



The Dragon Turns to Water with a Freestyle Lifestyle

Chef German Lam
Fights Cancer

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Cancer with His Freestyle Lifestyle

GERMAN LAM

StoryTerrace





www.glamfoodsllc.com

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With deepest gratitude, I thank my wife and sons, parents and sister, our families and friends, and the doctors and my care team at Mass General Hospital Boston, Mass Eye and Ear, and St James Church for their love, support, and guidance throughout my journey with cancer, from the treatments to rebuilding my life and beyond.

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INTRODUCTION

I have nasopharyngeal cancer, a cancer that is located in the area in the back of the nose. It's caused by a virus. So, even if you do all the right things your whole life — eat right, work out frequently, cultivate good habits — you can still contract it. The Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) is best known for causing mononucleosis, the “kissing disease.” It stays in your body, but most people don't have any symptoms past the first few weeks after infection. But in my case, it made me life-threateningly ill.

I was at a point in my life where I had a lot to lose: I'd been married for 19 years and I had two young teenage boys. I was a professional chef-turned-entrepreneur. In my professional life, I acted as a teacher and mentor, insisting on clean habits in preparation and consistency in technique and method. I lived for the artistry that a kitchen can unleash — and am still trying to get back to it.

When the nurses at my treatments asked if I was suicidal, week after week, I said, “hell no.” I wasn't, but I will admit that I wish someone had prepared me for what was to come. I didn't know how painful this journey would be and I want to share my story so that others are prepared.

By sharing my story, I want to create a movement of knowledge and prevention. I want to create awareness about cancers that are caused by viruses that are not often screened for. I want to illuminate the challenges and the gaps in the system.

But first I want to tell my personal tale and share the philosophies that have strengthened me and can strengthen others. The combination of these philosophies are what I like to call the freestyle lifestyle. The freestyle lifestyle, which helped me stay in peak condition before I got this disease, has made me strong enough to endure my battle against it. Anyone can use freestyle to feel their best during life's peaceful times — before any major emotional or physical challenges. What's more important is that freestyle can be used while people are engaged in the guaranteed battles that come with being alive.

Undergoing chemo treatments at Boston Mass General Hospital, I endured seven weeks of hell. My body, mind, and heart started to change for the worse due to the poison they put in me to destroy the cancerous tumor. Recovery is a long road ahead with no guarantee of how my life will evolve — no guarantee of whether I could rebuild my career or sustain my family.

My journey is about the light that gives you hope during the darkness of the unknown. This unknown factor — it's the beauty and the beast in life. Like the human spirit, and like the freestyle lifestyle, it is two different sides of the same coin. This is why the freestyle lifestyle is the philosophy that guides me on my journey.

German Lam loves cooking, and he wants everyone to share his passion. It doesn't matter what your cooking level is. German wants you to bring your "A" game to the kitchen. Our initial meeting took place at a recent cooking presentation he gave at the Hanzonford Supermarket in Woburn. Wearing a chef's white top and a ready smile, German comes across as a combined life coach and sports coach. As he says early in our conversation, "I'm a food coach and athletes need real food."

In one interaction at Hanzonford's, three young boys recognized German as he had visited their school. Their mother approached German and explained that out of the three boys, two loved the featured "French Style Turkey Stew" but one did not. When German found out it was because the little boy refused to try it, German pulled out his persuasive game. German challenged him to try it, and then asked what he could do to make it better. "Spicing it out is ok," as long as he tastes it first. The father of two young boys, ages 8 and 5, German closely knows how to interact with children.

The French Style Turkey Stew he was featuring contained dried cranberries, organic broth, ground turkey, plenty of flavor and vegetables. It was delicious and admittedly easy to eat a lot of quickly. Additionally, it seemed suitable for the cooking novice as well as the hurried parent rushing to prepare a home-cooked meal for the family. We talked about the stew and German suggested substituting the ground turkey with vegetarian options such as potato or tofu.

He confidently explains that he had the best training because he worked at the Ritz Carlton (now the Taj Boston). According to German, "This is where I learned what it is to be a professional chef, where I got my 'MBA.'" His resume includes work at Chatham Bass Inn and the Harvard Club in Boston. German believes that it is important in cooking to be able to sense "the potential mistakes" and fix it... like an athlete intuitively knows when to throw a ball or avoid being tackled. Cooking is "not about recipes or measuring." For him, smart cooking is emphasizing quality ingredients and "elements of common sense."

His interest in cooking and eating better is not just a passing trend. Cooking TV shows like "Iron Chef" and "Top Chef" have their solid fan bases, buzz, and celebrity chefs' crank out cookbooks at a dizzying speed. Results from this are foods that can't be enjoyed daily due to price point. At content or lack of time to prepare fresh meals.

German's mission, however, is not to stuff

German Lam

By Joanne M. Choi



Photographed by Carina Scott at Liberty Hotel, Boston

"Smart cooking is emphasizing quality ingredients and elements of common sense."

a dish full of calorie ingredients or choose ingredients that are out of the reach of average working families. He wants it to be about a lifestyle that externally conditions the body and controls weight while emphasizing taste. His aim is to "work within every budget and create gourmet food without butter or cream." German's heartfelt passion is to inspire his students and those he interacts with to realize how simply eating well can change one's life.

German's company is Glan Foods, and his motto is "Healthy Eating, Healthy Cooking and Healthy Body." He visits schools,

conducts cooking demonstrations, works with clients, and teaches at neighborhood centers. This sparked a desire in us to start cooking more. Thus, the French Style Turkey Stew sampled at the supermarket was loosely followed two days later. I made it sans dried cranberries and turkey, and the substitute ingredients were potatoes and rice.

If that is the final take-home message he wants to propagate, conquering the "fear of not being perfect" and just picking up the knife and doing it, then he has one new convert. www.glanfoodsllc.com

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I BELIEVE IN MIRACLES: DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

A metal machine shoots destructive rays through my skull into my soft tissue. It is damaging both my healthy tissue and the tumor the size of my thumb that sits behind my nose, just centimeters from my brain. I'm fortunate that the cancer that I'm fighting hasn't spread or my prognosis would be more terrifying. In these Proton radiation therapy sessions, I have to wear a mesh mask over my head that looks like a horror movie prop. I have a mouth piece because without it my tongue would disintegrate.

For seven weeks, Monday through Friday, I drove to Massachusetts General Hospital for these radiation treatments. I also had seven chemotherapy sessions. Before my first Proton therapy, I was anxious. The staff offered me a pill to chill me out, but I didn't take it. I knew that I had to become like water and melt into the experience on my own. The great martial artist and actor Bruce Lee said, "You must be shapeless, formless, like water. When you pour water in a cup,

it becomes the cup. When you pour water in a bottle, it becomes the bottle. When you pour water in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Water can drip and it can crash. Become like water my friend.” For each treatment, I followed in his wise footsteps.

I was born in the Chinese year of the dragon. Dragons are fierce and hard; they are the kings. But you cannot be a dragon all of the time. Sometimes you have to be soft and flow like fluid. To know when to be which — hard like a dragon or soft and fluid like water — is the key to my own personal philosophy, which I call the freestyle lifestyle.

When I was a kid in the ‘70s and my Chinese-born parents moved from Santiago, Chile, to Boston, Massachusetts with my sister and me, Lee became one of my heroes. We shared the same heritage, and I learned from his wisdom that in life’s battles, we need to find the balance between the two sides of nature represented in the Taoist yin-yang symbol. A circle that is half black and half white with one dot of the opposite color decorating each side — it shows that in all things dark there is light and vice versa. Lee favored the martial arts style Wing Chun, which is soft and fluid. He was taught it by a master when he was in his teens and then created his own fighting style from it. Likewise, as a chef, I learned discipline through my teachers, many from the strict, French, old-world style of teaching in the kitchen at the Boston Ritz-Carlton Hotel. And from there, I created my own cooking style. These tools of discipline and creativity, along with others I’ve gathered along my path, have helped prepare me for this

cancer journey. But I didn't truly know the depth of their power until I found myself on this battlefield fighting for my life.

As a warrior, you need to see your opponents' weaknesses, but my opponent is invisible. Where can I destroy cancer? I can't touch it. Everything I'm battling is invisible; I'm battling demons from within. They're coming at me from the treatments too, which make my body weaker and even took away my ability to taste, and thus cook. The side effects aren't immediate; they come later. They attack when you think you're out of the woods. I want to take cancer's heart and rip it out, but I can't. I see how smart cancer is. But the treatment is also smart, even smarter. Cancer wants to crack my inner shield but I am fighting this with everything that I have.

I have nasopharyngeal cancer, a cancer that is located in the area in the back of the nose. It's caused by a virus. So, even if you do all the right things your whole life — eat right, work out frequently, cultivate good habits — you can still contract it. The Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) is best known for causing mononucleosis, the “kissing disease.” It stays in your body, but most people don't have any symptoms past the first few weeks after infection. But in my case, it made me life-threateningly ill.

When the nurses at my treatments asked if I was suicidal, week after week, I said, “hell no.” I wasn't, but I will admit that I wish someone had prepared me for what was to come. I didn't know how painful this journey would be and I want to share my story so that others are prepared.

I want to create a movement of knowledge and, as far as it is possible, prevention. I want to foster awareness about cancers that are caused by viruses that are not frequently screened for. I want to illuminate the challenges and the holes in the system. This is only the beginning of my journey, so much of this will come later.

Right here, right now, I want to tell my personal tale and share the philosophies that have strengthened me and can strengthen others. My freestyle lifestyle, which helped me stay in peak condition before I got this disease, has made me strong enough to endure my battle against cancer. Anyone can use freestyle to feel their best during life's peaceful times— before any major emotional or physical challenges. More importantly, freestyle can be used while people are engaged in the battles that are an inherent part of being alive.

When I was diagnosed, I explained my minor symptoms to Doctor Allen C. Lam at Massachusetts Eye and Ear. He looked at my ear infection and prescribed me medicine. I felt like something was off, though I didn't know what it was exactly. My ear infection had cleared up, but my nose was still completely stuffed.

“Doc, I'm not feeling it,” I told him. I wasn't in pain, and my symptoms seemed innocuous, but in my gut I had this inclination that something was really wrong. He worked with me and looked further into my concerns. “There's a possibility you have nose cancer,” he explained. Because I am a man of Chinese descent, I am at higher risk of developing nose cancer. “We need to do a biopsy, get some tissue out of there,” he told me. And we were both right about my health.

The nurse who gave me the bad news also gave me a coin with a quote from Albert Einstein that I carry with me in my wallet: “You can live as if everything is a miracle or you can live as if nothing is a miracle.”

I believe in miracles. The diagnosis opened up a new world, one in which I am set to demonstrate my full potential as a dragon. I am focused on destroying cancer through the foundation of values I was raised with as well as the foundation I have built. I am focused on destroying cancer using the freestyle lifestyle, which emphasizes discipline, skill, and creativity. Freestyle will strengthen your body, mind, and spirit, so that if you ever are in a similar position — finding that you have cancer or are facing another seemingly insurmountable challenge — you can be better than prepared to meet your enemy.

I believe the core value that leads to success is eating properly and respecting the body. Just like an athlete, you need to protect your assets and the rewards will follow.

What I learned from the diagnosis process is that time is of the essence when it comes to your health — you cannot wait. The most important part is sensing the way your body feels, to be in tip-top shape in every way — mentally, physically, and spiritually — so that you can sense shifts in your health. When you’re not in tune, things happen so fast, it’s oftentimes too late for treatment. Because of my sensitivity as a chef, as a religious person who appreciates art, music, dancing, sports — things that engage the body — I knew I had to trust my gut feeling and return to the doctor whose next step

may have saved my life. Having that gut feeling, acknowledging it, is a simple skill. Without the softness I learned from Wing Chun, I wouldn't have been so sensitive to my body's changes, and without the dragon, I wouldn't have the raw power to fight for my life

DRAGON TURNS TO WATER



Spin class during my 5-week treatments — During the last two weeks, I was unable to spin/workout due to adverse physical side effects

Book Title:

The Dragon Turns to Water

Package Size, Number of Words, Pages, Photos:

Complete (10,245 words, 31 photos, 76 pages)

Ghostwriter Level: **Senior**



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I look at this cancer journey as a blessing because I will take what I have learned here and use it every day for the rest of my life. Cancer is a gift because it has allowed me to up my game and share my story and my methods with you. I've entered this world unexpectedly; I am accessing parts of myself I didn't before. I stand with joy in the face of this cancer. I hope in sharing my journey, I can help you on yours.

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