

## INSPIRATION

in(t)-spe-'rā-shen *n* 1. a divine or supernatural influence 2. to be an animating, enlivening, or exalting influence on another; to spur one to act 3. to draw forth or bring out

# BOTH Sides of the BED

Dan Shapiro, Ph.D. is an assistant professor in the college of medicine at the University of Arizona. He holds joint appointments in psychiatry, psychology, and internal medicine. His research focuses on coping with medical crises and physician-patient communication. His web site is [www.danshapiro.org](http://www.danshapiro.org).

By Dr. Dan Shapiro, PhD



When Dan Shapiro was a junior at Vassar, he was diagnosed with cancer. When he informed his anti-drug mom that he had been told marijuana could ease the effects of chemotherapy, she refused to listen. But she was also his mother, he was her son, and life had changed the rules. A gardener, renowned in the neighborhood for her prodigious crops, she quietly tended 10 bushy cannabis plants that grew to tower over her sunflower screen.

Dan's fight with cancer and his journey to recovery prompted him to write the book *Mom's Marijuana*. *Mom's Marijuana* is about life in all of its wondrous unpredictability. OA was fortunate enough to step inside the mind of Dan Shapiro and discover his views on pressing issues such as fertility and chemotherapy, delivering a cancer diagnosis and the future of psychology for physicians and patients. We hope you will enjoy this compelling interview.

**OA: Please provide us with some background on your Hodgkin's diagnosis and your initial reaction. How did your physician deliver the news?**

**DS:** I was diagnosed in 1987 when I was 20 years old. I'd had dizziness, night sweats, itching, and a strange symptom: pain in my shoulder with the ingestion of alcohol. I'd been to a number of physicians but it wasn't until a "doc-in-the-box" took an X-ray that the grapefruit sized tumor was revealed. The doc was young and inexperienced, he pointed at wisps on the scan and said, "that appears to be pneumonia...and that," pointing at the 14 centimeter wide tumor, "is a large, abnormal growth." He looked as scared as I felt.

**OA: Tell us about your treatment regimens (including your special "antiemetic" from mom).**

**DS:** During the five years of treatment I relapsed twice, had a bone marrow transplant, the maximum dosage of mantle radiation any one person should be allowed to enjoy, absorbed 12 different chemotherapeutic agents, had surgery 9 times. I've had shingles, rashes, mouth sores, warts, headaches, nausea, vomiting,

dry heaves, bone pain, gut pain and I got septic.

I've sat in emergency rooms in four states in over a dozen hospitals. My temp has been as high as 106.5, I've had rigors. I've peed blue from dyes from scanners, once all the hair on one side of my leg stopped growing while the rest grew. I've been bald twice. I gained 25 pounds once and lost 45 another time. I've been manic and agitated. I've been depressed and somnolent. I've been an insomniac, and at other times unable to stay awake, I've had a voracious appetite and anorexia. I've been unable to think, and at other times felt every sensation so clearly – so vividly, that I thought someone had turned up the volume on the world. I've been so weak I couldn't walk upstairs or open doors. I've been treated like a prince and like a leper – a total outcast. I've sat in waiting rooms for hours. I've lingered by the phone for hours. I've abandoned my belief in a just world and clung to it in the middle of the night. I've wept and screamed and dreamed and loved and begged to a god I wasn't sure I believed in.

Early in the experience my anti-drug mom grew marijuana in the backyard to help me

stave off the nausea and vomiting. The drug was less important to me than what she communicated by growing it – that we will do whatever it takes, even if it means recreating all of our priorities, to succeed.

**OA: Your mom took a huge risk for you in the face of adversity. What do you think would have happened if mom had been caught for growing marijuana in the backyard? Did you think about the possible repercussions at the time?**

**DS:** I have imagined visiting her in prison, mom with her orange jumpsuit and new tattoos.

Actually, mom was ready. If she'd had to, she would have gone to prison for this cause. I think the local authorities may have known and understood what we were doing.

**OA: What are your thoughts on the use of alternative medicine to treat cancer?**

**DS:** While I haven't been impressed with alternative medicine folks who claim cures, I think in many cases alternatives can assist with management of side effects from treatment.

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