

COURAGE, LIFE & HOPE

REFLECTIONS

of a journey



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Rev. Gerald Behling

Rev. Gerald Behling must have been living right. In his 73 years, he'd never been admitted to the hospital - he wasn't even born in one.

Because the retired pastor from Townsend had led such a healthy life, and because he had participated in a cancer program that tested regularly for the disease, Behling was shocked when his doctor diagnosed him with colorectal cancer.

"It was a very decided surprise," said Behling, now 74. "I had been having stomach problems for three or four weeks, which I very seldom had, but I was confident I didn't have cancer."

Behling was diagnosed June 5, 2001 and had surgery the next day to remove one-third of his colon. But doctors discovered the cancer had traveled to the lymph nodes and liver. Not long after the surgery, Behling began participating in a clinical research trial that called for him to receive chemotherapy and an experimental drug.

Despite the fact that his full head of hair is now a fuzzy "chemo do" and his thick, snowy beard is now thin and short, Behling has tolerated the treatment extremely well. And he doesn't despair the minor side effects because he has found attitude to be too important in his life.

"I've got the same amount of time as everyone else has," he said.

"I've got today. No one knows if they have tomorrow."

His todays have been great, partly because the cancer has brought his family closer together. After the diagnosis, his two sons drove from St. Louis, Mo. and St. Paul, Minn. to be with him. His daughter recently moved to Racine from Tennessee and drives up with her 18-month-old son to visit. Norma, his wife of 52 years, accompanies him to Antigo and Wausau for therapy sessions and has helped him stay upbeat.

And his faith has sustained him.

"I had no doubt that the good Lord had me in the palm of his hand and didn't desert me," Behling said. "Your faith in a loving God really takes care of you."

With all the love he has received, Behling has been able to enjoy the benefits of cancer. He has enjoyed the camaraderie of

fellow patients and developed good relationships with caregivers.

"I haven't been deprived of life's essentials - the things that make life worthwhile," he said. "Having cancer doesn't take them away. I don't have the strength I used to have, man, no. But I do the things I want to do: I go out and cut wood, I rake the lawn. It looks now like I have to cut the grass."

During Behling's years as a pastor he ministered to many people with serious diseases. He views his own bout with cancer as a lesson in empathy.

