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## Cancer survivor finds love at Gilda's

Michael H. Hodges / The Detroit News

The dog clamped down tight on the 11-year-old's nose, and only let go once somebody ripped the animal off.

The result, a scarred face with a mangled nose, haunted Matt Cummings, 40, all his life until -- and here's the kicker -- he got cancer.

Matt's sitting on the deck of his Ferndale cottage with his fiancée, Sheryl Abrams. They plan to elope sometime in the next month.

They met two years ago at the cancer-support group, Gilda's Club, when Sheryl -- an oncology nurse at the Karmanos Cancer Institute -- spoke to survivors.

A mutual friend had decided they'd be great for each other. They met but didn't reconnect that evening, so the friend nagged Matt until he e-mailed Sheryl.

The two went out, eating omelettes at a VFW post in Ferndale. Things were so easy between them that Sheryl, 40 as well, had no qualms about calling Matt while driving home to say what a marvelous time she'd had.

Some relationships just fall into place. This is one.

It's easy to spot the role cancer played in bringing them together. Had Matt not come down with Hodgkin's disease in 2001 -- and gotten cured -- he wouldn't have been volunteering at Gilda's Club.

That's the obvious, almost mechanistic, explanation.

But at a deeper level, Matt insists, his cancer freed up something that had been bound tight inside him all his life.

Hoping to help others confronting the same issue, he wrote a book, "Cancer Boy," but found he couldn't address the present without confronting the demons haunting his past.

It all boiled down to one simple, inescapable fact.

"I'd never allowed myself to love and be loved, because," Matt says, and he gestures at his face, "I always had this nose thing."

While "wallowing in chemicals" during his four months of chemo, whatever mental apparatus had imprisoned him fell away like a dried husk.

He knows many cancer survivors resist stitching a silver lining onto the disease, and he understands that.

"But without my cancer," he says simply, "I never would have met Sheryl."

Small wonder then that the two are huge Gilda's Club boosters, even sponsoring an August bike ride to benefit the group -- and prefer donations to that over wedding gifts.

Of Sheryl, Matt says he adores "her laugh, her smile, and her big heart. It's one of the things I admire about her job," he says. "She's a shining beacon in those people's lives."

Sheryl's crying now, head thrown back, and trying to wipe the tears with the back of her hand.

"Wow," she says, regaining control. "That was really sweet. Wanna get married? I'm free next month."

You can reach Michael H. Hodges at (313) 222-6021 or [mhodges@detnews.com](mailto:mhodges@detnews.com).

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Ricardo Thomas / The Detroit News

Cancer survivor Matt Cummings met his fiancée, oncology nurse Sheryl Abrams, at Gilda's House. [See full image](#)

### Charity Bike Ride for Gilda's Club

**When:** Bike ride Aug. 19 -- but kickoff planning event at 6:30 tonight.

**Where:** Gilda's Club Metro Detroit, 3517 Rochester Road, Royal Oak.

**Information:** Prospective "Gilda's Riders" should visit [www.firstgiving.com/gcmd](http://www.firstgiving.com/gcmd), or call (248) 547-8033.

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