

# Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



**MICHAEL RODRIGUEZ, 47**  
DIAGNOSIS: STAGE 4 RENAL CELL CARCINOMA OF THE RIGHT KIDNEY WITH METASTASIS TO LUNGS

## The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Apple Valley
- **OCCUPATION:** Disabled warehouse distribution manager in the food industry, prior to that, served in the Army from 1990-1994; 1994-1998 in the reserves
- **FAMILY:** Margaret Silva Rodriguez, 66, mother; a lot of family in the High Desert
- **HOBBIES:** Since regaining his health, he has been reintroduced to his "artist self" – drawing, painting and writing; is a member of a hiking group and enjoys outdoor activities like he did in the past.
- **PHILOSOPHY:** It could be worse. In my past I lived in the fast lane. Once cancer came along, there are death-defying things I have seen that would numb the mind. With cancer, it is still possible to beat it. It can't get worse, it can only get better. Cancer isn't the biggest obstacle I have had to overcome. Cancer? I can do this.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

In August 2014, Michael Rodriguez woke up one morning and couldn't move. He had pain from his back to his hips and pelvis.

"I rolled out of bed to go to the bathroom and I started urinating blood clots," Rodriguez said.



"I went to the VA in Loma Linda, and they saved my life. That same day, they told me I had a mass in my right kidney.

"They put a catheter in me to suck out all the blood clots. At first, I didn't understand the jargon. I was thinking something was infected and I would get some antibiotics.

"Then they started talking about long-term solutions, and I said, 'What are they talking about? Are you talking about cancer?'"

"And they said, 'yeah, but it will be OK.'"

"They had an immediate plan of action, so I said all right, they are going to take this out of my body. On Oct. 3, my birthday, I had a radical nephrectomy where the entire kidney is removed, along with fat surrounding it.

"I researched everything about renal cell carcinoma. It made me more knowledgeable.

"I learned how many different types of cancer there are, and the more I researched, the less I worried. I was, 'man, let's just do this.'"

"I just told my immediate family; I didn't tell everybody. I kept it kind of hushed.

"My family's reaction was they rallied around me. They knew right away I was going to be positive, so they reacted the same way.

Following the removal of his kidney, Rodriguez was monitored every three months.

"It looked like they had gotten all of it," he said. But, in the end of 2016, they diagnosed lung nodules, so they did chemo. I have been on it for almost two years now."

Rodriguez's medication is an oral, targeted therapy that he takes two weeks on, one week off.

"Hopefully the nodules shrank even more. I am looking forward to getting off these pills.

"In my mind, it is still getting better. People say, 'you don't look sick,' but I tell them that is not what it is all about."

Rodriguez's diagnosis has changed his outlook on life.

“

*“What are they talking about? Are they talking about cancer?”*

"I was a mean man for a long time. Cancer made me get rid of any type of negative person that I was."

"I am spending a lot more time with family. I was distanced from them for many years.

"I don't live in the past at all anymore," he said. "Once cancer hits, it is, 'I don't care what I could have done, it's what am I going to do?'"

"Cancer changed my outlook: Nothing that is negative will ever affect me again.

"I am just going to do better. I want to live."

Rodriguez said he gets support from his family and his hiking group.

"I have been to a couple of cancer walks with Liz Cofer-McGiffin (community development manager at ACS Relay

for Life). My sister-in-law is friends with Liz," he said.

"Our hiking group is called Boots and Beer. I surround myself with nothing but good people – that is my support group.

"You have to tell yourself immediately, either you are going to beat this or it is going to beat you.

"You either feel sorry for yourself or you conquer it. The rest is easy, especially with a good support system."

## Caregiver Perspective



Margaret Rodriguez said she reacted to her son Michael's cancer diagnosis "pretty much the same way he did.

"I was at my grandson's football game when Michael got the diagnosis.

"I heard the news when I got home, and we have been together ever since.

Margaret said she and Michael "are very strong-willed people.

"Of course, when you hear 'the Big C,' it hurts; it's devastating.

"But it was, 'How do we move forward?'"

"We hold up each other. We are not depressed. We take a day at a time. We are always laughing.

"Of course, you believe in the big man upstairs, and he helps you along as well."



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