

# Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



**DANIEL CRUZ, 30**  
DIAGNOSIS: PROSTATE CANCER

## The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Hesperia
  - **OCCUPATION:** Photographer
  - **FAMILY:** Sarina Cruz, 29, wife; Dora Cruz, mother; Dan Cruz, father; sisters Sumer, Kim and Jessica
  - **HOBBIES:** Camping, rock climbing, physical fitness, weight lifting, Gracie Jiu Jitsu, Apple Valley
  - **PHILOSOPHY:** Always be the best version of me; give an honest effort every day. Every day I am super thankful to be alive. We only have one shot at life, tomorrow is never promised.
- A big motivator for me is staying on top of my physical and mental health. God forbid, if it ever came back, I would be ready to face it head on.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Daniel Cruz was a young newlywed when he was diagnosed with testicular cancer. "My wife and I got married in June 2015, and I found out I had cancer in January 2016," he said.

Cruz was active in sports, and when he noticed soreness in his left testicle, he

attributed it to some sort of strain. "I had just gotten into rock climbing and wearing a harness," he said.

Cruz decided to "give it a couple months" during which he had on-and-off symptoms, which became progressively worse.



"The pain eventually got greater," Cruz said. "I noticed there was a little lump starting to grow. Of course, cancer was the furthest thing from my mind.

"But as the pain went on more and more, I thought maybe it was time to go see a doctor.

Initially, Cruz's family doctor thought it was probably just an infection and prescribed antibiotics.

But the pain and swelling continued, and an ultrasound was done. Cruz was referred to a urologist.

The day before the urology appointment, "I woke up and the pain was really bad, like having a knife stuck in my side," Cruz said.

"It got really hard to breathe. For the first time ever, I wondered if I needed to call an ambulance. My wife came home and we went to urgent care.

The urgent care doctor thought it might be pleuritis, prescribed a steroid shot, and did an X-ray.

The next day, Cruz saw his urologist. "That is when my life changed very drastically," he said. "The urologist said, 'There is a small chance you do not have cancer.'

The ultrasound showed a mass, and bloodwork pointed toward cancer. Surgery was

scheduled right away to remove Cruz's testicle. "They were already talking about chemo," Cruz said, "and the X-ray showed masses in my lungs."

Cruz said telling his family about his diagnosis was "probably the most difficult thing I have ever done.

"I told them, whatever you have going on, it is about to get a whole lot worse because your only son has cancer."

A needle biopsy on Cruz's lung confirmed that mass was a metastasis of his testicular cancer. "I was in a very advanced stage of cancer: 3A," he said.

Everyone in Cruz's family was "just shocked. You don't think of cancer affecting your family until somebody drops the news."

Now, Cruz says he is a completely different person. "Before cancer, I was battling depression and mental health," he said. "I was one



*"There is life after cancer and things do get better."*

of those people you would never guess was struggling.

"With cancer, it was a complete turn in my life. I think God knew I needed that to be thankful for my life and cherish the moments I have.

"I have never been this strong or had this much clarity. Now I pursue life more gratefully. I live my life every day to the fullest.

"In the chemo ward, I met all these incredible cancer warriors who might not beat it, and nevertheless they were so positive.

"I was able to connect with so many people and offer support for other people with cancer. I post on Facebook and Instagram (@danielcruz) to show my photo work and share my cancer story.

To others diagnosed with cancer, Cruz says: "Forgive yourself. You did nothing in your life to deserve this or to cause this. Sometimes life just happens. You have to be quick to forgive yourself to prepare for the fight.

"There is life after cancer and things do get better. My wife, Sarina, is six months pregnant. It is just a word of encouragement for people going through difficult things."

## Caregiver Perspective



Daniel and I were sitting side-by-side when we found out he had cancer, said Sarina Cruz, Daniel's wife. I didn't think he would actually have cancer. It was shocking and devastating. You feel like you are not really hearing this and it is not real.

"You totally fast forward your mind: I didn't get to have children with him yet. Is he going to be OK? Am I going to be a widow?"

"I would hear stories of people leaving their spouse because they were sick, and I thought that was horrifying.

"I just said in sickness or health, for better or worse six months ago. Now I thought: Here we go!"



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**www.cancer.org or call 800-227-2345**

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