

Sitas scores a win against stage 4 cancer

By Nancy J. White
 TORONTO STAR

A few words can change everything — “It’s full-blown cancer,” the doctor told Dom Sitas in the recovery room after his colonoscopy. Sitas, a 38-year-old father of three young children, began to cry.

His brother, who had come for moral support, fainted. His wife, Lidija, stood in shock.

“A nurse put her arm around me and said, ‘You are going to have to be strong,’” recalls Lidija.

Very strong. Further tests showed the disease had spread to his liver. Dom had Stage 4 colon cancer with a 10 per cent chance of living five years.

There were surgeries, chemotherapies, scans of scans and tests and some dark nights of the soul. But this summer, at the significant five-year mark, his scan showed he was cancer-free. “I started sobbing, my body shaking,” says Lidija. “You carry it around for so long.”

Dom, 43, and Lidija, 42, are telling their beat-the-odds story so that another family in a seemingly bleak battle with cancer might find what they desperately searched for — hope.

“I looked at the obstacles as part of a journey,” recalls Dom, owner of the building firm Pebble Homes. “I kept telling myself, ‘Anyone who survived had to get through this part, too.’”

They’re sitting at the dining room table in their four-bedroom Oakville home. The drywalling had just begun on this, their dream house, when Dom got sick.

Across the table, Lidija slides an album labelled ‘Dom’s Journey,’ pages of dates, quotes, photos, including a black-and-white one of the family. They’re wearing black and white and standing close together, showing smiles, but not big ones. It’s part of a photo shoot done shortly after Dom’s diagnosis.

“They were our family pictures in case he didn’t make it,” explains Lidija. Dom first went to the doctor because he found blood in his stool. ‘Not to worry,’ said the doctor, who ordered more tests just to be sure. It was after the sigmoidoscopy, a procedure to examine the large intestine,



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AGAINST THE ODDS: Dom Sitas and his daughter Sabrina participate in the Survivors Lap, officially starting the 2007 Relay for Life at Appleby College in Oakville.




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that the doctor told him it was cancer, but likely small. Dom headed to the park where he knew Lidija was with the kids. He hugged her hard.

Next was the colonoscopy followed by surgery, the removal of a large portion of his colon. He remembers being in so much pain that he couldn’t turn to talk to his mother visiting him. “I knew she was crying,” he says, his voice catching. “I can only imagine how tough it was for her.”

The news kept getting worse. Not only did the liver biopsy confirm that the cancer had spread, but Dom had three spots on his liver, involving more than one lobe.

To be a candidate for liver surgery, a patient must have enough healthy liver that the surgeon can leave some. They worried his might be too compromised. Without liver surgery, Dom’s chances grew grimmer.

They walked into the surgeon’s office, their fate in his hands.

One of the spots was small. The surgeon concluded: “It’s worth a try.”

A few words can change everything.

“What I felt,” recalls Dom, teary, looking away, “was that I had a chance.”

Dom’s liver surgery was Oct. 31, 2005. “I remember that,” pipes in Anthony, 13, who has been listening to his parents’ story. “I remember going out that Halloween night thinking, ‘I hope Dad is okay.’” The eldest, he was more aware and more affected than his sisters, say his parents.

Lidija was waiting when the surgeon came out. “He was elated,” she recalls. He not only removed the cancerous parts, but one of the worrisome spots turned out to be — nothing.

“When they told me that lobe was clear,” says Dom, “I thought, ‘That’s a miracle.’”

No saintly intervention, however, spared him pain, physical or psychological. One night still hospitalized after his liver surgery, he was

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