focus on the discussion while his wife took notes and added her own questions.

The author has good support from family, but has found the attitude of his physicians sometimes stifling, in that they do not offer the possibility that he might be a survivor. One thing that stood out for me in the book was the author's constant effort to fight the cancer and become a long term survivor, while not denying the seriousness of the disease. Some people do survive; why couldn't he be one of them? He seems to feel there is not enough emphasis by oncologists on those patients who live a long time with a diagnosis of glioblastoma. His belief that some types of glioblastoma are more sensitive to treatment than others gives him hope for a better outcome for himself.

Gilles recounts how he loves the sunrise, which represents a new day and the chance to start again. There's a lot of positivity that comes out in this book. He feels that while his disease may not be curable, there is no point in focusing on this, and he might as well be happy with the time he does have. He says "it was better to use the energy [he] had fighting

the intruder, rather than on refusing to accept his condition." He comes to realize that even though he can no longer do some things he enjoyed, he is able to make some changes in order to continue doing other things. He can see the positive aspects of his cancer experience, such as being able to spend more time with this wife and family.

He discusses his involvement in the Montreal Spring Sprint, a charitable run for the Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada. This gave him an activity, a focus, and something he could do to give back to the community. I found many similarities between the experience of the author and my own and I managed to contact him. We've had a number of conversations and he is doing well. His story is inspiring and you feel how hard he has fought, how strong his desire is to be with his family, to live longer, and to be ready to do whatever he has to do in order to make that happen.

This book is now available to borrow from the BCCA Rix Family Library.

To find more books about living with brain cancer and cancer survivorship, please contact the BCCA Library www.bccancer.bc.ca/Library 604 675 8001 or 1 888 675 8001, ext. 8001

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For more information about how you can support enhanced patient care, patient information and brain tumour research, please contact Erik Dierks, Vice President, Development at the BC Cancer Foundation TOLL FREE at 1 888 906 2873 or by email at erik.dierks@bccancer.bc.ca

Editions of *Headlines* are also available as a pdf download on our website at: www.bccancer.bc.ca

If you would like to submit an article, ask a question, or serve on our patient and family editorial board, please contact Rosemary Cashman at rcashman@bccancer.bc.ca or 604 877 6072 (phone) 604 877 6180 (fax).

All content by Rosemary Cashman unless otherwise specified.