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Jeannette Patros Springer



When John Springer, Jr. met Jeannette Patros in February 1998, he had no idea the impact she would have. In the proceeding four years, he would fall in love, enjoy the most fulfilling days of his life, get married, and lose his new bride to breast cancer.

Springer hadn't been looking for love four years ago because a separation and divorce had left him a single father and emotionally drained. But when he met Jeannette, he had no choice.

"I didn't want a relationship again; I didn't want to be vulnerable," he said. "She broke down my walls. I couldn't stop it."

Jeannette was a ranger at Rib Mountain State Park and she loved the outdoors. The new couple spent countless hours hiking, camping and canoeing. Because she was so active, Jeannette was shocked when doctors diagnosed her with breast cancer. She underwent a lumpectomy followed by radiation and chemotherapy. Things looked good.

"We had come to grips with the fact that we were really in love with each other at that point," he said.

So in September 2000, John proposed and the two began making plans. But in December, Jeannette began losing weight and getting bad headaches.

"They found that the cancer had gone from undetectable to uncontrollable," John said. "There was a tumor in her head and four nodules on her lungs. They began immediate radiation then chemo. Between the therapies and the cancer, it just ate her away."

John quit working, taking only sporadic construction jobs to make ends meet. He went to every doctor's appointment, every therapy session.

"My priority was being by her side during that time," he said.

Jeannette tried any treatment her doctors offered, and even volunteered for

unproven therapies she thought had little chance of helping. As her cancer spread, she viewed the methods as a way to help out future victims.

"I just would have said, 'I surrender;' I would have let it take its course," John said. "But she loved life so much, she never gave up."

The re-diagnosis had been so sudden that it interrupted the couple's wedding. They had planned to marry in September 2001 at the Willow Flowage in northern Wisconsin, but doctors recommended they move up the date.

They organized the wedding in six days. John built an altar from saplings and they made an

aisle from wildflowers. By that time, Jeannette could no longer walk, so her two brothers carried her down the aisle in her wheelchair. The couple said their vows before family and friends on the first Saturday in August.

"It really would have been hard for me if I hadn't been able to express my commitment to her in that way," John said. "It was perfect. It was beautiful."

Jeannette died October 10, 2001. She was 36 years old.

John said his experience with cancer and his time with Jeannette changed him completely.

"It's taught me to appreciate and accept help from others," he said. During her final months, Jeannette's family became like John's own, providing help he would have been lost without. Friends and relatives sent food and cards.

"I had never experienced anything like that," he said. "I never could have done it without them."

John says he feels no self-pity. What he witnessed has made him a better person.

"Cancer can take a lot of things away from you, but it never took away her spirit," he said. "I feel privileged to have been able to care for her."

