

PART ONE OF SEVEN

CANCER

A CODE RED PROJECT

Read the conclusion of THE ENEMY WITHIN in next Saturday's Spectator.

Pains continued from // BA11

"It's a blow to our ego, our self-esteem," he said. "We used to walk around with a good amount of money in our pockets. Now, it's 'Geez, we've got two weeks to get to the end of the month, have we got enough to get through?'"

Ten years ago, he was traveling in the U.S. when he experienced chest pains. He made it home, then checked into the hospital right away.

Turns out he'd had a minor heart attack. As they were doing blood work, they also discovered stage IV leukemia.

Rudaniecki said his first doctor told him it was a hopeless case and there was nothing they could do. He got angry and switched doctors.

He started chemotherapy but he said it was so strong, he nearly died. He kept with it for just two days and then gave up. He gave up on everything, actually.

"I dumped the equivalent of probably \$80,000 worth of pills and everything down the toilet," said Rudaniecki. "I went into a depression. I hit the bottle for two weeks, refused all my doctor appointments."

"The doctor was calling here every day, his nurse was calling, my wife was crying every day," he said. "Finally I agreed to go see the doctor just to thank him for what he had done for me up to that point."

While he was there, the doctor convinced him to have some blood tests done. "I said OK, since I was there anyways. I went back up to his office, we chit-chatted for a bit about general crap and then the blood work came back."

The doctor took a look, then casually tossed the report across the desk. Rudaniecki's blood cell counts had made a stunning improvement.

"I had given up," he said. "When the numbers turned around I thought, well, maybe we can fight this thing."

"It changes your way of life, it changes your thoughts," Rudaniecki explained. "Before, I used to be able to fight somebody at the drop of a hat."

"Today? If I go down the road and a wheel falls off, oh well, who cares? I haven't got time to argue with somebody."

The improvements in his health petered out after a while, however. Same thing with a couple of other different types of chemotherapy.

Each time, his body would become resistant to the chemicals.

Last November, it looked like Rudaniecki had run out of options when once again the chemotherapy stopped working.

"The end is coming," he said. "There's nothing more they can do for me and there's nothing left for me."

The best-case scenario was another year.

Rudaniecki's glands and lymph nodes began swelling grotesquely throughout his neck and throat, poking out around his collarbones and down through his abdomen and into his groin.

"When I'd look in the mirror, it was almost like looking at the elephant man because my neck was swollen so bad," he said. "It was discouraging looking at it every day, knowing it was getting worse."

Then, with hope fading, there was a possible breakthrough in late spring.

Rudaniecki's doctor told him about a promising clinical drug trial for chronic lymphocytic leukemia that was recruiting patients in Hamilton.

It's a two-part trial that is scheduled to last three years.

Patients receive two types of chemotherapy called benda-



Steve Rudaniecki and wife Susi. He joined a clinical drug trial — one of the treatment's side-effects is death.

SURVIVAL OF THE RICHEST

While more men and women are getting cancer in the poorer parts of the Hamilton, far more men and women are dying of cancer in the poorer parts of the city compared to the richer parts. THE MUCH LARGER VARIATION IN DEATH RATES BETWEEN RICH AND POOR suggests that surviving cancer is not nearly as random as getting cancer.

mustine and rituximab, which are supposed to kill the cancer. They also take a pill called ibrutinib three times a day, which is meant to keep the cancer from coming back.

The chemotherapy drugs are real but patients don't know if they're receiving the ibrutinib or a placebo.

Rudaniecki said he faced a tough choice. When he read the information about the chemotherapy drugs, he said, one of the main side-effects listed is death. "So that was playing in my brain. Do I want to live for another year or so — a shitty life, but live — or do I go on this study and take a chance on dying the first day?"

"That was a hard choice for us."

Not for Susi it wasn't. "I begged Steve to go on this," she said. "I can't imagine life without him."

Rudaniecki signed up for the trial. He started his first treatments in July.

"We decided this was our only chance," he said. "If this doesn't work, it'll be just a matter of time."

"This is my last chance to grab that apple off the tree."

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PHOTO BY JOHN RENNINGER, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

PSYCHIATRIC-RELATED EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS

