



Cheryl Lilley
Ovarian Cancer

In February of 2004, I was diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer. I went into shock when I received the diagnosis, and probably stayed that way for three years. I had never been sick, never in a hospital, never around illness. I was in excellent physical condition and hadn't even heard of ovarian cancer.

I was encouraged to 'get my affairs in order.' A will was immediately drafted and signed. My possessions were promised to friends. I have no family, so my support group was very small. I turned my financial and medical authority over to my boyfriend, Tim. My Christian friends, Scott and Marilyn, and Tim were holding me up! I immediately went to God and turned my future over to Him.

I had my first surgery three days later. I had no idea what to expect; whether I would wake up again. My gynecological oncologist and his office staff took complete care of me. They were kind and genuinely caring. I was afraid of all the tubes and tests, and people poking and prodding all day and all night. But, the nurses were very good at explaining things. We prayed together.

Scott, Marilyn, and Tim were always by my side. Marilyn and Tim split time and even spent nights in my hospital room. Marilyn took vacation from work to stay with me for two weeks. Tim vowed to be with me through the entire journey.

I had a radical hysterectomy, peritoneal removal, lymph nodes removed, etc. My cancer had metastasized to my small bowel and aorta. Due to my previous good physical condition and quick recovery, I went home in four days. I lost a lot of weight and was very weak.

Chemotherapy started the next week - hours and days of it. I had one day I refer to as the 'roisserie chicken day.' I had two ports for chemotherapy delivery; one on my left chest and one below my left ribs. Once every three weeks, the chemotherapy was delivered into the lower port for delivery straight into the abdominal cavity. I had to lie out on a bed and rotate every 15 minutes - front, side, other side, back - to bathe my abdomen with the chemical.

When I finally had some strength, Tim took me out to dinner and proposed. We were married two weeks later. I had chemotherapy the day before and only got up long enough to get married. Scott gave me away and Marilyn was my maid of honor. Tim held my wig and hat, so they wouldn't blow away in the wind. It was awesome! Attendees said it was the most beautiful and heartfelt wedding ever.

I had a second-look surgery a few months later. It went extremely well. I remember Tim telling me the doctor had tears in his eyes in the waiting room, exclaiming, "She's clean as a whistle." The two of them hugged and cried. There was no more cancer. This was truly a miracle.

Cancer is a big, bad scary thing. Even though I wouldn't ask for it, I wouldn't change what happened. When you are faced with your own mortality, your life changes forever; priorities change immediately. I am so very grateful every day I wake up. When I thought there was a chance - a real chance - I would die, I held on. And, I truly believe there is a reason why I was given this opportunity.

When a gift this big is given, please give back - give to others. I was blessed with an opportunity to volunteer in the same chemo room where I spent several years of my life. It was my honor to give warm blankets and kind encouraging words to those brave women. They are awesome and hold my highest respect. We're all in this together and we hold each other up.

Cancer has impacted my life and everything in and about it. I have a purpose. My goal in life now is to work with ovarian cancer survivors and newly diagnosed women.