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## Cancer patient gives doctor dose from the heart

10/06/05

By Louis Llovio

By all accounts Steven Engelman of Reisterstown should be dead.

The 38-year-old father of three survived Hodgkin's disease when he was 20, a heart attack and quadruple bypass surgery when he was 27 and a cancerous tumor on his spine six years ago - and he found out earlier this year that he's been suffering from undiagnosed lung cancer for the past 4 1/2 years.

Engelman credits his ability to survive these 18 years' worth of medical disasters to one man: Dr. David Sidransky.

Sidransky is professor of otolaryngology (disorders of the ear, nose and throat), oncology, pathology, urology and director of the Head and Neck Cancer Research group at Johns Hopkins University and Hospital.

Sidransky and Engelman first met when the doctor, then a fellow, treated the 20-year-old with Hodgkin's.

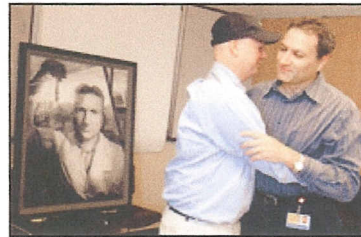
Since then, Engelman said, the doctor, despite his work as a researcher, has been there for him "every step of the way."

As a gesture of thanks for the years of advice, Engelman hired Owings Mills artist Jen Seidel-Walsh to paint a portrait of Sidransky.

Known for roaming the halls of Hopkins in a yarmulke and cowboy boots, Sidransky was voted as one of "America's Best" by Time Magazine in 2001.

Seidel-Walsh, whose family runs a Pikesville company creating makeup for people injured and disfigured in accidents, agreed to paint a portrait of the doctor using the photo from the Time article.

"I put my heart and soul into this," she said.



Steven Engelman, left, of Reisterstown hugs Dr. David Sidransky, director of the Head and Neck Cancer Research group at Johns Hopkins University, after giving the physician a portrait.

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A cover of Chesapeake Home magazine, featuring a house interior and the text "SUBSCRIBE" and "CHESAPEAKE HOME".

She spent about 60 hours working on the acrylic black-and-white portrait.

The painting was presented to Sidransky at an informal ceremony at Hopkins' hospital complex Oct. 3.

"I can't believe with everything else going on in your life you did this," said a visibly touched Sidransky.

Both Seidel-Walsh and Engelman hope that the portrait will hang in the doctor's Hopkins office for years to come.

"I know exactly where this is going to go," Sidransky said. "I know just the wall in my new office."

For Engelman, the money he paid Seidel-Walsh for the commission is just the beginning of what he wants to give back.

"I decided on the painting because it was more personal than giving money," he said. "I wanted to do something for David that came from the heart."

Sidransky said he owes Engelman as well.

"Steve, I owe you. I'll never forget how you helped me become the doctor I am."

Engelman, who took his last dose of chemotherapy Sept. 23, said that he intends to donate money earmarked for cancer research as well.

But now that the painting has been dedicated he has other things on his mind.

According to the American Lung Association, only 15 percent of those diagnosed with lung cancer survive five years.

Engelman is a few months shy of the five-year mark, and reaching it is his goal.

"I don't know if I can make that happen," he said. "Why it grew for four years and I'm still alive is mind boggling. But I can't think of dying. I have three kids; they're my passion. I don't have an option."

Engelman is separated from his wife, and his three sons live with him.

Sidransky has him taking the new cancer-fighting drug Evastin, and he goes to the gym three times a week to stay strong.

Even if he does fight off the cancer in his lungs, his greatest fear is that it will spread to his brain and liver.

"Once it gets there," he said. "There's not much of a shot."

That threat has him on antidepressants, but it also motivates him to continue the fight.

"I intend to fight, fight, fight," he said. "I'll do whatever I have to do. I'll never stop."

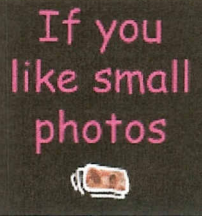
Sidransky, he knows, will fight along with him.

"I trust him with my life."

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