

Husband, Caregiver, Hero

Hilary Saltzman is a [cholangiocarcinoma](#) cancer survivor who lives in Austin with her husband and two children.

June 17, 2019 By Hilary Saltzman

My husband, Charles, knows I am not a doctor but sometimes like to play one. Waiting for my CT scan, I called him at work to share that I'd read some older pathology reports and thought there was something we had missed on earlier reads. He calmly told me it wasn't a great idea to extrapolate conclusions from reports I'm not so great at interpreting.

At this point, I was crying and coming unhinged. He let me be scared but refused to be scared with me.

After getting our kids off to school that morning, Charles drove to work, and I drove to Houston for scans. All day, he carried the anxiety that scans trigger, hoping I would drive safely and not be lonely or overwhelmed and praying the news wouldn't be awful. On top of all that, he had the stress of his daily job. Then his wife calls, whispering into the phone and crying, wanting reassurance that things will be all right even though she has "facts" telling her otherwise.

Here's the important thing I want you to know: There are many things my husband could have said to me to make this situation worse and so few things that could have made it better. How do you help the person you love while she is sinking into the dark abyss of her own mind? How do you keep yourself from falling in after her?

I don't know how my husband manages to keep his composure when these scenarios occur, yet he does so with extreme grace. His refusal to believe the stories I tell him, which are based in fear, is one of his greatest gifts. He could be short with me because, you know, he has a meeting in four minutes (which was actually the case when I called). He could unleash his own fears and escalate things, making us both feel worse. He could shut down and be unavailable.

Instead, he conveyed his love, total devotion and belief that we will be OK. Then he had to hang up the phone, banish the image of his crying wife in a hospital gown 165 miles away and walk into a meeting like his entire future wasn't hanging in the balance.

To all you spouses, partners and parents living with cancer patients: You are my heroes. No one, including me, knows how difficult it is to walk in your shoes. There are so many emotional landmines to navigate and you never know when one is going to blow up in your face. It's a

terrible reality of cancer.

I am so very grateful to my husband for being my partner. He didn't sign up for this, and we didn't ever see ourselves in this scenario, but man, does my man shine.

For tips on how to support caregivers, click [here](#).

This article originally appeared on I Had Cancer (IHadCancer.com), a cancer survivorship network that provides members with the ability to share personal experiences before, during and after cancer with others who really understand. It is adapted with permission.

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