

## Rod's IMPACT Story



Below is Rod's story as written by his wife Marianne Brudwick.

June 17, 2009 – It came down to one moment. All the symptoms in my husband's body of the last two weeks that went from being lightheaded to seizures would be explained and given a name in that moment. There were almost too many of us for the little meeting room in the local surgery center where Rod's biopsy had just been completed. We nervously waited for what seemed like too long for the physician to appear and offer us hope. He finally came, but the words that seemed difficult for him to say did not offer much hope. Glioblastoma was the one word I had prayed specifically that this would not be. And yet it was. My heart felt like a delicate glass vase that had just been thrown and shattered into a million pieces.

My dear friend, Trish, had passed away from this difficult disease at age 40, four years prior. I had watched, more from the outskirts, of the traumatic process it led her and her family through. We talked, prayed and I helped with her three young children for a time. Through her, I learned what an incredibly dangerous disease this was and how little it seemed could be done to fight it. Now I wondered at why God would lead me through this again and this time, with the love of my life.

Immediately, I knew we wanted to seek more advanced help because of the fact that Rod had three tumors at once. Thankfully, the local staff supported our decision to seek more advanced help in Seattle – 100 miles away. Rod was transported the next day to Swedish Neurological Center and into the hands of Dr. Gregory Foltz. This had to be an answer to prayer because as he and Rod came together, they formed a unique team. My husband was a passionate athlete and Dr. Foltz, a passionate surgeon. They agreed to go into battle, like a general and his soldier facing a world war. Dr. Foltz told us Rod was a good candidate for this extreme surgery because of his age (47) and otherwise great health. He would have about three agonizing months to live if we did nothing, but with surgery to remove the tumors, combined with a treatment plan including radiation and ongoing chemotherapy, his time on earth could be extended for an indefinite amount of time with greater quality of life.

On June 22nd, 2009 Dr. Foltz removed Rod's three tumors successfully. It was a long day but a celebratory one in the end. By the end of a week of recovery, we transported Rod home and his mission to heal began. He was excited to feel his strength return and his gratefulness for life, family and faith had never felt such zest. Things swiftly changed from good to bad, though, as he came down with a serious wound infection after only a week home.

Finding ourselves in frantic mode again, on July 3rd we returned to Seattle for an emergency surgery to clean out his wound infection. This time, Dr. Foltz had to remove a portion of his skull on the right side of his head due to the danger of the infection so near to the bone. Recovery was tougher this time around as we faced more drastic repercussions. Rod would have to use a helmet when he was ambulatory now. We would also need home IV therapy for six weeks

before beginning radiation and chemotherapy. The strength he had gained after his first week of recovery was gone and he was weaker than ever.

At the time, our children, ages 17, 15 and 12 were in the roller coaster ride with us. It is impossible to have time to read the “how to” book on dealing with a life crisis such as this in so little time, if such a book even existed. Instead, we were upheld by our faith in God, feeling His love extended through the prayers, arms and hearts of our family and friends. We live in a small community where both of us grew up in somewhat large families. We needed help desperately and were blessed to have received it.

Our physicians involved were spread from Seattle to Bellingham since our radiation and chemotherapy were administered here locally. We had some sign of regression after radiation completed in September of 2009. This was sad news after all we had gone through. Thankfully, though, as his treatment was adjusted and Avastin began, Rod showed tremendous improvement allowing us a glimpse of a new, more “normal” life, six months after the initial diagnosis.

Unfortunately, this was short-lived and signs of tumor growth began once again. Our options became few and our hope declined as Rod’s physical needs increased. We were able to take a family vacation to his favorite place on earth – Dodgers spring training – in Glendale, AZ, March of 2010. Though he was weak, he could still walk, enjoy the pool and attend the baseball games with all of us. It was a precious time for sure and one we will always remember.

After returning, his strength failed more sharply and we knew his time on earth was coming to a close. Around this same time, I had heard about Chris Elliott Fund through our Seattle support office. They gave me information on the new support groups they were holding there. My strength as a caregiver, loving wife and mother, was waning and I knew I needed more in order to see this to the end.

It’s difficult to give up a complete day as a caregiver to get help for yourself, but I will never regret coming to Seattle to meet in April 2010. There were about eight of us, all of whom were in various stages of caring for loved ones with brain tumors. The meeting was led by a professional who was very caring and sensitive to our needs, though hadn’t experienced this herself. A few minutes into the meeting, a woman walked in who immediately brightened up the room with her smile and countenance. She sat next to me and I wondered how she could exude any light in such a dark room. Come to find out, her name was Dellann Elliott and she had been the one to arrange the meeting.

We all shared where we were at in our struggles and when it came time for Dellann to speak, she shared some of her experiences as well. I asked about her husband and she explained how he had passed away years earlier. She said “kids are resilient” to encourage me when my fears about my children’s future were obvious. She continued to talk to me after that day, giving me encouragement and hope, despite the fact now that my husband was indeed dying.

It’s been over three years now since Rod left our world and though I miss my husband with every breath I take; we have survived. There are lessons we have learned that we would never have learned otherwise. We see life differently now. I see how going through this with my friend first was actually a gift from God to prepare me for going through it with my husband. Meeting Dellann was also a gift so I could get extended and specific help through the Chris Elliott Fund organization. And most of all, our faith in God has increased as we experienced an amazing year of trial, hardship, blessing and peace in the midst of an explosive battle between life and death.

The trauma of being diagnosed with a brain tumor affects not only the patient, but the community around the patient as well. The needs are great and the diagnosis can be grim. Often the events happen so quickly that families are left with their heads spinning, not knowing what to do next. The Chris Elliott Fund has opened their doors to families such as ours. They make available the information needed so desperately to help answer specific questions, get the best care, and know the options. But beyond that, they care because they understand... they've been there.

I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to the Chris Elliott Fund for taking the time out of their amazing schedule to explain things better to me, and show me around their new offices. Being able to sit in on your meeting gave me a better perspective of the whole picture of CEF & the End Brain Cancer mission, including your vision, daily work, and your care that extends beyond the computer into real life.

On behalf of families like ours, who have received help from you in the past and families presently getting help from both of you, we are all truly thankful! This is such a needed service and such a blessing to fill in the gap between the medical front and the real-life happenings of dealing with brain tumors.

With Love & Appreciation,  
Marianne Brudwick (Rod's wife)