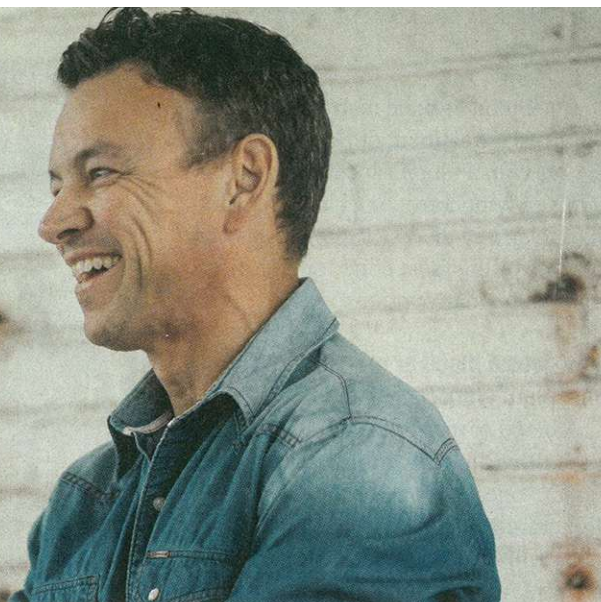


A Conversation with Childhood Cancer Survivor & Musician Ryan Hamner

“I want people to know there is hope. There is always hope.”

by Ashley Hubbard



Tell me a little about your cancer history.

I was diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma when I was six years old after being misdiagnosed for two years. I remember some of my first treatments as a young child. I remember being marked up with a red marker for radiation. And I'll never forget wondering why the door to the radiation room was so thick. Oh, and Showbiz Pizza. I'll always remember that place because we went there after some of my first radiation treatments. To this day, I'm not sure which was more creepy, radiation or those singing mechanical animals.

What were your treatment regimens like? Did you have any side effects?

For my first occurrence of Hodgkin lymphoma, I received radiation therapy. For my second and third, at ages nine and eleven, I received chemotherapy and radiation. At 21, I had chemotherapy again and a stem cell transplant. I have to say, though, treatment in 1998 versus the 80s was vastly different. I remember dreading my first chemo treatment in 1998 but was amazed at the new anti-nausea medicine that was available. I mean, it made me loopy and made me forget a lot, but I was able to eat a turkey sandwich during treatment. That, my friends, was a major win!

The major side effects of my treatment are how they have impacted my heart, and I was recently diagnosed with delayed radiation fibrosis syndrome.

Although I still like to get after it in the gym and with cardio as much as I can, last year, I went into third-degree heart block and had to get a pacemaker. And, eventually, I'll need a new heart valve.

What do you want people to know about childhood cancer?

I want people to know there is hope. There is always hope for new treatments, new procedures, and remission.

I also want people to know, with me, and with others who were treated in the 80s as kids, many of us still endure the side effects of cancer treatment years later. It can impact relationships, employment, and our health, of course. And on the health part, it's important to be proactive – to have regular checkups that screen for common long-term side effects.

How did you wind up in the music industry?

Music has always been a part of my life. I can remember in the 80s, my brother and I would listen to Casey Kasem's Top 40. We'd tape our favorite songs off his radio show. During treatment, those tapes on my Walkman were a great escape. Many would never guess that Tears for Fears, INXS, and Prince remind me of cancer treatment.

In 2007, I got my first record deal after country singer Sammy Kershaw showed interest in one of the most ridiculous songs I'd ever written and recorded. Although he never recorded my song, I signed a deal with Mighty Loud Records. My first radio single was “Lay Me Down.”

What inspires your music?

Some of the hardest times of my life have inspired me to write songs that made their way to TV commercials and PSAs. In 2011, I wrote and recorded the song

“Where Hope Lives” for the American Cancer Society. And that same song was later used in a PSA for the Nashville Rescue Mission.

What advice would you give to someone facing cancer?

I would ask that they always have hope and know that although cancer can be very tough, medical advancements are always being made. I'd also advise those who are facing cancer to surround themselves with amazing people and take up a hobby that they can look forward to each day. Everybody needs that “thing” that keeps them motivated and excited about waking up the next day.

I always recommend that anyone facing cancer seek a second opinion if they feel they've come to a dead-end with their current doctors, or if they feel they aren't being heard. I've literally saved my life just by switching doctors.

What's in the future for you?

In the future, I want to share my story and show others affected by cancer that they can overcome. My company for kids with cancer, Bamba Box, will be working on a cool project with the nonprofit organization CURE Childhood Cancer and Blackberry Smoke, a band that has done so much to raise funds and awareness for childhood cancer.

Ryan Hamner is a four-time Hodgkin lymphoma survivor, author, musician, and the creator of Bamba Box (BambaBox.com). You can learn more about Ryan at RyanHamnerOfficial.com and follow him on Instagram (@2survive1) and on Facebook (@Ryan.Hamner).