

# Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



**HEATHER WALLACE, 47**  
DIAGNOSIS: HODGKIN LYMPHOMA, SKIN CANCER,  
BREAST CANCER, PRE-CANCER OF THE CERVIX

## The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Pinon Hills
- **OCCUPATION:** Snowline Unified School District-Aid to disabled students
- **FAMILY:** Nick 15, son; Madison, 18, daughter; Linda Wilson, mother
- **HOBBIES** Bowling, Scrapbooking, Traveling
- **PHILOSOPHY** Live one day at a time. Even though you are going through the hardest time of your life, you have to be positive.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

When Heather Wallace was 17 years old, she passed out one day at school and was sent to the nurse. That incident led to a diagnosis of Hodgkin lymphoma, her first of five cancer diagnoses.

Wallace is 47 now, and in the intervening years, she has been

treated for Hodgkin lymphoma twice, including a recurrence when she was 21; skin cancer in her early 30s; a precancerous cervix; and when she was 46, she was diagnosed and treated for breast cancer.

Wallace said her lymphoma was treated with very aggressive



chemotherapy which is no longer used.

The treatments left her with organ damage. "Because of radiation and chemo, in 1995 my lungs collapsed and I almost died," she said.

"I was in ICU, and they had to repair my lungs. I only have 30 percent of my lung function left, so I cough a lot."

"My heart is bad – eventually I will have to have a new heart valve, but right now, my heart is tolerating the leakage.

In spite of everything, Wallace said she has kept a positive attitude, something she believes is critical to her survival.

After her battle with Hodgkin lymphoma, Wallace returned to an active life. She married, and in spite of being told she could not have children, she had her daughter when she was 30 and her son three years later.

"When I found out I was pregnant, I was ordered to bed rest. My

daughter was born at 26 weeks and my son 32 weeks. Knock on wood, both of my kids are healthy."

Now Wallace is divorced. Her daughter lives with her ex-husband, and her son lives with her.

But Wallace still worries about the possibility of other cancer diagnoses. "I have precancer of the cervix – they had to laser a lot of my cervix off. That is why my kids came early.

But fear has not stopped Wallace from having a full life. She works for the Snowline School District, where she travels on a school bus as a one-on-one aid to disabled students.

Wallace loves to travel, too. "My daughter graduated, so we went on a cruise. Then I went with my boyfriend to Hawaii, to Las Vegas with my son, and then Tahoe with my boyfriend.

"I met my boyfriend when I found out I had breast cancer, and he stayed with me," she said. He is a good guy – I definitely lucked out with him."

Still, Wallace lives alone with her son and is focused on the present. "My son is my top priority right now," she said.

When she was first diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma, Wallace was home schooled, and "one of the teachers took me to counseling in group therapy. Everyone had a different kind of cancer. They were all older."

Wallace said at 17, she did not relate to the participants and never returned to the group.

"With my breast cancer, I reached out to a cancer support group," she said.

## Caregiver Perspective



When Linda Wilson learned her 17-year-old daughter had Hodgkin lymphoma, "It was a shock," she said. "She was so young and I didn't know what to expect.

"The doctor told us she was going to have chemo. It did a lot of damage we didn't know about until afterwards.

"The cancer went away but it came back, so she had to go through chemo again. I took almost a year off work to take care of her.

"Then down the road a few years ago, she got breast cancer. She is such a strong-willed woman and I am so proud of her. Her outlook really helped her."

Heather's brother had cancer too. "He had Hodgkin's and then he came down with MS. Both of them are doing well now," Linda said.

"When Heather had breast cancer, I came to live with her for a month. She had tubes to drain fluid (from her surgery), so I had to drain that and measure and write down how much and the color.

Linda has advice for anyone facing a cancer diagnosis: "I know it sounds bad, but it will get better. If you have your friends for support, and family, you are already ahead of the game."

“I am so open – I will tell you anything you want to know.”

That group was in Apple Valley, and now Wallace says she would like to find a more local support group near Pinon Hills.

Wallace said if one of her friends was diagnosed with cancer, "I would definitely be there for them. Knock on wood, none of my friends has cancer.

"I am so open – I will tell you anything you want to know. It helps me, too, basically talking about it.

"It is something that will be with me for the rest of my life. It has been a big part of my life – from 17 to 47 now.



The American Cancer Society provides a 24 hour service to answer questions about diagnosis, insurance, local support and resources

**www.cancer.org or  
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