

Falling through the Cracks

By Shirleen Von Hoffmann

President and Cancer Coach for Calling All Angels Cancer Foundation

Copyright 2010



In addition to my work as a Sales Coach, Trainer and Author, I created a cancer foundation that I fund out of my pocket and from the sale of my book, "The Journey Home- A True Story of Life, Love, Illness, Passage and Healing. <http://www.journeyhomebook.com>

My foundation is about five years old and feeds and supports cancer patients who are all alone and have no one to help them. I personally work as a Cancer Coach and take no pay for this work. In fact, I pay for many things out of my pocket when my foundation is out of money. I make their meals myself and deliver them myself at no charge. Being that I work for people who are alone and have no family you can imagine how happy they are to visit with me. For some reason that has led me to work with a lot of low income, single and elderly patients. I must tell you that even though I do this work for no pay, there is NO more rewarding work in the world than helping these folks. It is my "Soul work" and I can tell you story after inspirational story of the wonderful people I have had the pleasure of working with. From time to time, I am struck with the absolute truth of our society. That hard truth is that a lot of our neighbors fall through cracks and it takes hands on, grass roots community efforts like my foundation, to fill those gaps that the larger organizations cannot. With so much funding being cut, these stories are becoming more abundant every day. I am going to share with you one such story.

This story is about my current cancer patient Joan. She is right now in need of help. She is 44 and was in the mortgage business for many years and then worked at a health care facility as a CNA until she was struck with breast cancer. She was treated for her breast cancer with chemotherapy. She survived this only to find out two years later that she now has leukemia. The chemo she received two years ago destroyed her bone marrow and she is now awaiting a bone marrow match, donor and transplant. She is all alone in the world.

She came to me as a referral through a social worker from a cancer hospital because she needed help with meals. The social worker informed me that she had been on a tough road and wondered if I could intervene and help her out. I contacted her and we met at a local coffee shop. I picked her up because she had no car; she had to give it up due to no money to make the payments, gas or insurance. When I interviewed her, I found her to be an absolute pleasure and very thankful to me for anything I might help her with. She has no computer to research her options or get help. She has a home telephone and that was about it for contact. She told me she wasn't eating and losing weight and her Doctor was concerned about her. I asked if she wasn't hungry due to the cancer and was astounded to find out that, No she was very hungry most of the day but just didn't have the money to buy food or the energy to fix it. This woman makes \$816.00 per month on disability and her rent is \$700.00 per month. Her cobra payment for her benefits is \$471.00! Which leaves no money for anything else and actually in the red! Over the period of time on disability she has wiped out any savings she had. Her only real concern when I met her was that she has enough money to make her March cobra payment. As she couldn't let that go or she would not have the benefit coverage for her pain medication and the transplant possibility.



You have to remember this is not a person who hasn't worked she was a working part of our society for all of her adult life. This is a Cancer Patient who's life has been absolutely devastated by cancer and who's future continues to be a huge question mark due to treatment. This is a person who fell through the crack. This person could be any one of us. Many people don't realize the costs that can be incurred from a major catastrophic disease like cancer. It can devastate your life and your family. Not only do you have to deal with the disease you have to deal with the hole it can leave in your financial pocketbook. Many of us feel comfortable and confident with our health plans but really have no idea what a major illness

would do to our plans, our pocket books and our lives when those plans have run out. I think most people would be very surprised to see what I see.

This case just broke my heart. While we were meeting, I asked her if she had eaten yet that day. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. She hadn't and told me she did her best to wait until five o'clock to eat, as she was only able to afford one meal a day. When I told her that we needed to get her a sandwich she looked at me, teared up and quietly whispered to me, "I don't have any money to pay for it." I knew she was embarrassed and I assured her I would be paying for the sandwich but the whole thing just broke my heart. I dropped her off and when she left, I just cried in my car all the way home. It affected me on a very deep level that someone like this, could fall under the radar and go unnoticed for such a basic need.

I immediately went home and made her two weeks' worth of meals, paid the cobra payment for her out of my own pocket because she was so worried about her benefits being cancelled. I am helping her with food, and clothing and transportation, but I am looking for a corporate sponsorship to help me, for this very nice person, and for the others who I will help that follow her. In a few months, she will receive social security but in the interim, she has fallen in a crack; the crack of our healthcare and of our society. It happens very easily and sometimes with no warning and it takes people caring about others to step in and help a neighbor in need.

I have raised some funds and I am looking for a cheap car for her to get her to appointments and give her, her freedom back. Life is a real challenge with no car when you don't feel good. Taking the bus is not an option when you don't have the energy to walk very far. Most transportation services have now been cut, at least the ones we have called. In the meantime, I will drive her and I have a computer donation for her. She has nothing and no one, but I am helping her. I am taking a stand for her. She has a strong faith and a great attitude considering what has happened to her and is very appreciative of ANY help she gets. I am looking for donations for her and corporate sponsors for my foundation, so I can continue to fund the kind of work I love to do. If you want to take a stand next to me and are an interested in donating or supporting my foundation please contact me, Shirleen Von Hoffmann at callallangels@yahoo.com.
www.callingallangels.us

Many do not realize the costs that can be incurred from a catastrophic disease like cancer. It can devastate families and certainly change your life. Not only do you have to deal with the disease you have to deal with the hole it can leave in your financial pocketbook.