

# My Story

## April 2006, a month that would change my life forever and the month my story begins.

As time would have it, I began to have some pressure in my rectal area that I thought was hemorrhoids. For a few weeks, I tried some over the counter remedies and even called my family physician for advice. After trying the suggestions, the symptoms did not improve, and my physician thought I needed to come in to be evaluated. Finding no evidence of the hemorrhoids, but knowing the symptoms were still present, I was referred to a gastroenterologist and a colorectal surgeon.

Due to my young age and no known family history, it was decided that I might be having some rectal spasm. It was suggested I might benefit from having a colonoscopy to make sure there was no other cause for my symptoms. The specialist left the decision up to me, have the colonoscopy or wait and see if things resolved on their own. I decided to proceed with the test; a decision I am grateful for. **If I had not decided to have a colonoscopy at that time, I might not be writing this story today.** On that day, to nearly everyone's surprise, at age 44, with a husband and two young children... I Christine became a cancer patient.

Further testing, including a rectal ultrasound, were scheduled and I began my journey. I was basically in shock. **CANCER. What was I going to do? What did the future hold? Was I going to die? What was I going to tell my young boys, ages 7 and 8 at the time?** What were the options for treatment? Who should I see as a surgeon, as a medical oncologist, or as a radiation oncologist? The questions seemed to swirl all around me and my husband Karl...and all we could do at that moment was cry.

I turned to God, who gave me the comfort that I could get through this journey with His help... wherever it might lead me and my family. As I continued to take each day at a time, my faith strengthened. The doctors were very positive and supportive. I knew I had the support of my pastor. He was always there at the right moment, when I needed to talk or when a procedure was scheduled. When the house was quiet at night, and everyone seemed to be sleeping peacefully except for me, I prayed for God's strength to help me get through this. There were many nights I had to turn over to see my husband, there beside me, to support me and to help me go on to the next morning. Karl had said "I do" at the altar when we married, I dressed in white and he in his tux. Now Karl was living those sacred vows of sickness and in health. My faith became stronger than my doubt.

Treating this cancer was not without complications and struggles. After completing five weeks of preoperative chemotherapy and radiation, it was time to face surgery to remove the bulk of the tumor. Because the tumor was located in the lower rectal area, it was a real possibility that I may have ended up with a permanent colostomy. Fortunately due to the skill of my surgeon, this did not come to pass.

**WAITING. Waiting for test results, waiting to see the doctor, waiting for surgery to be scheduled, waiting for answers, waiting for this nightmare to be over and for my life to go on; WAITING SEEMED TO BE THE THEME OF MY LIFE AT THAT TIME.**

I did succeed in completing post-operative chemotherapy and eventually had my ileostomy reversed. I began my life as a survivor of cancer. The new role included some new routines, new thoughts, new fears and more waiting. Waiting to see if this new part of my life (cancer) would ever rear its ugly head again. The doctors monitored my blood levels of cancer markers, and I waited for the results of each laboratory draw. I had momentary relief each time they were low, as they should be. Then one time, they were found to be increasing. The doctors watched for a while and I waited some more. Until January 2010, they could not be watched with patience as before. More tests were scheduled and I was told that the cancer had returned... this time in my lungs... the very organ that the breath of life enters and the toxicities leave with each exhale. **I could only breathe in and out and face this whole dance over again, knowing that I had beaten it before. That God had walked with me to this point and He had not left my side.**

I proceeded with a lung biopsy and then surgery to remove three nodules in my lung. I fought the cancer with chemotherapy once more. This time was a little more difficult. The fatigue was ever present, and I faced the loss of my hair. Soon, not only was I a cancer patient, but everyone would know it. Even strangers that I had not told would know. I drew on the strength of my family and friends, for when I had no strength; they were there to lift me up.

**My cousin went with me the day I had my head shaved. She wore a scarf upon her head, just like me. Perhaps I really was not any different after all.**

The chemotherapy caused a lot of gastrointestinal side effects, and I have developed a fissure with irritation in the previous site of the tumor. Biopsies were taken and were noted to be negative for cancer. The fissure is now healing, but more importantly, I am healing. I have learned to take one day at a time.

**I have faced the fear of the “what ifs...” and I have won for now.**

I have been blessed with the faith that God is with me and that He will lead me through whatever lies ahead. I have built a trust with my healthcare providers and have entered into a team approach about my health. I am living life to the fullest, cherishing the little moments of joy with my husband, my sons, my family and friends. I have even healed enough that I can help others battling this disease, those who may face this disease and be called to dance with it in the future. I am healing enough that I can share my story with you.

**April 2006, a time that I, Christine became a cancer patient? I do not think so. I have just become Christine and in one sense of time, my story of the future begins.**

**Christine**