



**Alan Polchies Jr. – My Cancer Story (13:55 sec)**

**Alan:** I wasn't like, "okay, if anything happens to me you can have all my fabulous dress shirts" or "if anything happens to me you can have all my coloured shoes" or "if anything happens to me you can have all my native jewelry," you know it wasn't that. I didn't come to that. Because I was paying attention to my body, I was paying attention to the physicians, I was attending all the appointments, I was doing what the doctors told me and that's what I was told right from the beginning was to do everything the physicians ask you to do, follow their lead and everything will be okay. It's going to be a journey and it's not going to be fun, but you need to get 'er done. And that's what was in my heart and in my mind.

My name is Alan Patrick Polchies Jr. I was diagnosed with cancer in December of 2011. I was 41 years old. I am a band councilor for St. Mary's First Nation which is a Maliseet Wolastoqiyik community here in Fredericton, New Brunswick. I have a partner of almost three years. I am two-spirited, and open about it in my community, I'm just open about it personally and I have been finished treatment for 15 months now. And to date I have gone from seeing the doctors for every 3 months to every 6 months and just last week I've now been told that I don't have to see the doctors until once a year now.

**Tyler:** I'm Tyler Nason. My partner Alan, who we call Chicky, was diagnosed with cancer in his rectum and his lymph nodes about two years ago and now is cancer free. He went through about 30 radiation treatments and 2 full weeks of chemo in St. John, New Brunswick. It was only stage one. We had quite a road ahead of us, but at least we had a light at the end of our tunnel.

**Alan:** When I was told the day I was told, you know, it was something that it's a shocker. It was a shock to know. You're just shocked with it right? And of course I broke down because I was, you know, it was a little bit of a hurt to the heart but when I left I was composed. I was just trying to absorb it, you know, and figure out what was going to be my next steps.

Because I grew up in a First Nation community, it's very close knit in our communities. We know one another. I'm practically related to everybody in this community one way or another. You know, to me they're all my brothers and sisters at the end of the day, I knew I had to have a communication plan into place because of the role that I had to play in this community and I wanted them to hear it from the horse's mouth and so what I did was that I did share it with other extended family members and some close friends and including my chief at the time.

I'm just going to drive around Polchies Court and all of the streets are named after the family names in the community and this is one of my favourite streets because it's named after my family.

I knew I had to have a communication plan into place because of the role that I had to play in this community and I wanted them to hear it from the horse's mouth, so to speak, and so what I did was that I did share it with other extended family members and some close friends and including my chief at the time,

**Chief Candice:** Alan is loved by so many here in the community and I remember when he first came and told me, I was

probably one of the few that he did tell in the very beginning and I talked to him, encouraged him that as a public figure it was probably best to be honest with people and to tell them exactly what he was going through because I knew that he would get a lot of support and people would be there for him. So I was very pleased when he did. And you know, and the support that he did receive.

**Alan:** It was quite moving in that Council room that night when I, you know, because it was felt it wasn't a dry eye in the room when I announced it and it was really tough. It was tough to get it out but I did it.

## **EARLY DETECTION AND TREATMENT**

**Alan:** I knew... It was something inside told me that, you know what? I felt that it was all treatable. And I was, I knew I had to be the strong one, I was the doing the, I was the one living with this tumour inside me, and I have to deal with this health issue and the confidence of the physicians that I was dealing with gave me that confidence and I was told that because of my age that my body was, because of my age I was in a very good position. I was told when I walked away that I had a 70-75% chance that we could beat this.

**Chief Candice:** You know, in his case, getting it early was important. So, I mean, that's what he expresses, that's what he talks to people about is, you know, "get yourself checked." You know, get checked. Excuse me. I know my father had colon. And you know, I have 6 sisters and we all, you know, we all said: "we've got to get this checked. We've got to, you know, let's do this." And we all made a pact and we all did it. Getting early detection is the priority.

**Alan:** I knew my body was going to go through a medical transition and it needed to fight this cancer. So I needed to do everything to my body to make sure it was ready for it. Because my body had no idea what was about to happen. Neither did I. So I was a smoker, so I quit smoking because I know smoking, it's when you smoke anything you do if you get a cut or anything it slows the healing process. So I automatically said I got to get rid of that because I needed to heal fast. So I got rid of that. They said your oral hygiene needs to be up to date – if you have a healthy mouth that's going to help your body to heal fast. So I had a situation happening with a tooth – I went to the dentist and I had that taken care of immediately. They, of course, any type of social activity in terms of alcohol consumption I needed to stop that right away. I psychologically prepared myself by reaching out to my elders in the community. You know, of course I did some sweats before I went to St. John to start the process. And sat with elders and finding the best traditional medicines that will guide me through my journey because that's something that was important to me that I was explore because I certainly believe in my culture and the creator and the gifts that we'd been given.

## **COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

**Tyler:** It's hard to watch someone you love go through that, you know what I mean? It's like one of the hardest things I think I ever had to do. The greatest thing for him was having his community behind him. I don't think the people of St. Mary's realize how much of a help they were to Chicky because the Facebook, and he has all of them on his Facebook, but the Facebook and the support was something that, you know, it was like a drug to him. It made him feel like everything was okay and that everything was normal. It helped him just get away from being sick for a little while.

**Alan:** I found myself up late at night. With social media, I found... I mean, I of course was using social media prior to that, but I found it an excellent tool to keep in touch with my friends, keep in touch with my family because everyone was away from me and I went on there and I was stating positive quotes. I would do one every single day. I would get tons of hits every time I would throw one on there. I know they all waited for it and when I was in pain, late at night, and I felt I needed to resort to something, that's what I turned to because it took my mind into the social media world, if you will, and to read other people's business because everyone puts their business on Facebook... And so that's where my mind went and it helped take the mind off what my body was going through. Whether it was for a minute or whether it was for five

minutes, it still was there for me and it played a lot.

**Chief Candice:** Thank goodness for social media. I had many Facebook chats with him in the wee hours of the morning when he really wasn't feeling that great. But, you know, he never, ever, publicly let on that, you know, some of the things he was going through. He always had a positive attitude. He was definitely a role model for what he was going through and I think that brought a lot of attention to cancer. And, you know, people were talking about it. And definitely he was always there to answer any questions that they, you know, did have for him. So I think that, you know, his positive outlook on life that he was going to beat it. And, you know, I know people still ask me about him and are amazed at what he's been through.

**Alan:** I never put that I wasn't having a very good day because you know what? Every day that I woke up was a good day. The day I wasn't going to open my eyes would have been a bad day, but we haven't seen that day yet and I hope we don't see it for a long time. So that was my attitude. Open my eyes no matter what I was going to feel that day, I was alive. And we were going to get 'er done.

## **MOVING FORWARD**

**Alan:** I never went that deep into it, other than saying, you know I need to take care of this health issue. Other people say, oh well, you got a second chance at life. Did I really have a second chance at life? I have no idea, because I could walk across the street and get hit by a truck and I could be six feet under. You know what? Our body works in mysterious ways. So to me it was a matter of being focused on the health matter at hand and I took care of it. Do I see life differently? You know I appreciate the medicines. I'm so happy that I live in the 21st century. And I did the western medicine, the chemo, the radiation, the technology that they have today. I give thanks for all that and those external things that I did helped me spiritually, of course, because it's all about mind, body and soul. And if you connect those three, you connect the mind with the body and the soul with the spirit, then it can combine and it all works very well together and you need it at times because let me tell you towards the end it wasn't fun, and I connect those three really hard together. But I did it.