

Life is a Gift.

My name is Tabitha. First of all, I just want to say how thankful I am to be alive. On May 8, of 2009 at the age of 29 I was diagnosed with stage IV Colon Cancer that had metastasized to my liver.

The tumor was found when my gynecologist felt a mass during my annual pelvic exam. I have three little girls, and at the time, they were 4, 2 ½ and 7 months old. My very first thought when I heard the words *“you have cancer”*, was *“O’ my gosh, I’m going to die and my little girls are going to grow up without a mother.”* I couldn’t believe this was happening to me. I had virtually no symptoms and the few that I did have, I chalked up to the c-section that I had seven months earlier and stress from my 2 year old who was having health issues of her own. In fact, she had a biopsy just two days before I actually had mine. Thankfully, her results came back differently than mine did. I couldn’t get the thought of having to leave my husband and three little girls behind out of my head that day. I will never forget that day the rest of my life.

I woke up the next morning with a completely different attitude. I wasn’t going to let this disease take away my life that I had worked so hard to make for myself. I wasn’t going to let it take my little girls mommy away from them, even if I was given only a 50 % chance of living for another five years... with treatment. I was going to fight with everything in me. So that’s what I did over the next 8 months. I fought hard, and I prayed hard. I had to rely on my faith to give me the strength to get through this journey. It gave me hope in what seemed to be a hopeless situation.

The first step in my treatment was to see how bad my tumor was, so I had a colonoscopy 4 days after my diagnosis. My colon surgeons let us know that the tumor was very large, 9 cm to be exact and it was very advanced. He was afraid if it wasn’t removed immediately that it was going to obstruct my colon. Surgery (a colon resection) was going to have to come before any kind of chemotherapy. **One week after I was diagnosed, I checked into the hospital and had a foot of my colon removed along with the softball size tumor.** I recovered from that very well and three weeks later I started chemotherapy. I had twelve rounds, one every other week for six months. Before each round I would pray that the medicine would do its job and that it wouldn’t get me down. My prayers were answered because it worked tremendously well and I had little to no side effects. For the most part, I was able to still be the mommy and wife that I love being. We were blessed with so much support during this time... including friends and family who would cook for us on my “on” weeks so that I didn’t have to worry about it. The chemotherapy worked unbelievably well. After just 3 rounds it shrunk the tumors on my liver 80%. I was told that was above the average results, and I was so happy to hear that. After the last round, it had shrunk the tumors a total of about 95 %.

At this point, my oncologist thought I was ready for a liver resection so he referred me to a local liver surgeon. I had to go through extensive tests, blood tests and scans to determine whether my body was ready for the surgery. When we met with the surgeon, he explained that this procedure was 10 times more serious than open-heart surgery. They would remove 75 % of my liver.

Thank God the liver is one of the only two organs that actually regenerate. He explained that the recovery would be about a six month process, and we really wouldn't know for sure if I would have enough liver left to live until after the surgery. I was again filled with all of the emotions that I felt at the beginning of my cancer journey. **My 3 beautiful little girl's faces flashed in front of me again and once more, I worried that they would have to grow up without me.** I remember wondering if I should write those letters that they could read when they got older just in case I wasn't around to tell them all the things I wanted to say to them. When I would start to think those thoughts, a little voice would tell me to stop, and I would have a peaceful feeling come over me. I knew I was going to be okay. I had to be.

We scheduled the liver resection for January 7, 2010. I went in the morning more nervous than I think I have ever been. I remember lying down on the operating table, not knowing what the next few hours, weeks or months would hold for me. **The next thing I knew, I was waking up in the recovery room and heard my sister say "does she know they were able to get it all out?" I was very loopy, but I caught that!**

I stayed cancer free for about 8 months. I had my second routine scan in August of 2010 and a small 1.6 cm spot showed up on my liver again. Hearing this news was like being hit by a truck once more. It really wasn't a surprise, as we knew there was a good possibility the cancer would show up again. However, it's not any easier hearing the news for the second time. I again had to go through additional scans and tests to make sure this was the only spot of cancer in my body. After the scan, there was a questionable spot on my thyroid. I had a biopsy a few days later and it was determined that the spot was not cancer, thankfully. At this point we scheduled another liver resection to remove the spot. I had that surgery on September 10, 2010. I recovered for three weeks and started chemotherapy again. We had a plan to complete 8 rounds of a different type of chemo than I received before. I went in for the first round, expecting it to be similar as before. **My body reacted to this chemo very differently than the previous mixture. I got very ill almost immediately. I was sick for 9 days straight. It was one of the most difficult times of my life.** I would lie in bed and could hear the rest of my family getting on with life in the other room. It was very hard to lay there and not be able to play with my girls or take care of them the way I wanted to. Thankfully, we added additional nausea medicine and the other rounds were much better.

I just completed my last round of chemo on January 24, 2011. I had a scan on January 7, 2011 and was all clear. I am now in remission once more. I pray that this is the end of my journey with cancer. It has forever changed my life and those around me, but I honestly don't think I would change a thing. Throughout my cancer journey, I have learned a lot about myself and about life in general. I learned how strong I can be and how precious every moment is that we are given. The little things that used to bother me aren't a big deal anymore. It's okay if my girls leave the house without a bow in their hair. **I thank God every morning before I get out of bed for blessing me with yet another day to spend with those that I love.**

I've been referred to as a "miracle", which by definition is a wonder; marvel. I *feel* like a walking miracle. I am so happy to be alive. I live everyday as if there

is no tomorrow. I tell people how I feel, I give my girls hugs every chance I get and tell them that I love them. I could not have gotten through this time without such an awesome support system. My wonderful husband who stood right by my side the entire time, and other family and friends that rallied behind me and were there from the very first step and still continue to be there.

Life is a gift and I plan to treat it as if it were the best gift I ever received... because it is!

Tabitha