



## Exploring the Human Heart, by Lance Armstrong

I thought I knew what fear was, until I heard the words 'You have cancer'. Real fear came with an unmistakable sensation: it was as though all my blood started flowing in the wrong direction. My previous fears, fear of not being liked, fear of being laughed at, fear of losing my money, suddenly seemed like small cowardices. Everything now stacked up differently: the anxieties of life -- a flat tire, losing my career, a traffic jam -- were reprioritized into need versus want, real problem as opposed to minor scare. A bumpy plane ride was just a bumpy plane ride, it wasn't cancer. One definition of "human" is as follows: 'characteristic of people as opposed to God or animals or machines, especially susceptible to weakness, and therefore showing the qualities of man.' Athletes don't tend to think of themselves in these terms; they're too busy cultivating the aura of invincibility to admit to being fearful, weak, defenseless, vulnerable, or fallible, and for that reason neither are they especially kind, considerate, merciful, benign, lenient, or forgiving, to themselves or to anyone else around them. But as I sat in my house alone that first night, it was humbling to be so scared. More than that, it was humanizing. [...] Epilogue: Pain is temporary. It may last a minute, or an hour, or a day, or a year, but eventually, it will subside and something else will take its place. If I quit, however, it lasts forever. That surrender, even the smallest act of giving up, stays with me. So when I feel like quitting, I ask myself, which would I rather live with? Facing up to that question, and finding a way to go on, is the real reward, better than any trophy. By now you've figured out that I'm into pain. Why? Because it's self-revelatory, that's why. There is a point in every race when a rider encounters his real opponent and understands that it's himself. In my most painful moments on the bike, I am at my most curious, and I wonder each and every time how I will respond. Will I discover my innermost weakness, or will I seek out my innermost strength? It's an open ended question whether or not I will be able to finish the race. You might say pain is my chosen way of exploring the human heart. I don't always win. Sometimes just finishing is the best I can do. But with each race, I feel that I further define my capacity for living. That's why I ride, and why I try to ride hard, even when I don't have to. --Lance Armstrong  
Seven Time Tour-de-France champion, cancer survivor