

# Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



**Sue Kalgren, 51**  
DIAGNOSIS: UTERINE CANCER  
(ENDOMETRIAL CARCINOMA)

Karlgren feels fortunate that she had a solid support system.

"I was a very independent person," Karlgren said. "It was very humbling to ask, hey, could you help me out with this or that?"

But, "It takes a village. People came by from church and brought meals, and my friend Dorothy cleaned the house and picked up my daughter from school."

Her husband, Kris, was very involved in her care, too. "He was shocked like anyone would be, Karlgren said. "I had to go down the hill for six chemos. You are there for five or six hours. At first ladies from church were going to take me, but he took me for every appointment."

The Karlgrens have included their daughter, Kaitlyn, in her mother's treatment and recovery, too.

"We bought a book about when someone you love has cancer and read to her to explain it," Karlgren said.

Kaitlyn learned that her mother was losing hair because of medicine she needed. "Kaitlyn slowly understood what was going on. She was 9 when I was diagnosed and turned 10 during treatment," Karlgren said.

"This summer, she is going to Camp Kesem for children who have parents or siblings who have had cancer. It's just great because she will be able to talk to other kids (about it)."

## Caregiver Perspective

Coming home from deployment and discovering his wife had cancer was "a shock, I guess," said Kris Karlgren. "And then we were open, so Kaitlyn knew."

"I was a little scared," Caitlin, 11, said.

"As a caregiver, (I did) anything that needed to be done," Kris said. "Logistics-wise, making sure Kaitlyn got all her stuff done, cooking meals, taking Sue up and down the hill."

Kaitlyn had responsibilities too: "I snuggled with my mom and helped her feel better," she said.

"When my mom was done with the surgery, I was happy 'cause it was mostly over, except for chemo," Kaitlyn said. "I thought the cancer was done after surgery and it was."

Kris says to anyone facing a cancer diagnosis: "I say trust in the Lord. Be open with the kids. Be supportive. Every day is a blessing; every day is a good day. Don't take things for granted. You are not in a vacuum."

"There is a learning curve to anything, and you are going through it fresh; you don't know what the outcome or expectations should be."

"I don't want to play Monday morning quarterback. You have individuals out there who can provide resources and information ahead of time about what to do with treatments and medications."

Kaitlyn thinks their caregiving was a job well done. "I think I did really good; daddy did really good taking care of my mom, she said."

“Losing your hair becomes the least of your worries.”

### The Basics:

- **Resides:** Apple Valley
- **Occupation:** Teacher, Apple Valley High School
- **Family:** Husband, Kris Karlgren, 52, daughter Kaitlyn Karlgren, 11
- **Hobbies:** Reading and sports- watching football, playing golf
- **Philosophy:** My thing from the beginning is trust God.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Sue Karlgren's husband, Kris Karlgren, had just come home from deployment with the Air National Guard when she went to the doctor complaining of generally not feeling well, including fatigue, losing weight, and pain in her stomach.

"I had gone through menopause," she said, "and I thought I needed a hysterectomy but waited until Kris came back."

That was the beginning of October, 2016. "My doctor felt a mass in my abdomen and sent me for bloodwork and an ultrasound," Karlgren said.

"The next day I was shopping with my family, and the doctor called and said I was severely anemic and needed to go to the hospital right away for a blood transfusion."

Thinking it would be a simple procedure, Karlgren said, "I drove down by myself because I didn't want to bother my family."

But, "five days after my husband came home, I went into the hospital. They kept me for three days doing tests and discovered cancer."

Because of the size of her tumor and complications, Karlgren stayed in the hospital for a week. She was



told her cancer was stage 4 because it had gone through the uterine wall, "a big shocker," she said.

The tumor was aggressive, and she underwent strong chemotherapy every three weeks for six rounds, and then radiation daily for 28 days.

"My hair started falling out on Christmas day," Karlgren said. "At first I was concerned students would see me with no hair, but after a while, it was 'who cares?' Losing your hair becomes the least of your worries."

Karlgren thought she would quickly return to her job teaching school. "But my doctors said I shouldn't go back because if I got sick, I would be back in the hospital."

"This year (2017-2018) I went back to school in August 2017, and my white cell count was still down. I was very nervous."

Karlgren says support groups are an integral part of recovery and survival.

"I have learned: Don't give up. I am in an online uterine cancer support group on Facebook and the St. Mary women's cancer support group."

"A support group is not all Debbie downers; it's uplifting. Other people are there to give you a wealth of information, provide support, even make great friendships."

Having cancer has affected Karlgren's perspective. "After going through this, you hear people get stressed out about the stupidest things." She said.

"You really need to take a step back and appreciate every day more. Every day I get up and thank God I'm alive. You don't take things for granted anymore."

Karlgren advises: "Do what's right for you and your family. You have to do what's right for yourself."



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