



THE POWER of *Passion*

When it comes to love, Susan Laine and Steve Craig believe timing is everything. "I have a wonderful husband, and I'm thankful every day that I met him," says Susan. "But I know that if I'd met him earlier, it wouldn't have been right for us."

Steve agrees completely. "No question about it. We were both too career-driven and self-centered when we were younger. We met at the right time."

And for this Encino, Calif.-based couple, who met online through *Match.com* when both were in their 40s, the timing was perfect. "We had a whirlwind romance," confides Steve, 49, whose first marriage ended in divorce. "Susan and I got engaged 10 weeks after meeting, and married eight months after our first date."

That was more than six years ago. Today, Steve and Susan are about as close as two people can be. They share everything, including a home, a financial-planning firm, their pets (two Great Danes named Casper and Rudie, and a Wheaten terrier named Max), a passion for life and for each other—and the experience of living with cancer.

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• How one
• California couple
• has lived and
• loved through
• two cases of
• cancer.

Couple Power

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An 'open book'

Steve was diagnosed with *Hodgkin's lymphoma* (a cancer that originates in a type of white blood cells called *lymphocytes*), when he was just 19. He underwent chemotherapy and radiation treatment, and his cancer went into remission. However, doctors cautioned Steve that he might one day face delayed treatment side effects that could complicate or even shorten his life.

Despite that ominous warning, Steve didn't hold back when it came to confiding in Susan that he'd had cancer. "I share everything about myself early on; being a cancer survivor is very much a part of my story," he says. In fact, when he met Susan in 2002, he told her of his cancer on their first date.

Susan admits that the news was sobering. "I fell in love so hard and so fast," she says. "At one point, I wished that he hadn't had cancer. But I knew that the experience helped to make Steve the person I fell in love with. The only thing that bothered me," she adds, "was that Steve had made a deal with God—that if God let Steve survive 30 years, that would be enough." The 30-year mark was fast approaching; the couple met when Steve was 42.

Although it's been 30 years since Steve's original diagnosis, there have been some bumps in the road. "I'm suffering delayed effects of my radiation treatment," he explains. In 2004, after he and Susan had been married for a year, Steve developed lumps on his thyroid. Although the lumps were not cancer, he had to have his thyroid removed. Then, in 2008, Steve learned that he had treatment-associated *aortic calcification* (a buildup of calcium deposits on the aortic valve in the heart) and needed open-heart valve-replacement surgery.

Scary news

The couple's medical problems didn't end there. In January 2008, Susan, then 50, had a lump removed from her leg, and doctors at the USC/Norris Cancer Hospital in Los Angeles did a biopsy on

it. Susan's brother, USC gastroenterologist Loren Laine, MD, had helped Susan find the right doctors and was with her every step of the way. After the tests, he was the one who told Susan the results. "When my brother pulled into the driveway," she says, "I knew it was bad news."

Susan has *follicular lymphoma* (a non-Hodgkin's lymph-node cancer), which is seldom curable. But it is often treatable, if it hasn't spread to the bone marrow.

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Fortunately, Susan's bone marrow was cancer-free, which meant the disease had been caught early. "If you have Stage I disease and you undergo radiation, there's a 30% chance the cancer won't recur," says Susan. "I'm focused and a positive thinker," she adds in her always-upbeat tone. "I know it's never going to recur, because I'm not going to let it!"

An avid golfer who works to stay in shape, Susan says she was made aware of possible radiation side effects before starting treatment in mid-January. But she wasn't prepared for the fatigue. "I had to stop going to the gym," she recalls. "We also tried to play golf, but I couldn't even make it to nine holes."

Susan persevered, however, and learned how to plan effectively around her treatment. "I completed my radiation treatment two days before Passover," she says, "and we planned the cooking so that everything was done for the Seder and I wouldn't tax myself too much. I'm really lucky Steven and my mother were around."

Finding support

Although every successful marriage takes work, Susan and Steve's has weathered some truly daunting challenges. Early on, Susan's father became ill, and for three years she had to take over the family restaurant. Soon after that came Steve's cancer-related problems, with Susan's right behind. How did they cope?

For one thing, they reached out to others. "We're active in the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society," says Susan, "and the day I was diagnosed, Steve immediately called them so I'd have the organization as a resource. With Steve having gone through it, too," she notes, "I also had a built-in support group."

In addition to getting support from others who were currently undergoing treatment, Susan found comfort in unexpected places. "I'd started going to a professional women's networking group, and a meeting was held four days after my diagnosis," she says. "At first, I wasn't going to tell, but the topic was 'The Challenges You're Going to Face This Year.' So I told them. And 32 women provided an outpouring of love."

Meeting of the minds—and hearts

Steve and Susan are a couple of one heart—and one mind. Both are passionate about the power of positive thinking. "We know you can worry yourself sick," says Steve. "If you believe that, you have to believe the opposite—that we can think ourselves well."

Being on the same wavelength when it comes to big issues doesn't mean they never disagree. Their mutual passion is evident to others, including a woman who shares their office. "She hears us argue at times," confides Susan, "and one day she said to Steve, 'You guys have a very passionate relationship. I hope it spills over to places other than work.'"

Steve and Susan say it does. "It makes a big difference that we were both older when we met," concludes Susan. "We know we're going to be together forever!"

—Marc Lichter