



Every Day I Fight: Making a Difference, Kicking Cancer's Ass

By Stuart Scott, Larry Platt

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The fearless, intimate, and inspiring story behind ESPN anchor Stuart Scott’s unrelenting fight against cancer, with a foreword by Robin Roberts.

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Every Day I Fight is a saga of love, an inspiration to us all.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In his posthumously released memoir, *Every Day I Fight*, the ESPN anchor chronicles the battle with cancer that ultimately claimed his life but never took his spirit... The most poignant takeaway of Scott's battle: Having cancer didn't make him a fighter. He was a fighter long before cancer, so trying to stay alive was natural, not extraordinary."—**Stephen A. Crockett, Jr., TheRoot.com**

"Scott's candor and combative energy are what drives his story... Being a conscientious journalist, Scott diligently, unsparingly reports on what was going on inside his head and in his personal life through treatment, remission and the return of the disease. In recounting every mood swing, every surge of hope and dread, he is imparting a lesson to his daughters, Taelor and Sydni—and to us: 'I want them to take every note of every moment and to make them count.'"—**USA Today**

"After a seven-year struggle with cancer, Scott, an ESPN SportsCenter anchor and commentator who died in January, wrote this memoir—with Platt (*Only the Strong Survived*)—with the same out-of-the-box energy that he brought to his shows... Baring his soul and not backing down, Scott reveals his physical and psychological pain, writing that he knew he needed to be strong because he 'wanted to walk Taelor and Sydni down the aisle.'... Scott taught his daughters that 'life consists of two dates with a dash in between,' and judging by this inspirational narrative, Scott has made that dash significant."—**Publisher's Weekly (starred review)**

"A memorable, joyful ode to a life well-lived and well-loved. As Scott would say: 'Booyah.'"—**Marilyn Dahl, Shelf Awareness**

"Scott writes about illness and loss with a relentless energy that makes this the happiest sad book I can recall. The book is a lot like Scott on television — over the top, irresistibly sincere. He has not produced a standard strength-through-adversity tale. "Trust me," he says to the people praising his fortitude after his illness became public, "I ain't courageous. I just don't want to die." And there are two simple reasons Scott did not want to die: his young daughters, Taelor and Sydni.... "Every Day I Fight," which Scott wrote with journalist Larry Platt, is the only possible title for this book. That's because fighting — for safety, for fun, for team, for family, for life — was a big part of being Stuart Scott.... Scott's unforgettable phraseology crosses over into his experience with cancer.... Stuart Scott was loving and he was loved, and then he was gone. But in these pages, this loudest of voices reveals the quiet dignity of his fight."—**Carlos Lozada, The Washington Post**

"An uplifting read.... The power of Scott's memoir is that it invites readers to think about how to handle the inevitable, either as a patient or a patient's friend or loved one.... Scott wanted to leave something behind for his daughters about his life and struggle. He ended up leaving something of value for all of us."—**Neil Best, Newsday (Long Island, NY)**

"In *Every Day I Fight*, ESPN anchor Stuart Scott's posthumous memoir, his voice is as distinctive and memorable as it ever was on-air."—**Sherryl Connelly, New York Daily News**

"There's a lot of pain and sadness within the covers of this book, but there's inspiration and humor, too. To the very end, Scott was, as he would say, "cooler than the other side of the pillow."—**Booklist**

"If you get that dire diagnosis, I hope by seeing Stu in action, that it will take away some of the anxiety that you can't live your life, that you can't work out, that you can't work. And seeing him thriving—not surviving, but thriving—I think people will take that and apply it to whatever it is that they are faced with."—**Robin Roberts**

"There are a lot of people who see [Scott] as a beacon of light, and something that they can relate to....I hear from people every day. He's on TV and he's doing what he loves. They take strength from the fact that he has not been paralyzed by his illness and that he has decided to live life on his own terms."—**Doug Ulman, president and CEO of the Livestrong Foundation**

"I thought I knew what tough was. But, in his battle with cancer, Stuart Scott is the strongest person I know. The courage he shows in *Every Day I Fight* will inspire you, as he has inspired me."—**Charles Barkley**

"I've known Stuart Scott since we were undergrads at UNC and I watched him become a groundbreaking sportscaster. But *Every Day I Fight* shows his greatest accomplishment: as a dad, who fights for his daughters every day. As a journalist, a dad and a cancer fighter, there's no quit in Stuart."—**Michael Jordan**

About the Author

Stuart Scott was an anchor and commentator for ESPN's *SportsCenter*. He was the lead host for the NBA on ESPN and ABC, as well as a host on *Monday Night Football* since that program moved to ESPN in 2006. His unique style and vocabulary made him one of the network's most popular and recognized anchors. He won the Jimmy V Award for Perseverance at the 2014 ESPY Awards. He died in January 2015.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY I FIGHT

My phone was blowing up. The text messages were coming nonstop, and, with each one, I was feeling more and more like an imposter. There were hundreds of them, almost all using words like "courageous," "brave," "inspirational."

Only I felt like none of those things. No, the only thing I felt, the only thing I've ever felt since the day in 2007 I learned that what I thought was appendicitis was actually a rare form of cancer, was . . . fear. To readers of that morning's *New York Times*, I may have seemed courageous. But trust me: I ain't courageous. I just don't want to die.

The article, on this March day in 2014, was headlined "A Story of Perseverance: ESPN Anchor's Private Battle with Cancer Becomes a Public One" and it had all the background. It had the three surgeries that had removed my appendix, large intestine, some lymph nodes, other organs; the fifty-eight infusions of chemotherapy I'd undergone to that point; the Wound VAC that drained the foot-long scar that ran from chest to belly button and that had taken two months to heal after a ten-hour surgery in the fall of 2013. And it had me wearing a black "Everyday I Fight" T-shirt at the mixed martial arts studio near my Connecticut home, where I go straight from chemotherapy to jab and hook and kick until I collapse, drained.

But that's not courage. That's survival. When cancer storms into your life, you have a choice: fight, or curl up and just be a cancer patient. That doesn't mean I don't have my moments. There are times when I say to

myself, *It's too much, I don't have the energy for this fight.* There are times I bawl my eyes out and tell my girlfriend, Kristin, who has slept on a cot by my bedside throughout countless hospital stays, "I'm scared, I'm really scared." I come from jockdom; what guy likes being that vulnerable? I have many such moments, but they're not the *last* moment I have. And they're not my most enduring moments.

Because having cancer, it turns out, is more complicated than you'd think. Like any great opponent, cancer is in your face. It practices the art of intimidation. It gets inside your head and messes with your thinking. It takes its toll on you physically, but the real burden is mental. I've told my doctors I don't want to know my prognosis: "I'm not interested in hearing how long *you* think I *might* have." That would be just another thing to be frightened of and obsess over.

But let's keep this real. I'm forty-nine. There's a good chance I'm going to die a helluva lot earlier than I ever wanted to. There's a good chance I'm going to die soon. And I know it. I know it every moment of every day. And that reality is never *not* with me.

So this book is a chronicle of my fight against cancer, but it's even more than that. It's really a memoir of a life well fought; in sports, the media, or the cancer ward, the one true thing I've learned is that life is hard but that there is redemption in the struggle.

Cancer is just the latest, and most terrifying, fight. Though I hate this most unwanted of companions, I respect it for its power—and there are even times when I'm grateful for what it's given me. Don't get me wrong: From day one, I was committed to beating it. But along the way, I've learned how paradoxical the relationship between patient and disease really is; cancer turns the old cliché on its head. It can kill you *and* make you stronger, all at the same time.

That's why words like "brave" don't really apply when confronting cancer. When you first hear that you have it—a doctor prefaced breaking the news to me by saying, "Things just got more complicated"—you say to yourself: *I'm going to die.* And, in my case, the very next thought was even more of a sledgehammer: *I won't be here for my two daughters.* After a while, once the sting subsides, you ask yourself: *How do I fight cancer?*

Here's what I knew about cancer: You get it, you die. But I'd always been a competitive sonofabitch. I turned down a couple of football scholarships out of high school to attend my dream school, the University of North Carolina, where I was friendly with Michael Jordan before he was the greatest who ever lived; I planned on being a walk-on wide receiver there, but an eye disease, keratoconus, ended my collegiate career before it began. As a sports broadcaster debuting on ESPN in the early nineties, I brought the in-your-face attitude of the music I came up on—hip-hop—to *SportsCenter*. That wasn't a planned thing; it was just who I was. Yeah, I'm young, I'm African-American, and I'm telling you about this game like I'm talking trash with my boys back home: "*Man, Mike about to put it on these boys! Mike about to mess them up!*" Even my most famous catchphrase—*Boo-yah!*—was all about capturing those adrenaline-fueled moments of intimidation in sports.

Yet behind the on-air bravado was a craftsman; I actually kept a running chart of how many statistics colleagues like Keith Olbermann, Dan Patrick, and Chris "Boomer" Berman used in their broadcasts because I was determined to lead the nation in giving the audience cold, hard facts behind the loudness. You could hate me for my style, but my substance was going to be beyond reproach.

On the football field or the TV set, the only way I knew how to succeed was to push myself, to be stronger than my opponent, to work harder. But now there I was, forty-two years old, and the opponent before me was

a freakin' assassin. How do you work harder than cancer? I didn't know. But when I want to work hard, I go to the gym. After my first four-hour chemo treatment, I was hooked up to a two-day chemo drip in a little bag that attached to a port in my stomach—and thirty minutes later, I was in the gym. On the elliptical machine, I looked down and noticed the name of the medicine dripping into my body: It was called fluorouracil, or 5-FU for short.

I smiled, said a little prayer, and then stuck that pack into the pocket of my gym shorts and said to myself: *FU, cancer*. The athlete in me realized: This thing growing inside me was trying to kick my ass. Well, I've gotta hit first and kick *its* ass. So I attacked the elliptical and made a promise to myself: From then on, I'd be working out within thirty minutes of each chemo treatment. Later, I'd skip the gym—there were too many inquiries about my health; they were well-meaning, but we members of the alternative universe that is CancerWorld chuckle at the overly earnest, stage-whispered “how you feeling” queries meant to convey deep concern—and instead I started doing P90X or mixed martial arts in the living room of my house. From day one, working out was my own private “FU” to cancer.

Because cancer is trying to rob the most precious thing in the world to me: time with my daughters, Sydni, fifteen, and Taelor, nineteen. They're why I say “FU” to cancer every day. When I have those moments—when I say to myself, *This is too hard, I'm too tired to go on*—I remind myself that cancer forced me to reconsider my life's goal and that I haven't reached it yet: I want to walk Taelor and Sydni down the aisle. I don't want them with an uncle or some father figure; that's my place.

I hate that a group of abnormal cells inside my body has such control over my life. At the same time, I can't deny that cancer has actually given me something. Because it gives every moment meaning. Because I'm on a time clock and I don't know what that time clock says. And no moments are deeper than those with my knuckleheaded daughters, for whom I fight every day.

A few weeks ago, Sydni came home—I share custody with my ex-wife—and asked if her girlfriends could come over and get ready with her for that night's dance. And, of course, could I drive them to it?

Hell, yes. “Do you want me to get some chips?” I called to her.

“Sure, Dad,” she said. “Get some chips.” I could almost hear the eye roll through her closed bedroom door. Sydni is beautiful and talented—she's the soloist in her school choir—but she's at that age where anything Dad does, by virtue of him having done it, is uncool.

On our way to the dance, the classic old-school tune “Cameosis” by Cameo came on. I reached for the volume and cranked it up, bellowing, “Now, this is when music was music!” and started singing along:

*When you hear a group that moves you
And feel it in your feet
You ask yourself, hold on a minute
What group now can this be.*

The girls were all laughing, but Sydni wasn't having it: “All right, Dad, whatever,” she said, insisting on a newer sound track. Kendrick Lamar came on, and now the girls were the ones singing, Sydni most of all, all of them smiling—they were showing the old man something.

And I just looked at them through that rearview mirror and thought: *This is so cool. I'll never do something more important than this. Taking my daughter and her friends to a dance.*

This is what cancer does. It makes you look fresh at small moments and see them—really see them—as if for the first time. Pre-cancer, the ride to the dance would have been merely fun, and then I wouldn't have thought about it again. But it wouldn't have hit deep. It wouldn't have seared into my mind's eye the image of Sydni's smiling, singing face.

During Super Bowl week last year, I met Taelor for lunch in New York City. She was between classes at Barnard College. We sat there, my firstborn and I, as she chatted away: about an assignment for sociology, her roommate, a boy who might possibly like her. My phone was vibrating, again and again. The old me would have answered. There's always time for my girls, after all, right? Not the cancer me. *Let it go, man*, the cancer me said. Nothing's more important than being with this person who, together with Sydni, changed my life more than anyone. Later, Kristin would say: "I called you today," and I'd reply: "I was with Taelor." 'Nuff said.

I'm not trying to "Kumbaya" you. My daughters are *teenagers*, man. Sydni is in perpetual eye-roll mode and Taelor is a typical college student; she'll call for advice or to ask for money or to share a joke—only, of course, not as often as her needy Dad wishes she would. Teenage girls are a whole 'nother thing. They get angry with me, annoyed, embarrassed. Friends tell me they'll come around. Teenage girls always come around to their dad eventually.

But that well-meaning advice strikes to the heart of my fear. I don't have "eventually." The truth is, I'm not as afraid of dying as I am of not being here for my daughters' aha moment. I'm on the clock and I want to be here when they get it—when they get what I got about my dad: that all the stuff he did that ticked me off? He did that *for* me.

Ray Scott was a federal postal inspector—the dude carried a gun and cuffs; I'd grow muscles when the neighborhood kids would see him. He promised his four kids that he'd pay our college tuition if we maintained a 2.0 grade point average. After my sophomore year, I was skating along with a 2.7. Dad said he was restructuring our deal—he'd only pay if I kept a 3.0 or better. "That's crap," I said. That wasn't the deal. It wasn't fair—a common refrain from my teenagers today.

But then something happened: In the fall of my junior year, I was heavily involved with my fraternity, I played club football, *and* I posted a 3.2 GPA. The next semester, I upped that to 3.6. The following one, 3.4. I remained pissed until years later, when it dawned on me: Dad *knew* I was better than a 2.7 student. And he knew I needed to be pushed. Funny, isn't it, how much smarter our dads are when *we* get older?

That was my aha moment about my dad. Will Sydni and Taelor have theirs about me in time? Maybe that's self-ish of me to wonder. Maybe their aha moment about me is for them—not me. But I can't help myself. I want them to realize that everything I do, I do with their best interests at heart—and I want that to happen while I'm still around for them to talk to me about it, like I did with my dad.

This is what cancer does. It makes everything profound. It makes everything urgent.

A couple of years ago, during a game of the NBA Finals, a couple of security guards were escorting Sydni, Taelor, and me through the concourse; we were on our way to see the family of a friend who was an NBA executive. Because I'm on TV, I tend to get recognized when I'm out, but this was a sports-centric crowd, so I was being swarmed. As fans saw me, they started to call to me. Some asked for autographs. One guy planted himself in front of me.

"Sorry, man," I said, "can't—in a hurry," as security helped us sidestep him.

“You’re an asshole!” he called out.

I laughed. Taelor was shocked: “Dad, that guy called you an asshole!” she exclaimed. “I mean, you *can* be an asshole, but he doesn’t know that!”

I cracked up. But back at *SportsCenter*, the anecdote prompted a bull session hypothetical. A bunch of middle-aged sportscasters started to wonder: What would it take for each of us to throw down?

“Man, someone calling me a name or cross-eyed, that’s funny,” I said. “That ain’t worth stepping outside.”

Now, I know how to fight. I train. I know how to punch, how to kick. But you’re not going to call me a name and get me to fight.

Then the question came: What would you do if someone called one of your *daughters* a name? I paused. “I’d put him down,” I said.

That might sound like a contradiction, but it’s actually very calculated. I want my girls to see me walk away if someone calls me a name. But I also want them to know that I won’t let anybody mess with them. I want them to know I’ll protect them. Maybe I’m wrong. But I feel this overwhelming need to show them how much I’m willing to fight for them.

And that’s what I’m doing every day against cancer: fighting for them. This book is about my fight against cancer, yes, but it’s also about why I fight, whom I’m fighting for, and how I find the energy to stay in the ring.

It’s also about the central paradox of that fight: You hate this thing inside you. You want to rid your body of it. At the same time, you’re aware of what it’s done to you: how it gives you an urgency to live—really live—every day; how it makes you see the profound in the everyday; how it teaches patience and humility. The contradiction is as top-of-mind as the fact of the cancer itself: Cancer can kill you, but it can also make you the man you always wanted to be.

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