



# Bruce Gimplin: CLL Is Just Part of My Identity

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## **Bruce Gimplin:**

My name is Bruce Gimplin. I'm 56 years old and I was diagnosed with CLL in 2008. I'm originally from Brooklyn, New York. And I live in Seattle, Washington now and I work as a clinical social worker, actually, a psychotherapist.

I remember when I was diagnosed. I walked into, I, my journey was that I had a sinus surgery and when they did the pre-op blood test, my white count was a little up. And after the surgery, I said to the doctor, this doesn't seem right. You know, I feel fine and everything else, and so they did another blood test, and it came out just a notch higher.

It was about 11,000 maybe twelve 12,000. And they sent it to a hematologist, and the hematologist said come in and see me. Ad I walked into the office and, and I actually very much appreciate this, is that he, he, as soon as I sat down, he goes I'm almost sure you have CLL. And he said, matter of fact, I am sure.

And what I said to him was, I'm shocked, but I'm not surprised. And the not surprised part was that I have family history of, of blood cancers. And, and so, I kind of expected it, in a way. There was a part of me that was not surprised by that.

So what happened at first was that it was, the CLL part of me, if I may, was just, it was my identity and it was very hard to go, oh, I'm Bruce with CLL. It was more like, I have CLL, who's Bruce? And so, as I went along, I tried to incorporate that and make it part of my identity, not my whole identity.

And this was in 2008, when I was diagnosed, and one of the first things I did, because he said, we're going to do watch and wait, was what can I do? What, what is it that I can do that I feel like I'm actually helping myself and taking care of myself?

So, I, because I'm, my background's in social work, I immediately started calling all the cancer centers from MD Anderson, Mayo, all of them, and finding out what are you doing, what are some of the things that are going on, what's happening?

I got a lot of information on supplements and some of the other things that were going on, so I can then incorporate that into my life. So not only do I feel that I'm watching and waiting and just, you know, every three or six months getting this abstract piece of paper that says my blood, my, my blood count is going up.

I was able to go okay, so I'm going to take, do nutrition, exercise, whatever it is that's important to me.

I come from the generation, or my parents' generation, where, when you got cancer, you didn't say it out loud, what you said, the big C or you got, and so I, I think some of that, it was in me. I was wondering, you know, I'm a, I'm a caregiver. I help people.

I meet people where they are and so I kept, and I still do keep, what they call a therapeutic veneer, where I can listen to you, and I can hear your issues and my helping you is, is almost out of body, in a way.

But the more that my white blood count goes up, the more that I realize that this is part of me and you become, it's a new normal, if I may, as we, you know, you, a well-used expression, I now think about where I want to go with my work, how do I want to do that. And part of it is, this is part of me.

That doesn't make me less of a therapist, less of a professional, less of a person. It makes me who I am. And, and so in a way, it's time to, to talk about it and be part of the community, which I think is so important.

Talking about it brings up, well, the, that, the expression that comes to my mind is if you wish for it and you get it, what do you do with it? And so, this is where I wanted to go with it, and it actually feels kind of comfortable.

I don't know what it's going to bring. I, I, I hope, somehow, it will touch others, because I think keeping, keeping yourself busy in the way that, the things that are important to you, to keep doing, and to be you through this journey is the most important thing.

One of the voices that I have that helps me counsel myself is that I, I tell myself, again, part of it is that I am Bruce with CLL. I have allowed myself and, and, and intentionally, have been working with the grief that goes along with it, that's, that my life is different now.

One of the things that happened for me, I was diagnosed when I was about 50, and one of the things that I said to my doctor was, when, you know, I'm going into the new transition, you know, look, midlife, later midlife. And so when something changes in me, I'm going to start asking myself, is this the CLL, or is this just aging?

And so, one of the things to do is try to allow myself to relax, take care of myself. I have a wonderful support in my wife and family and friends and, and it's okay just to be me, and, meaning, the CLL.

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