

## Henry Gerfen

ca. 1939 - April 27, 2014

After Gerf's death in 2014, his family elected to not have any obituary posted. For our 50th reunion, he submitted a courageous story of his fight with cancer. I think that it is appropriate to reprint that essay in lieu of an obituary. HBM



On November 27th 2007, I was diagnosed with stage 4 Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, the same disease that had killed my brother four short years before. For someone who had experienced nothing but wonderful health for my entire life, this came as somewhat of a shock.

Fortunately neither Maggie nor I wasted any time going through the four stages of denial, anger, etc. Having played way too much poker in my years at Dartmouth, Maggie and I simply knew "We have to play the hand we're dealt", and we began to plan for what the future held. We decided not to start chemo until after Christmas and spent the month of December reflecting on our life

together. Needless to say, it proved to be an interesting month. Sitting on the couch every evening with our cocktails, some nights laughing, others crying, we talked and talked and talked. Interestingly, all we could remember were the good times. Any troubles or disappointment we had experienced didn't seem very important.

We realized again what a blessed life we had led. Our son, Chip, a senior fellow in the Class of '84, a Magna cum laude graduate, is the tenured head of the Spanish department at Penn State. His lovely Spanish wife Pilar (also tenured) is teaching at Gallaudet University. For me, a successful advertising business that I sold in 1984, permitting Maggie and me to spend 27 of the 50 years since graduation retired and traveling the world; having been lucky enough to visit all seven continents. And, of course, all the little pleasant surprises, such as two mothers-in-law that preferred the son/ daughter-in-law to their own kin. We realized that the time that we had a great ride and that God and life didn't owe us anything. Whatever happened, we had nothing to complain about. In the face of the unknown future, a month of dazzling enlightenment, as we rediscovered the depth of love and affection that had carried us through 40 Years of a marriage.

But as always the month ended and laugh January and treatment arrived.

Before treatment started, however, I shaved my head and mustache. I told Maggie if I'm going to lose my hair, it will be on my terms, not the disease's. I thought the best way to deal with the cancer was to attack it. More than anything else I hated the thought of having "deceased" after my name in the class listings it just seemed too early. To me, it was a battle joined.

Chemo was difficult but not as bad as I expected. The worst part was how terrible everything tasted. The only things that always tasted good were fresh oranges and neat Scotch. Chip called me nightly and reminded me not to have any alcohol during the chemo. Between sips, I assured him that I wasn't having anything to drink.

The other difficult part was how little stamina I had. But I continued to play golf and forced myself to walk the 18 holes. I didn't want to give an inch to the damn disease. I went into remission in March 2008 and finished the chemo in April. I'm happy to report as of now, May 2010, I'm still in remission and feeling great. I'm still under medical care, of course, and the future is one big question mark.

Always sensible, Maggie made me grow my mustache back after chemo finished, telling me she forgot how scary I look when my whole face is visible. That didn't come as any big surprise, as I had to look in the mirror everyday anyway.

I don't know if we're any smarter now than 50 years ago, but I'll bet we're all a bit wiser. All in all, Maggie, I, and the family can look back and see how fortunate we have been. I feel lucky to have lived as happy and productive a life as I have, and extremely fortunate to have met and married a life mate as wonderful as Maggie. I don't feel I have any great insights or truth to offer up. I just hope my story will help any of you who face the dreaded "Big C." And, I do know, that I hope most of you had as good a time as we've had.

Here's to our 75th.