

Preface

I didn't plan on writing a book called *I'm Not Dead Yet*.

Honestly, I was just trying to stay alive long enough to tell a few good stories, drink some coffee, and keep my two Weimaraners from stealing my socks.

But life had other plans.

When you get diagnosed with pancreatic neuroendocrine cancer, you don't exactly ease into it. There's no orientation packet. No welcome video. Nobody hands you a map and says, "Here's how to survive the next 15 years—good luck, champ."

Nope. You get tossed into the deep end with a medical team shouting instructions while you're trying to swim with one arm and paddle fear with the other.

This book started as a way to help cancer patients and caregivers navigate that chaos. I thought I'd write about treatments, side effects, surgeries, emotions, and how to stay sane through it all. You know—your standard "survival guide by a guy who keeps dodging the Grim Reaper."

And for a while, that was enough.

But the longer I lived with cancer—and let's be honest, the longer cancer lived with me—the more I realized something bigger was going on.

I wasn't just surviving cancer.

I was surviving life.

And I wasn't doing it with medical charts and chemo schedules.

I was doing it with connection.

Connection to the people who kept showing up.

Connection to the moments that still made me laugh.

Connection to Naples, to Hawks Landing, to the valley that raised me.

Connection to purpose—especially on the days I didn't feel like I had any.

Connection to my dogs, who believe the cure for all human suffering is attention, belly rubs, and snacks.

Somewhere along the way, without meaning to, I stumbled into a whole philosophy of living.

A way of seeing the world that kept me going when the scans weren't good, when the treatment failed, when the pain wouldn't ease, when the future shrank to the next appointment.

I started calling it Living Connected.

And the truth is: cancer didn't teach it to me.

Life did.

Cancer just turned the volume up so damn loud I couldn't ignore it anymore.

So yes—this book is about cancer.

It's raw. It's honest. It's messy.

It includes digestive disasters, fear, panic, hope, grace, and more medical adventures than anyone ever signed up for.

But underneath every appointment, every scare, every miracle, every setback...

you'll find the real heart of this story:

Connection is how we stay human when life gets hard.

If you feel me drifting in that direction in these pages, it's because I couldn't tell this story without it. The philosophy showed up before I even knew it had a name.

This book is the prequel—the origin story.

The “how I learned it” part.

My next book, Living Connected, will give you the full system.

The tools.

The pillars.

The coaching.

The way forward.

But before we go there, I want to take you through the road that got me here.

The road with potholes, detours, miracles, and a few WTF moments thrown in for color.

Because I'm still here.

Still upright.

Still telling the truth.

Still refusing to go quietly.

Still believing that connection is the whole point of this wild, unpredictable thing we call life.

I'm not dead yet.

And while I'm here, I'm going to do everything I can to help you live connected—through cancer, through caregiving, through uncertainty, through hope, through every messy, beautiful chapter ahead.

—Tom Hawks II