

COURAGE, LIFE & HOPE

REFLECTIONS *of a journey*



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Passion for excellence. Compassion for people.



Debbie Manthe

Debbie Manthe's cancer is terminal. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in March 2000 at age 36, underwent a mastectomy, rigorous radiation and chemotherapy treatments then thought she was cancer free. A recurrence the following January was viewed as dire, but she again came through treatment better than expected, and for the following two years, believed she had the disease licked.

Today, the cancer has returned and metastasized to her chest wall, pancreas, both adrenal glands and both kidneys. She is undergoing treatment that has her essentially homebound, and cannot help but feel crushing disappointment. Yet Debbie doesn't talk like someone who is fighting for her life.

"I try to be upbeat," she said. "I definitely go on a pity party now and then. But my outlook on life is that there are so many people who have it worse off every day of their lives, and always have."

Her life since the initial diagnosis has been beautiful, even though she often wondered what the future would hold. Back in 2000, she had been dating her boyfriend, Jeff, for eight months. When she learned she had cancer, Debbie told him he should not feel obligated to stay with her.

Instead of moving on, he asked her to marry him.

"I gave him a chance to run, and he said

'no way,'" Debbie said. "He stuck by my side. My husband has just been unbelievably courageous through all this. He does what he has to do to keep me going and get himself through."

For example, when Debbie came home from her first surgery, Jeff had filled the house with roses to brighten her return.

Her parents have also been a tremendous source of support. The disease caught

everyone off guard, as Debbie was the first woman from either of her parents' families to be diagnosed with breast cancer – and she has 54 cousins on one side alone.

It was through her parents and annual trips with them to Mexico that Debbie gained valuable perspective on life. She developed lasting friendships with people there, and was

able to visit impoverished communities and see the struggles of people in disadvantaged areas.

"I've seen some of the poorest neighborhoods," Debbie said. "All of a sudden, one day, I realized that these people have it much harder than I do."

With help from her family and friends, Debbie plans to continue fighting and continue living.

"Our doctors and our scientists have come so far in their knowledge of treating cancer, and you never know what's around the corner," she said.

"I pray for miracles and a cure, and keep going day by day. There's always a chance."

