

Dancing in the Rain

*One Family's Story
of Faith, Strength,
Courage and Love*



Karen and Michael Turnbull

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and
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Contents

1. The Journey Begins
2. Dark Skies Ahead
3. The Storm Intensifies
4. A Break in the Clouds
5. Scattered Showers
6. Dancing in the Rain
7. Signs, Symbols and Voices



Two months before diagnosis

CHAPTER ONE

The Journey Begins

2013

PET Scan

By Karen Turnbull — Mar 23, 2013

This first entry was written after diagnosis as our team was being assembled...

On Monday, March 18th we met with Dr. Robert Wang to discuss Mike's case. After two hours with this man we both felt confident that he could do what needed to be done. He is in it for the cure! He is a calm, wise man who is honest but kind. He has quickly assembled a team of doctors for us. We met with a radiation oncologist, Dr. Toy, on Thursday and he also spent over two hours with us. Mike and I were amazed by the amount of information Dr. Toy gave us and his respect for Dr. Wang has reassured us that we made the right choice. Friday we saw an oncologist, Dr. Obara, who will also be a part of our team. Basically we will not know how extensive follow-up treatments will be until after the pathology reports come back from the surgery.

The worst part of Friday was that no one told us ahead of time that after Mike's PET scan he needed to stay away from children for twenty-four hours. We were livid. (Kind of an important piece of information when there are two small children at home!) We managed to work it out and get through the day, thanks to friends keeping me and the boys busy. Mike was going to stay in a hotel, but due to March Madness Vegas hotel rooms were

literally sold out! So Mike stayed quarantined in the downstairs bedroom and the boys and I stayed out and about.

Surgery is scheduled for next Saturday, March 30th. It will be a long and involved process, taking about seven hours. Dr. Wang says he is in no hurry and will take as much time as he needs to get it all out and preserve the structure of Mike's neck. He will also try to preserve his ability to play trombone, which of course comes second to curing him. So I think that brings us up to date. We feel very blessed to be surrounded by so much love and support and the best thing anyone can do for us is to keep Mike and his surgeons in your thoughts and prayers.

We will beat this!

My Story

By Michael Turnbull — Mar 29, 2013

Hello All. We are incredibly grateful and we feel very blessed and fortunate to have the love and support of our many friends and family members as we navigate this illness. It is difficult to respond to all the calls, texts, emails, cards and general well-wishes, so we have decided to set up this page as an efficient means of keeping everyone informed. Our friend Brian encouraged us to do so, as it was helpful to him while he dealt with his own, even more complicated issues. Thanks for checking in and we will continue to keep you posted.

We are still in the process of learning about my disease, and the doctors on our "team" are gradually narrowing their diagnoses, so there are still some uncertainties and I may not have all the facts straight. I'll give it a shot, though!

In December, while performing with Donny & Marie at the Pantages Theater in Los Angeles, I (along with a good portion of the cast and crew) came down with a bout of bronchitis. A visit to an urgent care facility resulted in a prescription for a course of antibiotics, although the doctor I

consulted with recommended I hold off on taking them as she was uncertain whether it was a viral or bacterial infection. The symptoms persisted, however, and as I was coughing consistently and forcefully during this period I coughed up a small amount of blood. I figured this was just a result of irritation, so I took the antibiotics and things seemed to clear up. I had some time off in January and did not notice any significant symptoms, but when I returned to work in February the hemoptysis (coughing up blood) also returned. This time it was frequent and substantial. My loving and alarmed wife encouraged me to see our general practitioner, and it wasn't until I did so that I realized I hadn't had a physical in five years, since a few months after our oldest son Evan was born. The doctor found nothing wrong with me and all the blood work he ordered came back clean a few days later, but when I mentioned the hemoptysis he suggested I either go straight to the ER or have a chest x-ray at a nearby radiology center.

In addition to the aforementioned issues, I have had a lump or protrusion on my throat for several years. (We are uncertain as to when this developed). My cricoid cartilage is more pronounced than normal and is similar in appearance to the laryngeal prominence (Adam's Apple), only smaller. The lump has never bothered me, so I naively assumed it was a result of repetitive strain injury or overuse syndrome. Occasionally after a four-hour salsa gig my throat will be a bit sore, but considering the pressure involved in playing trombone at high volumes and having done so for thirty-five years I thought my occupation was the culprit. When I pointed out the protuberance to my physician, he also ordered an ultrasound of my neck. The chest x-ray yielded nothing unusual but the ultrasound revealed a large mass on my thyroid, which I now know is pushing the cartilage outward.

At this point I was referred to an otolaryngologist (ENT), who prescribed a stronger course of antibiotics as a precaution. He assumed the two issues were unrelated, as it is extremely rare for a thyroid tumor to cause pulmonary problems. When the hemoptysis worsened again he also suggested I go either straight to the ER or to a pulmonologist. I also needed to see a cytologist for a thyroid/lymph biopsy, but as he is regarded as the best in the state he was backlogged for several weeks and the bleeding seemed to be the more pressing concern. The pulmonologist decided to perform a bronchoscopy, so I underwent the procedure on February 28th.

He found no issues in the bronchi but did discover a tumor on my trachea, which was determined to be the source of the bleeding. The tumor was biopsied and sent to a local pathology lab. They forwarded the samples to the Cleveland Clinic for further evaluation, so it was a while before we had any results.

Meanwhile, I took a week off, the bleeding ceased, and I was able to get in with the cytologist. He performed a Fine Needle Aspiration biopsy of my thyroid as well as two adjacent lymph nodes, and the pathology report came back positive for a Hürthle Cell Neoplasm. These can be benign, but as it has metastasized to the lymph nodes and I have an adjacent tumor on my trachea, the assumption is I have Hürthle Cell Carcinoma, which has invaded the tracheal cartilage. The ENT referred me to two surgeons: the chief of head and neck surgery at UCLA, who was unavailable, and Dr. Robert Wang, the chief of head and neck surgery at University of Nevada.

From what I understand, there are four main types of thyroid cancer. Hürthle Cell Carcinoma is usually classified with the follicular group, but it is a distinct type that makes up only three percent of all thyroid cancers. In only around ten percent of those cases does it invade the lymph nodes, and in only a handful of those does it affect the trachea. As Brian said on his history page, "I guess I'm special." Many otolaryngologists perform thyroidectomies, and some have done over one thousand. Once the lymph nodes are involved a neck dissection is necessary, which reduces the pool of qualified surgeons. A tumor on the trachea also requires a tracheal resection or reconstruction. Apparently, only a handful of surgeons in the country are experienced, qualified and willing to take on such a procedure. Lucky for us one of them happens to be in Las Vegas.

Dr. Wang was the first person in this process to go into detail with us about the disease, the treatment and the recovery. He answered all of our questions and was informative, patient and kind. According to his peers in the medical community, he is a pioneer in his field and the only surgeon in town able to perform this surgery. He practices as an ENT but is also a surgical oncologist. The other doctors we spoke to said he is too modest to mention that credential and some of them follow his surgical reports. One oncologist went so far as to say that without traveling east to Johns

Hopkins, UPMC Pittsburgh, Mayo Clinic or a few other head and neck surgery hospitals, Wang is the best we will find. He has also assembled a team of other highly qualified doctors: a radiation oncologist, Dr. Beau James Toy, and a hemotological oncologist, Dr. Gregory Obara. All three of these men spent over two hours with us during our initial visits, so we are confident we are in good hands.

I have none of the common risk factors for thyroid cancer (female, Asian, smoker, low iodine diet, advanced age, family history, exposure to radiation as a child, victim of nuclear fallout as in Chernobyl). Doctors are asking me about radiation exposure and I cannot recall any significant events. The staging guidelines for thyroid cancer follow a cut-off age of forty-five. Had I been diagnosed last year, I would be considered Stage I despite the metastasis. Since I turned forty-five in November, however, I am considered Stage IV. Also, the pathology reports from the thyroid and tracheal tumors vary slightly, so until the surgery and resulting pathology reports are completed we will not know for sure what our treatment protocol involves. So far in this approximately six-week adventure, I've had two chest x-rays, two CT scans (chest and neck), two ultrasounds of the neck, two nasal endoscopies, a bronchoscopy, an FNA biopsy, a PET scan, multiple blood tests, four days of fasting and an EKG.

The irony here is that I feel great, as healthy as ever. I guess that is the insidious nature of cancer in general, in that most patients are unaware of what's going on until it is sometimes too late. Although hemoptysis is a side effect of a well advanced case, it was also the signal to get myself examined. I was informed that the bronchoscopy would further irritate the trachea and therefore cause increased bleeding, but in fact the bleeding ceased immediately afterwards! I've been told by all parties involved that if I do not have the affected tissue removed it will kill me, so I am scheduled for a seven-hour surgery this Saturday at Mountain View Hospital. (Yes, that is tomorrow. I had every intention of publishing this entry earlier. Turnbull is Scottish for procrastination). Dr. Wang scheduled me on his day off so he would have no other procedures the same day, and got me in as soon as possible. His office staff has been amazing in regard to scheduling, referrals, insurance, obtaining test results, etc. His wife, Dr. Annabel Barber, is his surgical assistant and she has been wonderful to us as well.

The majority of the surgery time will be spent carefully identifying, marking and moving structures in order to preserve as much integrity as possible. There are between two to three hundred lymph nodes in the neck (depending on who you talk to) and I will have as many as one hundred removed. I will undergo a bilateral radical neck dissection, total thyroidectomy, nodal dissection, and tracheal resection.

If you've made it this far, I apologize for being long-winded, but this was the only way to answer all the questions I've been asked lately. As I stated what must seem like several pages ago, we are unable to express the love and gratitude we feel toward all of you for keeping us in your thoughts and prayers. Karen will keep this site updated with posts detailing my progress, and I will write when I am able.

Thanks again for everything!

Jason H

Mike, I'm just completely floored by all this without a real clue how to respond. True friends like you and Karen only come along a couple times in life, and I just hate that this whole thing is happening - hate it. But, if there was or is to be any people in the world who I think could overcome some awfulness like this, it is definitely you and Karen. Stay strong for now, and I'm looking forward to all of us "Getting Strong" over a nice pint or two of Guinness in the near future. From my family to yours, much love.

Jeff W

Hi, guys. This news obviously saddens me, but I've always believed people with positive attitudes (like the two of you!) face these challenges much better, and with better results, than average people. I can only imagine your loving family members are there to help and support in whatever ways they can. All I can do is wish you the best of luck, and try to encourage you with my family's personal experience. Hoping for the best for both of you!

Christina P

Hi, you two. Thank you for taking the time, energy and love to fill us all in. Please know that you have an army of supporters that will

move the heavens for you, make a meal or simply say a prayer every day of healing. We are sending you all the love and hugs that your family can endure! We are here and we will be there in a heartbeat-just say the word. Love to all of you.

Suzanne P

Yes, Mike, you are special! And that is why eight years from now you will be able to sit and read your journey about the most life-changing event you will ever go through. I have faith in the healing powers, and I have faith in you, too. With much love and respect from one survivor to another. All hearts, prayers and healing energies are on you.

Brian M

Mike & Family, you have been in my thoughts all week since learning the news. You have such a gentle and joyful spirit, and legions of friends and colleagues whose lives you have touched pulling for you. I'll be sending good vibes tomorrow during the surgery and look forward to watching your good progress towards full recovery. As has been my MO since my own adventures in cancer land, "it's just a bump in the road." Much love.

Bill C

Hey, Mike. Sending you lots of positive healing energy, my friend. Take care and we'll be following your progress and recovery. Peace.

Sharon H

Dearest Mike, we are praying continuously for you ... all of us ... Jade, Ariane, Danny. I know you will be victorious in your fight. Sending you light, love and prayers. We love you so much.

Hope M

Kick Cancer's Ass, Mike!!!!!!!!!!!! I'm thinking of you and I will be on the prayer circuit with everyone else this Saturday and EVERY day after that until you are fully recovered. We love you guys. We're here for you. :)

Birgit P

Mike, Rick and I are thinking of you as you are going through this very difficult time. I believe that you are in very good hands and with Karen by your side, things will be ok. We are sending you our best wishes, positive thoughts and strength, because that is all we can do.

Deborah P

Dear Mike & Karen, I want you to know that I have been thinking of you since Tiffany told me. Mike, you are a "special" kind of guy; honest, sincere, caring and unwavering in your positive attitude. Our thoughts and prayers are with you. Always here for you.

Mary P

Dear Mike, Karen and Kath, we are here or can be there for you and your family. Thank you for letting us be a part of your journey. Many hugs.

Kathy A

I have been praying, sending love and healing energy. You are all family to me. So sorry I can't be there in person but I will be in spirit. You are in great hands. Looking forward to your fast recovery. I love you both with all my heart. XOXOXOX

Jenny F

Mike, I'm sending all my most positive vibes to one of the smartest, classiest, funniest guys I've had the pleasure of knowing. You are a gem. I know Karen will be simply the best for you and you deserve no less. I'll be thinking of you every moment tomorrow. Hugs.

Jen K

Mike, Karen & boys- You are in my prayers EVERY DAY!!! You both are amazing people and will get through this!!! We love you both and are here for anything you need!!! Lots of hugs for tomorrow!!!

Cathy M

We are holding you in our hearts and sending bundles of Colorado healing energy your way as you navigate this journey. Our prayers and thoughts are with you for strength and an uneventful recovery.

Your team is highly skilled and we're confident that they will give you the very best of care. Even though they've just met you, surely they must realize how important and well-loved you are to all who call you friend. We are with you, Mike!

The Obvious?!

By Michael Turnbull — Mar 29, 2013



Family dinner the night before surgery

I've tried to educate myself enough to be prepared, but not so much that I freak myself out. Various people have advised for/against scouring the Internet for both reasons. Here's my favorite piece of information, gleaned from a well respected medical site. It was on a list of what to expect post-op.

“Your neck may be sore.”

Surgery

By Karen Turnbull — Mar 30, 2013

ell, we are on our way. We have been blessed with wonderful hospital staff this morning. Everyone has been so kind and done all they can to calm Mike (and me). Dr. Wang came and met with us before surgery. His calm

manner and knowledge of the task at hand eased our fears. Mike is **W** definitely in good hands and the anesthesiologist assured us that he would feel no pain and would be taken good care of. (Dr. Wang informed us later that the anesthesiologist is highly trained and specializes in intricate procedures. My feeling is that Dr. Wang chooses those he wants in the room with him and will take only the best. I am grateful for that!)

I am surrounded with love and support and I thank you all so much for the love, prayers, thoughts, etc! Keep them coming! For now, we patiently wait. I am here with my amazing mother-in-law Kathy, sister-in-law Wendy, and brother-in-law Mark so I am in great company! Also, a special thank you to Pastor Marta for waking early, driving to the hospital and praying with us. Your kindness has truly touched me and my family!

Eric T

I love you, Mike. Sending healing thoughts and strength to you.

Nate K

Mike, I had no idea any of this was happening, so thank you for sharing it with all of us. I'd wish you luck but you don't need it. If there's one thing trombonists are inherently great at, it's persevering against all odds. Knock this one out of the park, brother, and I'll look forward to our next chance to jam together! Much love.

Stacia F

Well, you know friends from your past are going to start appearing. And that's ME! I keep up with you guys through mutual friends and I am certainly with you on this. I send light and healing strength to you. And anything else you need. LOVE from New York.

Gil K

Thoughts and Prayers are with you! You got this, my brother!

Darelle H

Well, if you were ever wondering why, in the big scheme of things, you and Karen ended up in Las Vegas, I guess the fact that one of the only qualified and willing surgeons to do a tracheal resection or

reconstruction is there could be it. Dear brother, you are in my thoughts and my heart. I will meditate, pray, whatever you want to call it, to send you positive vibes. Stay strong. You are such an important part of our lives and hearts, so stop being so special, get well and go back to being boring, healthy and happy!!! I love you and your beautiful wife and your pretty babies!!!

Rob M

Hey Mike, when you are done screwing around at the hospital, get your butt back on stage because we miss you and your antics. Karen, thank you both for setting up this web site. We need to be updated but we don't want to pester you. And Dr. Wang and Dr. Toy? You sure you went with these guys because they are the best at what they do? Because it sounds like you just like their names. Both of you take care and hug those babies for Etsuko and I.

Michael M

Mike, I just got a CaringBridge email from Karen. Wow. I'm wishing you the most complete of recoveries. You are a lovely guy and a great musician. I thought about you out of the blue yesterday, and the night we all hung out with your dad. You are certainly in my heart and my thoughts.

Ed R

You both are in my prayers and I have asked Shirley to give it her best with everyone in heaven.

Mark M

Jessi and I are thinking about you guys. Hang in there!!

Frank S

Mike, just in case I don't get to see you again before I leave, I'm so glad I got to see you and the entire family yesterday! You're going to get through this, with even more great stories to tell (we relived a few yesterday :)). I love you dearly, my brother!

Kim B

Mike and Karen, you both have been in my thoughts and my prayers since I heard the news. Just seeing your photo here makes me smile and miss you. You will get through this! The power of prayer is amazing and you have a lot of people praying for you and your team of doctors.

Sara O

Praying that God's hand is guiding the surgeon's hands. Praying for divine healing. Sending love and hugs to you and your family.

Shari B

Mike & Karen, when I think of the two of you it always brings a lightness to the room. Your positive attitude, nurturing ways, deep down goodness mixed with an incredible sense of humor makes anyone around you feel good. You and your precious little boys are such a wonderful part of our family. I just wish we lived closer to each other so that we could help in any way possible. Please know that I'm a phone call/email/text away if you need anything! Thank you so much for setting this up so that we can be kept in the loop! It also reflects the huge amount of people who love and care about you! You will beat this, Mike!!! All our love.

Beth S

Karen, I am so sorry to hear of your family's struggle right now. I am thinking of you and praying for your husband and the best possible news you could hear. I am so happy that you are keeping us updated and I will check in every day.

Frank L

Mike and Karen, sending you loving thoughts and prayers. You are in our hearts, always.

Karen Mc

Our prayers are with you all.

Brie D

Wish I could ACTUALLY be there, but I'm there in spirit. Love you guys.

Melissa M

Can't stop thinking about you guys. Prayers are most definitely with you! Love you guys so much!!!

Update

By Karen Turnbull — Mar 30, 2013

The nurse just came out to tell us that Mike is doing very well but they are not yet done. They have completed the neck dissection and now it is on to the thyroid and we are guessing the trachea. Not sure how much longer but we are taking this to mean that our skilled surgeon is being extra careful and thorough. He had told us this morning that he would send samples to pathology as he goes as he wants to be sure to get it all out. We have been blessed with beautiful visits from friends as we patiently wait. The love is overwhelming!

Thank God!

By Karen Turnbull — Mar 30, 2013

It is 6:43 pm. Mike is out of surgery and in recovery! He is breathing on his own and will spend the night in ICU for close monitoring. Dr. Wang said he got clear margins, which means he got it all! He removed many lymph nodes, the entire thyroid, part of the parathyroid and a large portion of the trachea and reconstructed it. He was able to move the healthy part of the parathyroid to his arm where it will function and regulate his calcium levels. Dr. Wang said Mike is doing well and trying to talk (although they don't want him to yet). He also commented that during surgery he was thinking about preserving Mike's ability to play trombone. I have tears of joy that we got through the day. Thank you all for your prayers and love and PLEASE keep them coming as I know they are working!

We love you all so much!

Dan F

What wonderful news! God surely directed this surgeon. I'm beyond happy to hear all of this, Karen! I'll see you both soon. Love to you and your family!

Matt J

Hallelujah!!! Amazing. Not intubated and on a vent??? Incredible. Go Mike, Go!!!

Tammy C

So glad Mike had such an amazing surgeon that was guided by God!! What a blessing! We are continuing to pray for complete healing and restoration. Love to you all!!

Marianne M

Thank you God for the miracle today! Mike and Karen, words cannot express how much you and the boys mean to us! We are so very thankful that we can be here to support you through this trying time.

Laura T

We're so relieved to hear the surgery went well! We've been thinking about you all day and we're so thankful to you, Karen, for keeping us all posted. Have a peaceful and restful night and know that we're sending even more love your way.

Shelley Dr

We're so happy things went well today. Thanks for keeping us updated. We've been checking throughout the day and continue to send love and prayers your way!!!!

Mark S

I had no idea Mike was ill. I believe it has been a slap upside the head to each of us who know and work with him. He has always been the most gentle of men and seems interested in people and their lives. I am returning that at this time. I am now most interested in his recovery and updates as they are available. Please let him know my thoughts are with him and his family during this difficult time.

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