


Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



 **CHARLES BENT, 72**
DIAGNOSIS: BASAL CELL CARCINOMA

The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Victorville
- **OCCUPATION:** Retired Air Force air traffic controller
- **FAMILY:** Wife, Reiko, 83; two sons and a daughter; Brother-in-law, Kozo Yoshino, and father-in-law, Toshizo Yoshino
- **HOBBIES:** Photography, going to the movies
- **PHILOSOPHY:** Every day that I wake up in the morning and see the sunrise is a plus. Everything is in God's hands and what is, is.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

In his youth, Charles Bent says he spent "all day long" in swimming pools during the summer. Now, he is living with a possible consequence of that activity – skin cancer.

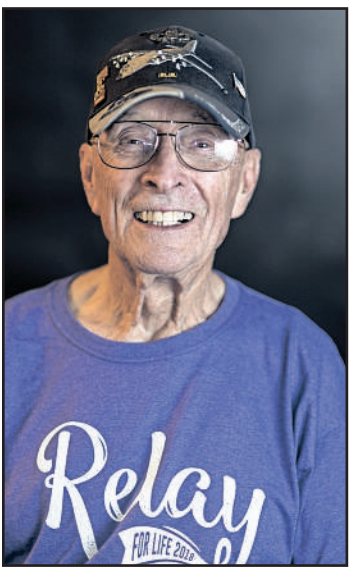
In 2004, he was diagnosed with "sun lesions" on his head. "They started

treatment in 2004 for sun lesions on my scalp," Bent said. "The dermatologist was a great guy – he burned them all off with liquid nitrogen.

"Every time I would go in, there were a couple, then a couple more, and then they found two spots that they thought needed a biopsy – a year-and-a-half apart.

"Both turned out to be active cancers. They removed them. When they did that, they got all of it. It was really a plus. I didn't have to go through any therapy. I still go in every three months – for the past 14 to 15 years – and they burn them off.

"It is hard to scare me. I was in the Air Force for 26 years as an air traffic controller. That was hours of boredom interspersed with moments of sheer terror. When the dermatologist explained it to my wife, he had no thoughts of it progressing beyond the lesions on my scalp."



But Bent's wife, Reiko, does have cancer in her family. Her brother, Kozo, 81, has been battling the disease for 35 years.

And in 1968 her father passed away. "It started with cancer of the esophagus and progressed to his stomach," Bent said. "He died of stomach cancer. He fought it for over two years. Under those circumstances telling your wife not to worry, or a baby not to cry, or a bird not to sing, is about the same thing."

Bent met his wife in 1957 when he was stationed at Tachikawa Air Base and she worked at the base exchange. They were married in 1959 and are now approaching their 60th wedding anniversary.

Lately, Bent has become involved in American Cancer Society events,

recently attending a Relay for Life event held at Victor Valley College.

"I have been to several since then," he said. "Victorville was the first one. They had the luminary display in paper bags in remembrance of a family member – or to honor the person they decorated the bag for. My wife and I made one for her brother, Kozo."

Cancer awareness has prompted Bent to become more vigilant.

"I quit procrastinating, I go for my checkup every three months," he said. "I procrastinated a year or a year-and-a-half. It started out there was no evidence of lesions being cancerous, but as they progressed, there were two."

Now he says anyone facing the possibility of cancer should react swiftly. "Get involved, let's put this baby to sleep," Bent said. "Don't put it off if you have cancer."

People diagnosed with cancer should use all the support you can get, according to Bent. And if you know someone diagnosed with cancer: "Let someone know that you care about them, even if they are not family members."

"Friends are important," he said. "My wife gave me all her support. I had several medical issues at that time. I had a heart attack and a pacemaker was installed. I had a fall that took three or four months to recover.

"(If you are diagnosed with cancer), talk to people who have had cancer. Most cancer survivors are willing to talk to you about it.

"In Reiko's family, we saw the results of a different type of cancer. Thirty-five years ago, Reiko's brother, Kozo, 81, had a kidney removed due to cancer. He had over half of his pancreas removed six years ago. He is still fighting. Things like that motivate you."

Caregiver Perspective

Reiko Bent was apprehensive when she heard her husband's cancer diagnosis.

"I have my family getting cancer, then my husband again," Reiko said. "I was very worried. (But) God always watches us and church people pray for us.

"I get up, I thank him for this day, I don't worry about (it). My husband is very strong-minded; he keeps going. I told him, slow down.

"People don't want to share a (cancer) diagnosis with other people, but you have to share it. Thirty-five years ago, my brother didn't want to use the word cancer. He was hiding it.

"Nowadays, people have cancer and they share. I am very, very happy (Kozo) is willing to share the experience now."

“I quit procrastinating. I go for my checkup every three months.”



The American Cancer Society provides a 24 hour service to answer questions about diagnosis, insurance, local support and resources

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