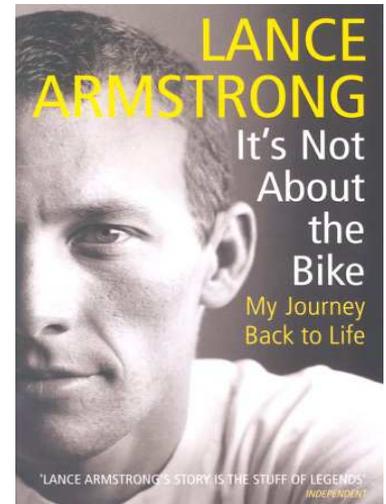


IT'S NOT ABOUT THE BIKE. MY JOURNEY BACK TO LIFE (By Lance Armstrong)

The power of attitude

THE CEREAL Box



THE QUESTION THAT LINGERS IS, HOW MUCH WAS I A factor in my own survival, and how much was science, and how much miracle?

I don't have the answer to that question. Other people look to me for the answer, I know. But if I could answer it, we would have the cure for cancer, and what's more, we would fathom the true meaning of our existences. I can deliver motivation, inspiration, hope, courage, and counsel, but I can't answer the unknowable. Personally I don't need to try. I'm content with simply being alive to enjoy the mystery.

Good joke:

A man is caught in a flood, and as the water rises he climbs to the roof of his house and waits to be rescued. A guy in a motorboat comes by, and he says, "Hop in, I'll save you."

"No, thanks," the man on the rooftop says. "My Lord will save me."

But the floodwaters keep rising. A few minutes later, a rescue plane flies overhead and the pilot drops a line.

"No, thanks," the man on the rooftop says. "My Lord will save me."

But the floodwaters rise ever higher, and finally they overflow the roof and the man drowns.

When he gets to heaven, he confronts God.

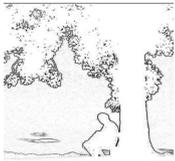
"My Lord, why didn't you save me?" he implores.

"You idiot," God says. "I sent you a boat, I sent you a plane."

I think in a way we are all just like the guy on the rooftop. Things take place, there is a confluence of events and circumstances, and we can't always know their purpose, or even if there is one. But we can take responsibility for ourselves and be brave.

We each cope differently with the specter of our deaths. Some people deny it. Some pray. Some numb themselves with tequila. I was tempted to do a little of each of those things. But I think we are supposed to try to face it straightforwardly, armed with nothing but courage. The definition of courage is: the quality of spirit that enables one to encounter danger with firmness and without fear.

It's a fact that children with cancer have higher cure rates than adults with cancer, and I wonder if the reason is their natural, unthinking bravery. Sometimes little kids seem better equipped to deal with cancer.



than grown—ups are. They're very determined little characters, and you don't have to give them big pep talks. Adults know too much about failure; they're more cynical and resigned and fearful. Kids say, "I want to play. Hurry up, and make me better." That's all they want.

When Wheaties decided to put me on the cover of the box after the Tour de France, I asked if we could hold the press conference in the children's cancer ward at the same hospital where my son was born. As I visited with the kids and signed some autographs, one little boy grabbed a Wheaties box and stood at my knees, clutching it to his chest.

"Can I have this?" he said.

"Yeah, you can have it," I said. "It's yours."

He just stood there, looking at the box, and then he looked back at me. I figured he was pretty impressed.

Then he said, "What shapes are they?"

"What?" I said.

"What shapes are they?"

"Well," I said, "it's cereal. It's all different shapes."

"Oh," he said. "Okay."

See, to him, it's not about cancer. It's just about cereal.

IF CHILDREN HAVE THE ABILITY TO IGNORE ODDS AND percentages, then maybe we can all learn from them. When you think about it, what other choice is there but to hope? We have two options, medically and emotionally: give up, or fight like hell.

After I was well again, I asked Dr. Nichols what my chances really were. "You were in bad shape," he said. He told me I was one of the worst cases he had seen. I asked, "How bad was I? Worst fifty percent?" He shook his head. "Worst twenty percent?" He shook his head again.

"Worst ten?" He still shook his head.

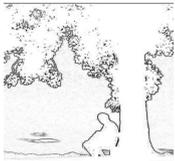
When I got to three percent, he started nodding.

Anything's possible. You can be told you have a 90-percent chance or a 50-percent chance or a 1-percent chance, but you have to believe, and you have to fight. By fight I mean arm yourself with all the available information, get second opinions, third opinions, and fourth opinions. Understand what has invaded your body, and what the possible cures are. It's another fact of cancer that the more informed and empowered patient has a better chance of long-term survival.

What if I had lost? What if I relapsed and the cancer came back? I still believe I would have gained something in the struggle, because in what time I had left I would have been a more complete, compassionate, and intelligent man, and therefore more alive. The one thing the illness has convinced me of beyond all doubt—more than any experience I've had as an athlete—is that we are much better than we know. We have unrealized capacities that sometimes only emerge in crisis.

So if there is a purpose to the suffering that is cancer, I think it must be this: it's meant to improve us. I am very firm in my belief that cancer is not a form of death. I choose to redefine it: it is a part of life. One afternoon when I was in remission and sitting around waiting to find out if the cancer would come back, I made an acronym out of the word: Courage, Attitude, Never give up, Curability, Enlightenment, and Remembrance of my fellow patients.

In one of our talks, I asked Dr. Nichols why he chose oncology, a field so difficult and heartbreaking. "Maybe for some of the same reasons you do what you do," he said. In a way he suggested, cancer is the Tour de France of illnesses.



“The burden of cancer is enormous, but what greater challenge can you ask?” he said. “There’s no question it’s disheartening and sad, but even when you don’t cure people, you’re always helping them. If you’re not able to treat them successfully at least you can help them manage the illness. You connect with people. There are more human moments in oncology than any other field I could imagine. You never get used to it, but you come to appreciate how people deal with it—how strong they are.”

"You don't know it yet, but we're the lucky ones," my fellow cancer patient had written.

I will always carry the lesson of cancer with me, and feel that I'm a member of the cancer community I believe I have an obligation to make something better out of my life than before, and to help my fellow human beings who are dealing with the disease. It's a community of shared experience. Anyone who has heard the words "*You have cancer*" and thought, "*Oh, my God, I'm going to die,*" is a member of it. If you've ever belonged, you never leave.

So when the world seems unpromising and gray, and human nature mean, I take out my driver's license and I stare at the picture, and I think about LaTrice Haney Scott Shapiro, Craig Nichols, Lawrence Einhorn, and the little boy who likes cereal for their shapes. I think about my son, the embodiment of my second life, who gives me a purpose apart from myself.

Sometimes, I wake up in the middle of the night and I miss him. I lift him out of his crib and I take him back to bed with me, and I lay him on my chest. Every cry of his delights me. He throws back his tiny head and his chin trembles and his hands claw the air, and he wails. It sounds like the wail of life to me.

“Yeah, that’s right, "I urge him. “Go on.”

The louder he cries, the more I smile.

Lance Armstrong. “*It's not about the bike. My Journey Back to Life*” Berkeley Books New York 2001