

OPEN ARMS NEWSLETTER

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“I am so sorry. It’s cancer.”

Do you remember your life before you heard those words the first time? Did you have plans, hopes and maybe a dream or two still unrealized?

I’ll bet you remember where you were and exactly what you were doing in those seconds before time froze and life lost its gravity. I think it is safe to acknowledge that cancer is a real pain in the ... it’s a real pain.

It’s the uninvited and unwelcome elephant in the room that shows up one day unannounced and then refuses to leave.

Like the 9/11 terrorists ... cancer doesn’t fight fair. It sneaks in under our radar and causes cataclysmic damage to our bodies, our families and friends, home lives, and financial security. Basically, cancer stinks! It zaps our strength and our peaceful sleep and tests our spiritual resolve.

Oh yes, I know, it is tough summoning up the will to fight when you’re throwing up in a bucket, aching all over, trying to figure out how to pay for that next test, treatment or prescription that the doctor says you’ve got to have. Trust me ... I do know.

It’s easy to feel hopeless when you’re feeling alone and scared and vulnerable. We have each done our time in that dark place.

And we are still here.

Still fighting.

Life is worth the fight.

That’s something that we have all learned, isn’t it? It’s worth fighting for that one more day.

Cancer may be a bitter pill to swallow but it is also a great teacher. It demands that we sit up straight and prioritize. It stops us dead in our tracks and forces us to realize that we may have been taking life for granted.

You know what I mean. Just going through the monotonous motions of ordinary, everyday life, a misnomer if ever there was one. It’s as if when we were born, we were placed on a train that is traveling in one specific direction ... staying on the rails. And we more or less just allow ourselves to be carried along this path. There is not generally anything special about the path, other than it is a path we have known and become comfortable with.

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THIS IS FAITH

“I believe in the sun, even when it does not shine.

I believe in love, even when it is not shown.

I believe in God, even when He does not speak.”

[The above was found scratched on a basement wall of Holocaust victims and discovered by Allied soldiers at the end of the war.]

And then ... blam!

"I am so sorry. It's cancer."

It is the cosmic slap across the face, punch in the gut and the swollen black eye on our being. Cancer leaps on us like some menacing villain straight out of a really bad comic book. In its bag of nasty tricks it brings fear, a sense of isolation and abandonment. The phrase, "Why me?" slips past our lips before we can stop it.

Our heads swivel and our eyes dart, scanning the horizon for some elusive super hero to arrive on the scene. Someone to just make it all go away and make life normal again.

Of course, as we all know only too well ... that's not about to happen. The elephant is still in the room, leering at us every day. He's not going anywhere anytime soon. But have you noticed that it is not an altogether bad thing?

I have come to realize that cancer brought with it some pretty neat inspirations. Life is this whole new thing. Very cool! Little things that previously got by me have become HUGE. I stop and take the time to breathe them in and appreciate them. People have become nearer and dearer and more easily forgivable. We are all in this punchbowl of life together. It suddenly became impossible to ignore the fact that when someone's head drops below the surface, my hand can pull them back up. My touch, my words, my prayers ... and yours ... possess mighty healing power to pass on to others who find themselves feeling alone, frightened and desperate.

Emily Dickenson wrote:

*"Hope is the thing with feathers,
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without words,
And never stops at all."*

Ever since that day when the doctor told me for the first time that I had cancer, and I knew that it could certainly kill me ... I began to live. Oh sure, I thought I was living before then, but in actuality, I was only going through the motions, however well intended. I have come to know Life is a living, breathing, palpable entity. It has colors, textures, dimensions and smells. It has levels to it that we have not even dared to dream to learn how to adequately define yet.

We have been blessed by God to be part of this amazing process.

To experience it.

To breathe it in.

To live it for all we're worth.

We are cancer survivors.

We are not a number on some medical record or our condition, (the breast cancer in room 318). We are people, individuals caught up in something that our brains simply cannot completely wrap themselves around. We are bruised, hurt and frightened.

But we are still here. Still fighting. And most significantly of all ... we are children of our loving God. The elephant remains in the room. It rears up. Fear slips inside. We are not alone.

God weilds the mightier sword. He walks with us and when our strength fails us, he lifts us up and carries us. He has extended to us an open line directly to Him through the power of prayer. His line is never busy. It is never out of service. There is never any interference on His end of the line. And He is available to His children 24-7.

One of my favorite verses in all of scripture is Romans 8:38: *"For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

And there it is.

This is the place for healing body, mind, spirit and soul.

The elephant shrinks in the corner, his head pressed against the wall. And suddenly the fear is on the other feet as it were.

God wins! And so do we. Every day is a victory. Every single day! As we hurry through this busy month, may we pause and remember who we are and why we are here. Celebrate the birth of Jesus, His life and resurrection, and the promise of our own.

Life is worth the fight.

No matter how difficult that fight becomes.

Celebrate it!

Breathe it in.

Live it!

It is God's ultimate gift to us all. Don't go through one more day without opening God's most precious gift.

Merry Christmas to each and every one of you and yours.

May the elephant in the corner of your dark place shrivel and lose all power over you. May God continue to shower you with His blessings. And as Tony Snow so very eloquently stated, "May God always hold you in the hollow of His hand."

Peace and Love