

Reaching new heights

Two-time cancer survivor to climb Kilimanjaro

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**Peter Campbell is set to climb Mount
Kilimanjaro this month.
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Life has been full of curveballs for Peter Campbell, 42, of Grosse Pointe Woods.

First diagnosed with Hodgkins lymphoma at 31, Campbell braved eight months of chemotherapy and two months of radiation to eliminate the disease. He underwent scans every year for five years before being considered in remission. The chances of the cancer returning were scarce.

"I went my five years and got the all clear," he said. "I was living thinking it was all behind me. Then I got back pain. I didn't think it was cancer."

A visit to the oncologist revealed the cancer had returned, this time in his chest.

His first day back at St. John Hospital, he said he wasn't sure he wanted to go through treatment again; he knew it would be a year of his life he'd never get back. As he pondered his decision, a friend texted to say a friend would be in touch. Soon after, he received the text that made all the difference in the world.

That someone was Sean Swarner, a two-time cancer survivor and author who has reached the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa 12 times. Swarner sent Campbell a link to a video about his life — his battles with cancer, his defeat of the disease and what he's accomplished since.

"It literally changed my life," Campbell said. "I went from 'Should I do this?' to 'Let's do this.' I made everyone watch this video. You don't have to have cancer to be inspired by this story."

Swarner told Campbell if he beat cancer, he was invited to climb Kilimanjaro with him.

Campbell's stem cells were deemed healthy and were frozen to be used later. When they were reintroduced to his body, his wife suggested they be as positive as possible about the transplant. Not long after, when three nurses ran through his vitals in preparation for the procedure, each of them repeated his blood type; three times the words "B positive" rang through the room.

After the transplant, Campbell was told it's crucial to walk as much as possible. He thought of Swarner's mountain



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metaphor: As long as you keep climbing, you'll make it to the top. Campbell said he remembers walking the halls of the hospital, thinking "I'm climbing my mountain."

"I also remember thinking, 'When I get out of this hospital, I've got to walk somewhere with a view.'"

After leaving the hospital, Campbell was in isolation for 100 days, unable to shake hands or touch unwashed food, having to wear a mask if he went in public. On the 100th day, he got married.

It was April 1 — April Fool's Day — when he got another life-changing phone call. Swarner told him to start training for his climb.

Through the Cancer Climber Association, which was cofounded by Swarner, Campbell received an Adventure Support Grant that is paying for his trip. Marmot, of which Swarner is an ambassador, donated \$3,000 worth of climbing gear for the adventure as well.

"I never really thought it was something that would actually happen. I've been on cloud nine ever since, to say the least," he said. "I hadn't run since before I was in the hospital. I started running that week and I've been running ever since."

Campbell leaves Saturday, July 11, and arrives in Tanzania Sunday, July 12. It takes four to five days to climb Kilimanjaro. The final day, they'll start hiking at midnight and reach the summit in the early morning hours, so they can see the stars in the night sky and then watch the sunrise.

"It's very emotional. I've been through a lot," Campbell said. "To me it's like the metaphor of climbing the mountain. I've beat cancer now twice, so to me it's like there is no mountain I can't climb. This will be for fun. The other ones were to just be here, to save my life. This one I can enjoy."

He's allowed to make one phone call from the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro and he's going to call home. His wife, Erica, and their children, Dalton Campbell and Sabrina Shaw, should get the call around midnight.

When he's not training — going on hikes with an overweight backpack, getting mentally prepared through visualization — Campbell spends time as an advocate for the Lymphoma Research Foundation spreading a message of hope and perseverance to other cancer patients.

"Someone reached out to me. It changed my life," he said. "So I'd be a fool not to do that with other people."

Campbell shares Swarner's video with everyone, hoping to get the story out.

"He's all about inspiring cancer patients. For me, that's what he did," Campbell said. "He got me through a tough time. He's been named one of the top seven most inspirational people in the world, yet he tells me I inspire him."

This will be Swarner's 13th trip up Kilimanjaro. He takes a cancer survivor with him each year.

"I want to inspire people to inspire people," Campbell said. "It makes me feel good to help people. He took two minutes to do it for me."

Campbell has been cancer-free since February 2013.

"Not many people get a second chance at life. I've had three."