


Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



 **CHERYL HEMRY, 59**
DIAGNOSIS: TRIPLE NEGATIVE BREAST CANCER WITH INVASIVE DUCTAL CARCINOMA WITH DCIS GRADE 3

The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Phelan (was in Apple Valley)
- **OCCUPATION:** Workers comp processing for a trucking company
- **FAMILY:** Large family with 6 living siblings, including sisters Nancy and Marcia
- **HOBBIES:** likes to read, study and be out in nature
- **PHILOSOPHY:** Too many people are affected by cancer; it seems to be on the rise. We all need to learn more about cancer and make life changes to avoid it in the first place.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Cheryl Hemry is “not very good with dates. But, St. Patrick’s Day, Tuesday, March 17, 2015, is a good anchor,” she said.

That is the day she was diagnosed with breast cancer. “When I found out, I said, ‘oh, ok.’ I wasn’t scared.

“I was more upset when the doctor told me it was going to take a year to get through surgery and treatment and get back to “normal”. I thought, ‘I don’t have time for this.’ It did take a year, and then some.”

Hemry said her treatment and recovery, which included bilateral mastectomies and breast reconstruction, “got going right away. It started in April



(2015), and I was back to work in November. That was a challenge, because I still had chemo brain. I sometimes forgot how to do things at work. Chemo brain is real.”

Hemry was treated at City of Hope. There, she was in a trial group and received 16 rounds of “pretty aggressive” chemotherapy.

To combat low white blood cell counts, “I had to do Neupogen shots in my stomach,” she said. “I had to do five days in a row before the last three treatments. It was \$10,000 for each round of five vials delivered to the house in dry ice.”

Fortunately, her Neupogen treatments were covered by insurance.

Hemry said she had plenty of support. “I had so many people helping me get through this. My family stepped up in ways I never would have expected.

“Essentially, I had a full team - secretary, nurse, cheerleader, cook, medical adviser, therapist, driver, housekeeper, masseuse - among my family and friends.”

Hemry said her battle with cancer affected how she lives life now.

“I thought I was the healthiest person in my family,” she said. “It has made me step up my health care – the way I exercise, the way I try to get balance in my day.

“There are so many things you don’t have control over, but the things you do have control over, you should try to accomplish.”

She also takes a holistic approach to her health, embracing such things as vitamins, herbs, essential oils, acupuncture, chiropractor, craniosacral therapy, and massages.

“It is expensive,” she said. “These are not things

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“Chemo brain is real.”

medical insurance covers, but things I have control over.”

Hemry said worrying about finances was a constant battle.

“You are missing a year’s worth of work. You have to pay for health benefits and pay your bills.

“I knew support issues would be taken care of. It was the financial that I was always worried about: What’s this going to cost?”

Hemry said she joined the cancer support group at St. Mary Hospital in Apple Valley. She also participates in High Desert Cancer Connection’s Journey through Cancer workshops. “I was surprised how much the creative stuff was good for me,” she said.

“I do a lot of research. I found a group called Chemo Angels. They have these wonderful women sending you cards and letters during your treatment – sending well

wishes, normal stuff that cheered me up.

And, she says, breast cancer patients should fully understand side effects of breast reconstruction, including the possibility of constant pain.

“If I had it to do over again I would not have had implants,” she said. “That is a valid decision for women to make.”

Caregiver Perspective



Nancy Smith said one day, “I was sitting in my office when my sister Cheryl walked through the door and looked at me. I knew something was going on.

“She said, ‘I have cancer,’ and she started crying. I started crying and hugged her and told her ‘we are going to fight this together.’

“From the beginning to the end, my other sister, Marcia, got involved as well. I took Cheryl to all of her doctor appointments. Thank goodness, I wasn’t working.

“I would try to make her laugh. I tried to spend quality time with her and have fun and get her mind off of things.

“I believe in God and I always had faith she was going to get through this. It was hard to see her go through it, but she was a champ. She got through it and she is here with us.”

Nancy said family and friends of newly diagnosed cancer patients should “talk about it.

“Do things with them. They are going to feel depressed, down and sad. Be there for them. Love them.”



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

www.cancer.org or call 800-227-2345

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Q WHAT DOES SKIN CANCER LOOK LIKE ?

A The skin cancer which occurs most commonly is basal cell carcinoma. It may appear as a non-healing sore or bump on the skin. These should be diagnosed and treated early as their continued growth makes treatment more difficult. If you have any questions about a possible skin cancer, be sure to consult a Board Certified Dermatologist.

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