

Jim and Connie Schiff

After suffering three strokes and losing a leg to amputation, the last thing Jim Schiff needed was a cancer diagnosis.

But, that's exactly what happened in 2009.

Schiff and his wife, Connie, faced the lung cancer diagnosis and treatments with a positive attitude, the same way they'd faced other challenges in their 55 years of marriage.

"People say, 'You've got a great attitude,' but this is the way it is," Jim said. "I tell my kids I am too old to cry. You've got to look at it and say, 'Let's go, let's do it.'"

The Sidney natives were no strangers to cancer – Connie lost an eye to a melanoma in the 1970s – but cancer wasn't on their minds last spring and summer after Jim fell ill.

Beginning in April and continuing into September, Jim had seven surgeries, three strokes and lost a leg after surgeries failed to save it. During one of the surgeries, doctors told the couple Jim had lung cancer in the mediastinum.

Although treatment was proposed at a Lima hospital, the Schiffs wanted to be closer to home. They turned to UVMC Cancer Care Center. Jim had spent time in the UVMC rehabilitation unit following his leg surgery.

"The people there are just unbelievable. We've never had such good treatment. I can't say it's a pleasure down there, but ...," Jim said of his experiences at the Cancer Care Center.

Despite under going 34 radiation treatments and 15 chemotherapy sessions, Jim never fell ill from the treatments. The week of Christmas a full body scan showed no cancer.

Keys in their cancer journey with Jim were his prior experience with bladder cancer around five years ago and Connie's knowledge from years in nursing and her experience battling cancer as a young mother in the 1970s.

"Knowing she's there, still survives, I think has helped me," Jim said.

He recalled how he was advised to get the affairs of his young family in order as doctors contemplated Connie's treatment. At the time, the family included four children under age 6.

Support of family, friends and strangers also has been vital. "We have been just amazed at the support, the prayers that we have received," Jim said. "I don't think there was a church in Sidney that our name wasn't on the prayer list."

ADVICE from Jim and Connie Schiff

- Remain positive.
 - Have faith.
 - Have people around you who care.
 - Have confidence in caretakers at hospital and at home.
 - Ask questions.
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A sense of humor also has helped, as evidenced by the Schiffs teasing of each other as they discussed the ups and downs of their journeys through cancer.

Connie said she wasn't shy about asking questions of health care workers throughout Jim's hospitalization, surgeries and treatment.

Jim retired after a career in management. He and Connie have four children, 10 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Although he tries to keep a positive attitude, Jim said it would be difficult to say he hasn't been discouraged at times.

"It is tough. There is no question it is tough," he said. "If you've got something you've got something. That's all there is to it. So, let's beat it. I am Type A, very competitive and, by God, we're going to beat it."