

COURAGE, LIFE & HOPE

REFLECTIONS *of a journey*



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CANCER CENTER

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Mary Friederichs

When Mary Friederichs had emergency surgery in April 1997 for a ruptured ovary, it was the beginning of a series of scary discoveries. The problem turned out to be a rare type of ovarian tumor, and physicians performed a hysterectomy.

Unexpectedly, the tests Mary underwent prior to the procedure found breast cancer too, so she ended up receiving chemotherapy for both cancers. The breast cancer diagnosis caught her completely off guard.

“I wasn’t prepared for it at all,” Mary said. “I wasn’t even thinking along those lines.”

Just hearing the word “cancer” was difficult for Mary to deal with, because she wasn’t familiar with the disease; she hadn’t been around many cancer patients.

“I had only known one person before me who had had chemo; it was my mother, and she died,” Mary said. “That was scary.”

But Mary came through the treatments well, and as the months rolled by, she made a pleasant discovery. “One of the things I learned was how big a support group I have, and how many different areas it comes from,” she said. “You don’t realize how many people are in your life.”

When she was first diagnosed, there had been no formal cancer support group available to her. So when one formed about a year later, Mary got involved right away. And she has stayed involved, drawing strength from, and providing help to, dozens of women with similar experiences.

This network proved extremely helpful when Mary’s cancer returned in February 2002. She needed all the support she could get because, following surgery, she began a round of chemotherapy that flattened her.

“The first time I didn’t have any trouble with it at all,” Mary said. “The second time, it was a lot rougher. (Dr. Ahuja) told me it wasn’t going to be easy, and he wasn’t kidding.”

The treatment drained Mary, and kept her off work for more than six months. During that time she battled a staph infection and pneumonia. But these days she’s feeling good, and her follow-ups continue to provide positive news.

Mary is thankful for the past seven years, and for the ways cancer has changed her.

“It shows you how much you can go through, and come out on the other side,” she said. “It shows

you your support group. It makes you appreciate small things, and not get excited about small things that don’t go right.”

Mary volunteers at the concessions stand in Rib Mountain State Park, and gives more freely of her time than she has in the past. She is thankful for every day she’s given, and actively seeks out opportunities to share her time with others.

And she’s not worried about another recurrence, having beat cancer twice already.

“If it comes back, we’ll deal with it then,” she said simply.

