

COURAGE, LIFE & HOPE

REFLECTIONS *of a journey*



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Tiffany Schmitt

When you're 30 years old, cancer is something you worry about your parents or grandparents getting.

So when Tiffany Schmitt discovered a swollen lymph node under her arm Memorial Day weekend of 1999, she wasn't sure what to make of it.

"I just knew there was something wrong," she said. "They did three different blood tests to see what it was."

It was cancer. Doctors diagnosed Hodgkin's lymphoma and offered Schmitt several treatment options.

After laboring over the decision, she chose to participate in a research study that calls for patients to receive different treatments for similar cancers.

Some patients receive chemotherapy only, others are given radiation and a third group is treated with both.

"I wasn't real keen on the idea of chemo, but I didn't want to choose something that wasn't going to work," Schmitt said. "I decided to let God choose for me, to spin the wheel."

She was randomly selected to receive radiation therapy only. In August 1999 she began the first of two six-week treatment cycles during which she received radiation therapy daily.

Today, Schmitt feels no ill effects from the cancer or the treatment.

"Things are great," she said. "I couldn't feel better."

But two aspects of her life have changed since her diagnosis. She is far more aware of her health and the health of her loved ones, and she enjoys every day.

"I pay more attention to my body and go to the doctor when I should," Schmitt said. "And I've been a pretty strong advocate for friends and family to be proactive about their health."

Good health is not something Schmitt jealously protects; it is

something she enjoys. Surviving cancer has changed her in a fundamental way.

"I live my whole life differently, I really do," she said. "It's unfortunate when people say it takes

a near-death experience to make them appreciate life. But it's true."

She has tried vainly to explain to her husband, Mark, what Lance Armstrong described in his book, "It's Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life." In the text, the world famous cyclist explains that he treasures his experience with cancer more than winning the Tour de France.

Schmitt understands. "I see the cancer as a positive experience in my life," she said. "It's really made me who I am today."

