

Celebrating a Survivor

Cindy Payne, her journey with breast cancer and her new prospective on life

By Linda Dillon

I had the recent opportunity to sit and speak with Cindy Payne. It is an unquestionable privilege to hear of her journey, her experience, her many blessings, and the way in which each of these forever changed her perspective on life. Here is her amazing story.

"I was 60 years old when I was diagnosed with breast cancer in January of 2019. I was doing a self-examination that winter. I do those in between my mammograms, just to be on the safe side, as we did have a family history; mom had had a little bit of breast cancer.

Through my self-examination I found a small lump, so naturally I went ahead and called the doctor, and he scheduled a mammogram. I had that done quickly, and they also did ultrasounds.

I pretty well knew; I just had this gut feeling that it was cancer. They proceeded to do a biopsy, but gave me the news before the biopsy, saying they were pretty sure it was breast cancer. I wasn't really surprised, because you know, there's so many people that end up with it, I really just felt numb.

Why me?

All my life I've heard people say, well, why me? Why me you know? But I got to thinking about that one day and I thought well, why not me? You know, I'm nobody special or anything, so why wouldn't it hit me.

Anybody, all ages and all colors and everything, so why NOT me. So, I really wasn't shocked, and I didn't get really upset at that moment. I pretty well knew that God was going to get me through this, and I thought, he's there with me at all times and I know I want to survive.

I started making the appointments, and by June of 2019, I had my surgery. I had Dr. Prajapati at the time, and I spoke with him, and he said, "well you need to get a surgeon" so I had a surgeon Dr. Matthew Golden, and I went to talk with him and Dr. Prajapati.

He said my cancer was a little bit of a rare type. I had Hers 2. I didn't even realize there were different kinds of breast cancer. I just thought breast cancer is breast cancer, but there are different kinds, and then of course you've got your stages too.

Dr. Golden consulted Dr. Prajapati, and he consulted with Vanderbilt in Nashville to be sure of what type of treatment I needed. My lump was very small, and it was Stage 2, so that was a plus on my side.

The doctor that did the biopsy couldn't even believe that I found it because it was so small. He said "well, I'm surprised you even felt it." So that was a blessing!

They discussed the treatments with me; what sort of treatment I preferred. Of course, they were going to remove the lump. Some people think, oh it's just a little lump so they're just going to take a little spot, but it's a pretty big area that they end up removing.

While Dr. Golden was giving me the options, in my mind, I just automatically said, well I just want to remove both breasts. I want to make sure that I do everything possible to keep it from coming back or spreading.

He didn't really get finished with his conversation and I said, "Well I'm pretty sure I want to remove both, but I do want to discuss it with my husband and girls."

That same day Dr Golden sent me to a reconstructive doctor, Dr. Kittinger. I went to see her and started talking about what they would do. We discussed it all that one day, and I said, well, this is the way I'm leaning. So, after we saw the surgeon for the removal and the expanders, I went home and discussed it with Pat and the girls, and they all

agreed double mastectomy and reconstructive surgery was the best option.

Dr. Kittinger and her husband are both in the business and they both do the same thing so they both worked on me, and Dr Golden also, so I had three of them in there the day of surgery. They removed both breasts, and in the same surgery, they go ahead and put in expanders in so tissue will start to grow a little bit. Those get removed later with another surgery."

My Support

"I came home within 24 hours. I think it was more or less like a half a day of surgery and they send you home and I had a very good nurse. My support system was excellent. Of course, my husband Pat, he brought me home with my girls, Carrie and Rachel.

Pat took very good care of me. I must give him a ten plus on that! He was there to make sure I had my pain meds early, even if I didn't have pain, he'd say, you need to take them because you're gonna have pain!

I had these drainage bottles attached to me, about six of them. I really couldn't feel them because I was still numb from the surgery. We had to empty the drainage bottles every couple of hours, measure them out and keep a chart. Pat was very organized and my granddaughter, Madelyn (she was 18 or 19 at the time) had this chart all fixed out with the time of days written on it and how much. My granddaughter loved doing it, she was like, come on, Mimi, let's go empty. She wasn't scared of it, and it didn't make her ill.

Now, Carrie wasn't, but she is not a nurse in that way. She's a good encourager and support, but as far as the hands-on things, she said Rachel and Madelyn can do that. Rachel helped very much and Pat was an excellent nurse. He was there the whole time, even the first day I came home. He got me settled and everything, but then he was just sitting there looking at me, and I looked at him and said, you can go out there in your mancave now.

My family gave me wonderful support, and it didn't end there. I have friends, and then my sisters, and of course, mom and dad. Dad was a very good supporter, and he was always so positive."

Additional Help

Having a support system is absolutely critical she says. "If somebody does have cancer, the doctor can set you up to talk with people - talk sessions with other patients to help support you, if you don't have a good support system at home or family or church. It's important to know there are places where you can get support.

There are people out there that will help you, just like with the free wigs. I wouldn't have known it if the lady hadn't told me. It's very important because it helps you with the mental part of it. The Mitchell Center has a team of Patient Navigators, social workers, chemotherapy educators and directors."

Cindy expresses one other support system matter. "People were always asking Pat, well, how is Cindy? I mean, he would get phone calls from people he'd worked with and just anybody and everybody, people from church would call him and ask, well, how is Cindy?"

Then one day (this had been weeks after my surgery and everything) Pat looked at me and he was like, nobody asks how I'm doing. And, I kind of laughed at first, but then he was serious, He said you just don't realize how it affects the caregiver. He said I know they don't do it on purpose, but people forget. So don't forget that caretaker who is taking care



of the patient, because it affects them emotionally also."

Recovery

It took several months for Cindy to recover. Just weeks after her surgery, she had a port inserted in her chest for chemo.

"They wanted to do chemo to make sure. A few weeks later I started my chemo. I had to have ten sessions once a week, and the steroids they give you is probably the worst thing because it would make you stay awake and be really wired.

Two times I couldn't sleep, and I got up and started washing windows. I couldn't move my arms up all the way. You have restrictions on your arms on how much you could use them after the surgery. Just with elbows bending only, and you couldn't pick up anything heavy, not even a gallon of milk. The restrictions on your arms caused people having to do even more for me. I couldn't get anything out of the cabinets or pick up anything and I couldn't reach them on my tippy toes. I love my garden and I couldn't pull weeds or anything, so the girls would come over and Pat and the girls walked through, and I'd show them, okay that's a weed, PULL IT!"

During the ten weeks of Cindy's chemo, on her third or fourth week she started losing hair.

"It just started falling out while I was in the shower. We were supposed to go see some friends that weekend in Louisville. I was taking my shower getting ready, and my hair just started falling out. They told me it could. They said "well, it might, and it might not." That was the first cry that I had. It just really threw it all into perspective, and I had a meltdown.

I mean, because you're standing there and it's just falling out. I would touch it and have a handful, and I just kept piling it up on the side of the tub. I thought, I'll get out and dry it off, but it just wouldn't stop. Of course, I was just bawling, and Pat came in there to check on me. He decided to leave me alone. He knew I needed that time because that was the only time that I had cried. Even when I found out that I had cancer, I didn't cry."

"Finally, I managed to get out and we went on to our friend's house in Louisville, and the support there was great with our friends Dave and Carol. Carol took me out that weekend to look

at wigs and scarves because I was like, oh my gosh, I can't be walking around bald, I wasn't comfortable with that, not then anyway.

I wore a lot of baseball caps. People could still see that I was bald, but that was okay because the hair that I didn't lose that day. I had the rest shaved off. I didn't know where I'd be when the rest might just start falling out.

After I had been shaved and started wearing scarves and baseball caps, my girls took me to a beauty shop where they were authorized to give free wigs. They will give you one free wig a year, I think. We made an appointment and oh we had fun! We set in our own little room all by ourselves, the three of us, and they'd throw me a wig. "Here mom, try this one, and here try this one!" They made it fun.

After my surgery on June 3, 2019, it took several months to really recoup. I didn't realize how the chemo and the surgery had affected my body until the day I went to Florida (in October) with the family. When we arrived everybody in the world was there. Our room was on the fourth floor and instead of waiting for the elevator, which was going to be what seemed like days to wait for, one of the girls said let's just walk, we can walk four flights. I was like, okay, no big deal. I've done that plenty of times. Well, I walked one flight and I had to rest. I couldn't do it and I wasn't even carrying anything heavy anyway because my restrictions were still there.

I still couldn't carry anything heavy at that time because your muscles are still healing from all the surgery. Carrie turned around to look at me, and she said Mom, are you alright? And I said, well not really, but go on. I'll catch up with you. I've just gotta go at my own pace.

I was so out of breath I didn't know if I was going to make it up four flights. Finally, I get up there and I thought, what in the world happened. Then walking out on the beach in the sand, you know how it is, it's kind of hard walking in sand. The girls would take off, saying let's go over there!... and I was like, you all go on, I'll be there when I get there. They asked if I was ok and I said, I'm fine. Once I got there, I didn't leave. As a matter of fact, I took a nap!

They had a tent set up on the beach for me, so I went in, and

Pat says well, you gotta keep that hat on, you'll get your head sunburned, you know. I said, I got it! I dug out the sand a little bit where I could lay on my belly because I'm a stomach sleeper. I had not gotten to sleep on my stomach for months, so I just dug out the sand and I said, I'm gonna lay on my stomach! This is heaven! I took a nap and enjoyed it very much.

I didn't realize whether it was a chemo or probably a combination of the surgery and the chemo, what it had done to my body. I realized then, I had some work to do to get back in shape and get back to where I came. I can work out in my garden now and do other things. The Lord blessed me very much."

Blessings

"You know I had a lot of blessings during this journey. There was so much joy and the people, I mean, two or three days after surgery, I'd say ten to 15 people stopped in to see me. They got permission first and I told Pat. I said, if anybody wants to come over, you tell them I'm good. I sat out there on the back porch, that's where I did most of my healing. I lay on the couch and read magazines and whatever I could do, or just sit there and listen to the birds sing.

And of course, my family; sisters, sister in laws and close friends, and then the girls, and ladies from church came over and someone would bring food. We tried to say you don't have to bring food, Pat is here, I'm going to make him cook! But they came over and it was just such a joy. It really was. The Lord just blessed me giving me those friends.

I heard from people who would just text me or call and a real good friend of mine that I grew up with, Stephanie, she even had her husband bring her in from Indianapolis to see me. That summer with other people stopping in, was just a joy."

New Perspective on Life

"Forget the little nitty picky things, you know, it's not worth it," said Cindy. "All of this is going to be gone you know, we're not going to take it with us, we're not. It doesn't matter.

My father passed away in 2020 and we had to sell a lot of his stuff and move mom. Mom moved over here near me, and it made me realize and Pat's parents also have passed since and you have to get rid of everything. You keep a few memory things and all, but that has shown me that this stuff doesn't mean anything. That's not what you really love, or you shouldn't. It's those people closest to you, you know, your parents, your husband, your kids, your grandkids.

I mean, from day one, when I had got the news that I had cancer, and I didn't really get upset with it, I knew I had that faith that God was going to get me through it. Not saying that, oh, I wasn't going to have cancer anymore or I wasn't going die, I'm saying that he was going to give me the strength to go through it whatever the outcome, and I was at peace with that."

"I made peace with that before I even went into surgery, and I thought whatever the outcome is. I'm gonna be okay. I'm all right here on Earth and I know I'll be okay. In Heaven, you know, not that I deserve it, I don't deserve it, you know, but thank goodness we have a loving God that forgives us for our sins, and I knew it was gonna be okay. Even now, if it comes back, then he'll get me through it again, and whatever it will be, will be. But I'll be ready."

"Maybe that's why the Lord has let me live here on earth a little bit longer, not just to share about my cancer experience, but the blessings that He has given me," she said. "I mean over this time of sickness you know that it's been a storm. He's gotten me through my storm.

I'm a very strong person but I'm not saying that I'm perfect, I'm nowhere perfect. I've got a lot of faults and yes, I sin. I try not to. But I know that my God's a loving God, and he's, yes, he's here with me, and I feel like that's what I need to be doing, is sharing that part.

More than anything, because if you don't love the Lord, then that's my hope that someone I'm sharing with, they'll come to loving him."