

# “A Six Letter Word”

My story begins with the blessing of being born to Christian parents and being the fifth daughter of seven.

**I have always been blessed with good health and a lot of energy; in fact, I have often been called the family caregiver. I often say they all think I have 911 written on my forehead.**

My husband has had two knee replacements and two major back surgeries so I have been a caregiver at home and away. I am also a volunteer at St. Mary's Medical Center. After my husband's last back surgery was over, I decided I should see my doctor due to a loss of appetite and weight loss, but no pain. All my office tests were fine and since I had a colon scope done 11 months earlier, he was not concerned about that. After extensive blood work, I was called by Dr. Gourieux's office to get to St. Mary's as soon as possible. I needed five units of blood. I was admitted for three days and left feeling my old self again. Thankfully Dr. Gourieux was very concerned about the blood loss. He ordered a colonoscopy with my doctor of choice, Dr. Chilukuri. To his surprise and mine a small tumor was found in my colon. It was tested and that day my life changed forever. **I have always hated four letter words, but that day I heard a six letter word that was worse than any four letter word I had ever heard. Yes, it was cancer!**

I could not believe it. I had never smoked or drank. I ate my veggies and loved to cook nourishing meals for my family. Three days later, I was in surgery with much encouragement from my family, Dr. Gourieux and Dr. Chilukuri. The day after surgery, the doctor walked in my room and explained the surgery. Eleven inches of my colon was removed and the cancer had spread into the lymph nodes. **It was Stage 3 cancer which called for chemotherapy. With this information, I quickly said, “No Chemo, No way.”** I am 75 years old and I have a son fighting cancer for the past 6 years and I didn't want to be a patient for months.

After telling my son David the plan, he was very upset. He said *“Mom, after my St. Mary's doctor helped me get into a treatment program at Vanderbilt for head*

*and neck cancers, you dragged my ass there for years. Now I'm taking your ass to St. Mary's, two blocks from home for Chemo!"* I gave him a long hard look with tears in my eyes and he said, *"David, I think that's a good idea."*

**How could I say no to my precious son who was also fighting to save his life for me?**

The next day I had a visit from the Vice President of St. Mary's, Tom Lilly. I told him he would receive a letter of resignation from me for the position of President of the Auxiliary. I had just recently been elected and felt I may not be able to take over as president in one month. His response surprised me. He said, *"That's not an option. You were elected and can do it."* I guess I expected him to join me in a pity party. Instead he left the room after saying, *"I'll see you at the first meeting."*

**I was so mad. I thought that he didn't have any sympathy for an old sick lady who was ready for a pity party.** But God bless him, he made me so mad I forgot about the pity party and in about four weeks, with my family support I started Chemo. I had decided that I could do this. So with a "fanny pack" of chemo under my pink smock, I was installed as president of the auxiliary. My family and Tom Lilly applauded when I received the gavel. It all went well until my son had a set back and God took him from his pain. Our family, the doctor and our pastor were there by his side in his room at St. Mary's.

**David made me promise I would not stop chemo and I would keep volunteering. So today I am 3 ½ years cancer free and each time I walk into St. Mary's in my pink smock I think of David and say, "This one is for you."**

Cancer, yes it is a dreaded word to hear, but early detection is important and the cure is getting closer every day. So get moving, help others, thank God for early detection and every blessed day. **My favorite saying is, "Lord let me be a blessing to someone today." If we are thinking of others we worry less about ourselves.**

Yes, my life has changed after cancer. My appreciation for everything and everyone in my life has grown. When I look up on a sunny day, the sky is bluer and the rain is appreciated more, because I look forward to the first tulips, then the roses and green grass soon to come.

I also appreciate the words, "*I love you*" from a family member or friend because today it touches my heart with a deeper meaning. I am so very blessed because I have been able to live long enough to become a great grandmother. God is good.

**Phyllis**