

The Unexpected Guest:

Approaches to Responding to Health Challenges

My Story:

I had two serious health challenges between 2019 and 2025. In the spring of 2019, I lost complete use of my right arm during a flight carrying me, my husband, and three others at the start of a three-week vacation. It took three months of tests to confirm the diagnosis and schedule the surgery to fuse a couple vertebrae in my neck and free up pressure on the nerves that controlled my shoulder and arm. After four months with no use of my right arm, the surgery restored use of my lower arm, and I started physical therapy to retrain the nerves in my shoulder and regain strength in my arm. The PT sessions would continue for well over a year.

In 2020, six months into my physical therapy, I was diagnosed with a blood condition that generally results in cancer. The tests also showed a sudden serious loss of kidney function, likely caused by that blood condition. After a bunch of scans, tests, and biopsies, I added quarterly testing for the blood condition to my physical therapy appointments. The blood condition worsened over time, leading to a diagnosis of multiple myeloma, a blood cancer that attacks the bones and can cause kidney failure. I started preparing in 2024 for a stem cell transplant in 2025. A year and a half later, thanks to the transplant and a monthly infusion, development of the cancer has not progressed and labs show my overall condition is now better than when I was originally diagnosed in 2020.

The five years between the diagnosis of the blood disorder and the transplant gave me a lot of time to consider the possibility of developing a cancer that typically leads to bone damage and kidney failure. Then there were the months preparing for the stem cell transplant, which brought its own questions. As time went on, I noticed the different ways I attempted to cope with the stress and uncertainty around both my diagnosis and treatment. As my husband can tell you, I had my share of meltdowns over the years, but I started noticing ways I could help myself deal with the emotional fallout. After the transplant, a friend of mine suggested that my experience could help folks facing similar challenges, and when I shared my story with others, they agreed. The first step for me is to gather the experiences of others to consider along with my own.

If you have experienced similar medical challenges, I hope you will consider joining me to help others in responding to their own Unexpected Guest.



About Nick Dorochoff:

I was raised Catholic in northwest Indiana, the grandson of immigrants who worked in the steel mills, as did my dad and brother. After high school, I considered becoming a priest, but instead a bachelor's degree in education, English, and German prepared me to teach high school.

I later taught composition and technical writing at the university level, which got me interested in technology. I ended up editing online documentation and then worked as a software developer and IT project manager in the private sector.

In my 40s I went back to school for a degree in Historic Preservation, which allowed me to work in federal service as an environmental specialist until my retirement in 2023.

I live in Chicago with my husband, Joe.

For more information, email Nick: contact@unexpected-guest.com