

Amy Tuten Darrah

prepared for Amy Tuten-Darrah on April 30, 2019



My Story

Journal

Fun on the 4th of July, Chemo on Labor Day??!!

September 14, 2016

Thank you for joining me! Things have been a little nuts lately and I have set up this page so you can follow along, keep in touch, cheer me on and most importantly, pray with me, if that is something you do. I will try to give specifics so you know what to pray for. Every day, I am praying for you, my children, my husband, my parents, friends and family, all the medical people who handle my care and for a cure. God's hand has been in this from the beginning and I know this without a doubt. So, here's what has been going on:

- July 9-Lookin' good! Feelin' good! The picture above was taken the night this all started and is outside of the Aronoff after the kids' performance in Fidelio. When went home, for the first time in the history of my life, I took my shirt off in front of the bathroom mirror. As I did that, I noticed that the right side of my upper chest, by my underarm was a little puffy. I poked, Scott poked and neither of us could feel anything. It didn't hurt. Over the weekend, I iced it, I heated it, we kept poking. On Monday, Scott looked at me and said, "it still looks the same". Not one to run to the doctor, having a clear mammogram in December, 2015, and no breast history, I'm still shocked that my gut reaction was to call breast surgeon that I had seen, briefly, 10 years ago. I forced myself into an appointment with her on 7/21.

July 21. I went to see the surgeon who began with a mammogram, which was followed by an ultrasound and then a more focused mammogram that morning. When finally sat down with the surgeon she told me that what I had been feeling was FAT! Fat that had filled up a lymph node! In reviewing my mammogram she had, however, seen this spot on and she wanted to do a biopsy. "No worries", she told me. If it was something, she could fix me up. I left the office thinking that life was strange.

August 2 - I had the biopsy. You know, they really should prepare a girl for what that means. Face down with your breast through a hole in the table. Vice grip and a machine that sounds like a jackhammer/dental drill boring into your breast. Again, I left hearing that IF it was anything, the fix was quick. Radiation should do the trick!

August 4 - The surgeon calls and yes, I have breast cancer. What??!! Oh, but the good news is that it is Stage 0, in situ. We are going to do a lumpectomy and be done. Oh, and as a courtesy, she is removing my fat blob for a more contoured look. Thank you very much! She says there is no rush and school is starting the next week, so I opt for the second week of school to do the lumpectomy and get back to my life.

August 22 - Lumpectomy. Surgery is easy and I am left with two 5 inch incisions and a drainage tube, which is

disgusting and becomes the thing I hate most in the world. The incisions are much larger than I anticipate and the drainage tube just needs to be run over by a truck! Surgeon tells Scott that all went well and that she took two lymph nodes to biopsy just because they were close to the fat blob. Just precautionary. Don't worry. In situ cancer that was removed is 2.9 millimeters or the size of a grain of rice.

August 25 - Call from the surgeon. The cancer in your breast is gone, however it spread to your lymph nodes and is now at Stage 2. You need chemo, radiation and probably more surgery later. Come back in a week and we'll take out your disgusting drainage tube and I'll refer you to an oncologist. At this point everything is surreal. I contact my friend Ruth Ann who is managing her cancer through Ohio State and receiving excellent care. I start looking for oncologists here, but how am I to know who is really the best? Our prayers become increasingly more focused. It's also time to tell my parents what's going on. I pray over this, worried that the news might undo them (and I'm sure it did) but when I finally do, they are calm, caring and supportive.

August 29 - Meet with the surgeon to get the drainage tube out but because I am an over achiever in the art of draining, it must stay in...maybe 2 weeks more. Argh!!! We learn that I have Triple Negative breast cancer. It doesn't play nice. It's aggressive. Treatment and attempt to cure will be difficult chemo sessions. She assigns me an oncologist by my zip code and that just isn't going to work for me. I ask her about survival meats and she says, "some people live. Some people die. Just be a survivor". REALLY??!! Scott and I leave totally deflated, not knowing where to turn but knowing that we must find big guns fast. We stop at City Barbeque to eat and pray that God leads us to the helpers. I tell him that Mr. Rogers' mother always told him that in times of crisis, look for the helpers. I know God is there and help is coming...and it does. When we get home, I get a phone call from a lifelong friend and one of the greatest people on the planet. She also happens to be a world-recognized hematologist/oncologist from Cinti Children's Hospital. She knows a great doctor who can help me and she is contacting him on my behalf the next morning. This brings immediate relief, unspeakable gratitude, hope. The cavalry has arrived! The next day, I am contacted by the doctor's office and scheduled for an appointment on Sept 1.

Sept 1 - Scott and I meet with the oncologist who brings out charts and doesn't mince words. Quickly, I am unable to hear him talking and all I can think is, "take me home". They make plans and I just nod. Electrocardiograph, to see if my heart muscles are strong enough to withstand chemo is ordered along with a CT and bone scan. I am to do those the next day (9/2) at Christ Hospital (gets an A+ from me. Plus Nicole Kidman was down there filming something...not that that really matters. Someone told me she was 9 feet tall and a size 00) downtown, and will return the following Tuesday to get the port put in. Chemo is to start on Sept 8. A little scary but we are making progress.

Sept 6 - Port is installed in the type of operating room you see on TV. Very dramatic with big lights, lots of masked people, draping and my heart waves on a 60" screen. They give me twilight anesthesia and I can hear the surgeon and nurses casual chatter. I am praying I don't start saying something stupid and end up on YouTube!

Sept 8 - Chemo starts. It is 8 weeks (every two weeks) of high intensity drugs and then 12 weeks at some less intense dosage. That will be followed up by more surgery and the radiation which should put me at February or March. All I know is that as soon as I get a hall pass, I heading to the beach! As for chemo, all I will say is that

it laid me out. Today is the 14th and it is the first day I've been almost back to normal. There is no coping, controlling or handling with this chemo with Tylenol, as I thought I might do. You just submit and start praying!

So that is definitely enough information for now. I feel good, physically, and still have a sense of humor. PleAse don't feel like you have to find the right words or say "something". I know you care and I know you feel bad. I really do! I've been on the other side so many times just wishing I knew what to say when there are no good words. I feel like I am in great hands and I know God is in control, so I am going to take Ruth Ann's advice and just live my life while they work on a cure. Cheer me on because I CAN DO THIS!!!

If if you'd like to pray for me, my prayer, currently, is that I have a week of normalcy before I do the next round of chemo. This will give me time to be present with my family, catch up on things and be strong for the next round. Also, I have about 7 days of hair left. I'm not sure how I am going to handle that but I know it's a path i walk alone. I'm not seeking advice or motivation about it but you can feel free to comment on my cute hats later. ??

Comments

Thank you for sharing this Amy. It definitely brought tears and laughter. You are so BRAVE! Continued prayers ahead...XOXO

—*Jennifer Blum, September 14, 2016*

Amy! I had no clue you were going through this. I'm saying many prayers for you and your family. PLEASE let me know how I can help! Dinner? Lunch? Help with your kids. Whatever, you name it. ?? He will kick ass!

—*Terri Spears, September 14, 2016*

Thanks for sharing what is going on. No words other than to trust the Lord, which I know you already do. Love you kid.

—*Brian Forrester, September 14, 2016*

So Meredith was running around the library today bare footed... just sayin'. :)

—*Suzanne Carter, September 14, 2016*

Cute hats indeed! You might be pleasantly surprised by the shape of your head! :) Remember keep doing you!

One minute, one hour, one day, whatever works! Humor is a wonderful thing! Thinking about you! Big hugs!!

—*Laurel Fritzhand, September 14, 2016*

Glad you have Ruthann as a great resource. Keep up your great sense of humor. Love you.

—*Martha Snider, September 14, 2016*

Yes, you can do this!!! Stay strong, and know that I, and all of your friends, love you.

—*Gabriella Balassa, September 14, 2016*

Thank you for sharing with such honesty and humor. You are in our thoughts and prayers every day. Love and hugs.

—*Kathie Houchens, September 14, 2016*

Oh, baby sister!!! With God's help, you've got this!!! His love and His strength will carry you through this scary and daunting time. Keep smiling and concentrate on what really matters in life: Faith in God, your beautiful family and a strong community of friends who love and care about you! Hugs and prayers every minute of the day for YOU!!!

—*ruth ann siegler, September 14, 2016*

Amy! I cannot believe how quickly things progressed. How terrifying to think all is okay and not to worry. But isn't that what God is always trying to convey to us? Still...

Thank God your friend called the other oncologist on your behalf and you were able to be seen so soon. And thank God your instinct was to call the breast surgeon you knew from a decade ago! Smart cookie...

Just wanted to tell you a good story...

My dear friend and fellow OU alum also had breast and lymph node cancer. She has been doing great now for over 15 years. She only has to see her oncologist once a year! There is such hope now with all the work & research that has been done.

I'm so sorry this happened to YOU.

I'm sure your family is scared but gearing up for this fight together. And if you are raising your kids like I think you are, they will be full of love, smiles and help...all with humor.

I'm praying for Scott and your children, your entire family and your friends who are nearby taking care of you directly.

Most of all I'm praying for you, Amy. You don't always have to be strong for everyone else. I KNOW you can BEAT the €?#% out of this!

Remember to take good care of yourself. I am praying specifically the chemo effects give it a rest and allow you to get done what you want and need to, and the strength to prepare for your next treatment.

I'm thinking about you so much and when I do, a big smile comes upon me.

No doubt you have that effect on many.

Love, Tracy

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, September 15, 2016*

As I write this and tears streaming down my face , I know those curls you used to twirl when we gossiped will grow back.

—*Lori Sikon, September 15, 2016*

LOVE YOURSELF AND LET US LOVE YOU. WE CARE AND WE ASK GOD TO GUIDE EACH OF US INTO A HEALTHY REACH INTO YOUR LIFE.

—*Sylviaanne Derrick, July 10, 2017*

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Today's Weird Blessing

September 15, 2016

Scott and I are Foodies, no doubt. There's nothing I don't like about it. I like shopping for it, reading about it, talking about it, looking at it, cooking and eating it. I have floor to ceiling shelves of cookbooks and we travel regularly to Columbus and Centerville to shop at Whole Foods, The Andersons and Dorothy Lane Market. At some point in this journey, eating became an issue. As in, I didn't want to eat ANYTHING. Rationally, I knew I had to eat and drink, but the reality was, it really wasn't happening. It became a tireless frustration of constantly having to work on eating and frankly, I was bored and totally over thinking about food all. the. time. How could this be? I LOVE food!!! This morning, something pretty awesome happened. I woke up and my ability to taste food is totally gone. This means that I have been liberated from trying to find something I want to eat and not really wanting to eat it. I can now use food as fuel and move on. Not being able to taste is a weird textural experience but it is a huge monkey off my back.

Today I'm giving prayers of thanks for this blessing (and the fact that in glad I saved some of my skinny pants). I am grateful that today I feel back to normal. I'm also praying for my children who seem to be bearing up under the circumstances. Childhood is difficult enough on its own. I am beyond grateful to everyone who has reached out. Contact becomes such an important lifeline and source of happiness when your life slams to a halt. God is good!

Comments

You are so cool - finding good in all things. So liver will taste the same as ice cream????? Hmmmmm. Love you, girl!!

—*Martha Snider, September 15, 2016*

You are such a good writer...you make even a cancer experience an adventure that draws the reader into the details that we could never guess or imagine. Losing your taste??!! A blessing in disguise??!! You ARE an original, making lemons out of lemonade. What an inspiration....prayers and hugs continue...for all of you.

—*Kathie Houchens, September 15, 2016*

Time to move on from the cookbooks!! Let Scott do the cooking and you just lie around like Camille in lots of lace!! Love you, sweet Amy!

—*ruth ann siegler, September 15, 2016*

Being a cookbook lover myself and also having had to care for someone thru this process, two books you may want to use are The Lahey Clinic Guide to Cooking thru Cancer and /or Betty Crocker Living with Cancer Cookbook. Both give great advisement on troubling side effects and how to counter them nutritionally with the right foods. They are very helpful! Keep eating and smiling! You will get your taste back and be enjoying Whole Foods soon!

TTF!!

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, September 16, 2016*

You are so Positive! Perfect! I'm hoping to lose my taste for Reece Cups vicariously through you.

—*Suzanne Carter, September 16, 2016*

You know, Le Soupe's soup tastes bland to me. The soups are so beautiful, though, and they look so healthy and they look as if they promise to be delicious, but they just aren't to me. Almost, but not quite. I keep telling them that if they don't add more salt and pepper, they're gonna go out of business. But they remind me that they're preparing soup for people who have cancer and who are undergoing chemotherapy or who have other physical challenges that effect the appetite. And I always just sort of brushed it off as a bad business decision. But you've made it make sense to me. I mean, I guess that right now you wouldn't know if they dumped the whole shaker of salt in the broth, but others might stay longer in the stage you described as the "what can I eat?" state. So, I guess I'll be eating my bland soup and making amends to those folks over there.

As for you...thanks for writing about all of this, and I love you. You're right...it's not depressing. :)

—*Liz Tilton, September 22, 2016*

Kemo and Me

September 16, 2016

I am 8 days past my first chemo treatment and it wasn't until yesterday that I truly felt back to normal. They warned that the "Red Devil" (medicine is red) was very harsh and hard to tolerate but you cannot prepare for what you receive. Even today, I really have no words to describe it. They good news is that I survived it and I only have to do it 3 more times before I switch to the friendlier version. ?

Because chemo the the disease are now daily companions, I've begun to personify them. They are easier for me to deal with that way. Instead of "disease" and "treatment", to me they are a cartoonish band of black cloaked and masked bandits who move around in unison on tip-toe vs. the ultimate and overly exaggerated rabid dog warrior who is solely focused and 1000% committed to anihilating them, his one and only enemy.

So let me tell you what I know about my warrior named Kemo

1. Kemo is a badass and he does not care if I like him or not. He has one job to do and no time to make friends with me.
2. Kemo's one and only job is to kill bad stuff because he's here to save one life. He does not have time to worry about collateral damage or my feelings about it. So my hair falls out...deal with it. Indescribable fatigue...get over it. Oh, you just took a 19 hour nap, went to the bathroom for 2 seconds and now need to take another 2 hour nap to recover? Oh, your husband read that exercise is good after a treatment and decides you need 100 yards down the street but ends up practically carrying you home so you can recover with a 5 hours nap? SUCK

IT UP, BUTTERCUP!!!!

3. Kemo does not give a flying fig about all that I've read about managing symptoms, my intentions on powering through or the advice and articles people have given me about nutrition, attractive make up for chemo patients and wigs. KEMO DOES NOT CARE ABOUT MY PINTEREST PAGE!!

4. KEMO says, "Next time, just buckle up, shut up, pray and everything will be okay." KEMO has my full attention and respect so that's just what I'll do. I have to tell you, though, he makes me a little nervous.

Comments

Your attitude has the WOW factor....we are CHEERING YOU ON.....!!!

—*Kathie Houchens, September 16, 2016*

I think you need to turn this into a graphic novel. Seriously.

—*Gabriella Balassa, September 16, 2016*

Glad you and Kemo understand each other. So thankful for your sense of humor and great writing skills....and for you!!!!

—*Martha Snider, September 16, 2016*

Thank you for introducing us to Kemo. Grateful to be able to join you in thought and prayer on your journey to recovery.

—*Sue Porter, September 16, 2016*

I have always thought of chemo as a warrior intent on rescuing the damsel in distress!!! Go get the bad stuff, Kemo!!!

—*ruth ann siegler, September 17, 2016*

Will be looking for your Kemo book on the bestseller list...praying for your strength...

—*Ellen Georgilis, September 17, 2016*

KEMO AF!

(I don't think Kemo gives a shit if I curse on your page)

—*Liz Tilton, September 22, 2016*

The Hair Situation

September 18, 2016

So I've spent the weekend passively avoiding the issue of my hair and the fact that I am on borrowed time in terms of it no longer being attached to my head. Nothing has fallen out yet but I was told that I had 10-17 days from the start of chemo before it happens and today is day 10. Day 17 is going to put me mid-chemo coma and I do not want to awake from that looking like the Crypt Keeper. Tomorrow at 8:00 am, I go to the salon to get a Pixie cut. At first, I was just going to shave my head but I think this will be an easier transition for me and all involved in this household. Shoulder length hair, Pixie cut, Sinead O'Connor. Seamless progression. That's what I am telling myself.

Let me just say, I DO NOT want to cut my hair. I just don't. I've been thinking about why I don't and what the big deal is, really, anyway. It's going to grow back by March. Shouldn't I just get over it and forge ahead?? Here's what I have been thinking about and why.

I twist my hair and I always have. I fully realize that the awesome art of hair twisting is lost on those who don't but for those of us that do, it's a wonderful, soothing quirk that feels awesome. It especially feels good when something is going wrong and frankly, at this point, I'm surprised I'm not bald from just twisting it. So here is my plan for tomorrow, (and I have wavered on disclosing this because I can't figure out if it is creepy or not, but whatever), I am going to have my twisting hair and a back up twist of hair banded and cut off...in case I need to twist it. I promise I won't take it out in public.

The next three things I've been thinking about are really concerning what the big deal about baldness boils

down to for me.

1. I don't like to be told what to do, ever, about anything. I don't want to cut my hair, shave my head or be bald. It's that simple. Stamp my foot and throw a hissy fit!

2. How much of this is what society, media, people make it to be? They say it's awful and sad and traumatic. There's no redemption. It's just horrible and awful and bad, so we assume it is and we let be that way. What if we changed the dialogue? What if bald is beautiful, noble, powerful, empowering? What if bald is heroic, courageous, brave and fabulous? Maybe I'm on a mission to make it so, at least for myself. I'm definitely on a mission to own it.

3. Most importantly and concerning to me is the feeling that losing my hair changes things. It is the outward sign that someone is sick, as in, this-person-could-die, sick. And that changes things because then some people get uncomfortable and they don't know what to do or what to say. Should I say nothing? Do they want to talk about it? Will they feel bad if I share something good that's going on in my life? Should I offer help? Is asking a question about what's going on appropriate or will that make them feel bad? Your illness scares me on a personal level and I just can't engage because it's just too much for me to deal with. Oh, look at that lady. She must be going through chemo. That's so sad. I've been on the other side of this so many times thinking these things and knowing what to do or say. Going forward, I will treat those in my spot much differently.

To me, it feels like Chemo has a "face" and I just don't want to be the object of anyone's pity. I do not want this illness to define me. I am still interested in things and people, I still have a sense of humor and love to laugh. I am more than this disease and like I said before, God and my doctors are handling this cure. I'm just living my life. Let's hope I'm just a little paranoid and am pleasantly surprised at how this actually goes. I know I'll feel a lot better when I can just find my center and own it. Right now, though, it pulls me back to that feeling I had as a freezing cold, shaky-kneed 4 year old in a soaking wet and saggy red bathing suit, standing on the high diving board at swim lessons. Staring down at that deep water with my instructor yelling up to me to "Jump! For Heaven's sake, just jump!!" I though surely I would die. As she pounded up the steps to push me off, I jumped and then belly-smacked. It hurt a lot but I didn't die. I have a feeling that this experience may feel the same.

This is what I am currently praying about:

1. One of Will's lacrosse coaches has recently been diagnosed with ALS. I know his needs are serious and many. Something like this keeps my issues in perspective.

2. I'm praying for my children. Up to this point, because I've looked and felt good, this issue hasn't been too real for them and I've been thankful for that. This week, things get real. They know it's coming and Meredith says, "whatever, Mom. I'm fine with however you look." Will says, "I'm fine, too. I will still love you". Let's hope that that continues to hold true.

3. I am praying that I can make this transition easily and continue to remain positive. I'm thinking that I can. Over the past couple of weeks I've made some test runs to Krogers with my hair totally hidden in hats and no

one even looked at me.

4. I give prayers of gratitude for all the friends, family and almost strangers who have been so kind to put me on prayer lists, send email, cards, gifts and food. Their outreach and caring has been the single most meaningful thing that lifts my spirits and makes each day sunny. I know really good people!! Is it bad to say that I hope, they don't forget about me as time goes on?

Tomorrow, I'll post a pic of my new doo and share my most recent purchases.

1.

Comments

Excited to see your hair, but it has always been about those stunning eyes Tuten!!

—*missy potter, September 18, 2016*

You are always so amazing....the new " look" will still reflect all the beauty that you are. Owning it is courageous and healing. Praying for all your concerns.

—*Kathie Houchens, September 19, 2016*

Love the support from your amazing kids. The're right - we love YOU, not your hair. You might need several twist braids on hand cause you might wear them out. We won't forget about you for sure. ?? I, I will always love you ?????!!!

—*Martha Snider, September 19, 2016*

Yeah! I figured how to reply! Already told you girlie. Hair is just hair. We will shave each other's heads and spray tan them. Frankly - I've been waiting for years for someone to take me up on my offer. All I received in the past was "make it really short" - so I did a buzz. Then, my young Torz at 22 (2 years ago) said "don't shave it with me because it will make my mom do it and you two are scary enough together without being bald". You and I, however, know how to work it girl!~(maybe we should have some silly putty on hand in case we discover our skull is not as pretty as we think it should be)

—*Carol Ney, September 19, 2016*

Bald is powerful and fierce. And therefore sexy.

—*Liz Tilton, September 22, 2016*

I admire you so much. Your honesty is touching and exactly what is important...you are so REAL. There are far too few people in the world who are real. I have always gravitated towards them. When we met in college, I recall sensing it in you from the start.

No one who has ever known you will forget you....hair or no hair. You got this, babe. I see before me a Rock Star!?

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, October 2, 2016*

My New Doo

September 20, 2016



Yesterday turned into a day for a haircut, a visit with my parents and lots of napping but no updating.

Among the things I pray for daily are strength, courage, bravery and positivity and God delivers on that. He is faithful to me and hears my requests. I am certainly not a Pollyanna and I know that dark days will likely come but the past two weeks have been good days, mentally and physically (except for the week that shall not be mentioned?) and I have been really grateful for that!

By the time I went to bed on Sunday night I was pretty indignant about the looming haircut but when I woke up on Monday, I was ready to do it. I was in a good mood about it and pretty curious about the outcome. Because there is no non-awkward (I love double negatives and made up words) way for me to tell someone about my situation, I went to the salon to see Sean, walked in and blurted out, "I'm doing chemo. I need you to cut my hair!" He just looked at me for a moment without a reaction so I added, "I'm not gonna cry" and he said, "so let's cut your hair" and we did. He saved two bands of twisty hair for me and definitely thought I was weird for that request but I made the right move there. I haven't touched them but I'm glad to know I have them.

Wherever this picture attaches on this page you can see my new doo. Because my highlights were mostly cut off, it looks like I have a really bad frosting job. Like something I would have created from one of those Frost and Tip boxes in high school. Other than that, it feels a bit liberating. It definitely feels a lot colder and as for the whole hair cut thing, I'm just over it. I think I had too much mental build up about it and I have bigger fish to fry this week so I'm moving on.

Just two other things on my mind this morning. My sweet, sweet dad and Scott both had the same reaction to my hair cut. The first thing out of both of their mouths was, "I love you no matter what your hair looks like and even if you have no hair at all." They are a gift to me and good men who know how to say the right things.

The second thing on my mind is that in deciding not to get a wig, I've decided to wear false eyelashes and hats instead. I've researched wigs and frankly, I think I'm too lazy to deal with it, I'm not going anywhere and seriously, who am I kidding? I'm owning this!! I'm sure that if I really had places to go and be or if I was working, a wig would be a great choice, but I'm comfortable in the circles in which I currently move. I know good people!

I also researched false eyelashes and let me say that once you Google something like 'chemo and fake eyelashes' your world greatly expands. It expands into horrible and cheesy online stores that cater to the chemo patient. I also found a few good sites and on one of them I found the eyelashes and glue that I thought would work well. It put them in my cart and all of the sudden there was a pop up on the screen asking me if I would also like to order some fake eyebrows. WHAT?!??? Fake eyebrows?? Are you kidding me?? This, of course, opened another can of worms and more research. There are water proof eyebrow tattoos, stencils, adhesive fake eyebrows and real human hair fake eyebrows! It's a lot to take in. It's weird! In an eyes-closed panic maneuver, I ordered light brown real human hair fake eyebrows along with my eyelashes. The box has been delivered and the eyelashes look great but I haven't looked at they eyebrows. They are kind of freaking me out and I'm just hoping I don't have to use them. ?

Photos



Comments

Good for you....positivity, bravery, research and adventure....and you are ALWAYS the QUEEN of selfies....I love you, too, no matter what!

—*Kathie Houchens, September 20, 2016*

Looking good!

—*Crystal Kipp, September 20, 2016*

You are beautiful!!! Love you.

—*Martha Snider, September 20, 2016*

Your haircut looks jus amazing! You got this! You're kicking ass and taking names! ?

—*Terri Spears, September 20, 2016*

I love it!!!!

—Carol Ney, September 20, 2016

Looks wonderful!! Still those gorgeous eyes for me!!????

—missy potter, September 20, 2016

Love the part about the eye brows!!Ha!

—Claudia Pittenger, September 20, 2016

Wait? Is that my neighbor Amy...or a rocker from my favorite rock band?? You look beautiful and fierce...and ready to tackle anything!

—Steph De Falco, September 20, 2016

You are going to rock and roll this and I'm LOVING the do! Who knew you could wear that so well!!!
TTF!

—Sallie Starr Paracca, September 20, 2016

Wow, I love the haircut. chemo or no chemo, you're rockin' that.
EYES!

—Suzanne Carter, September 21, 2016

You've always had such beautiful eyes that the short (or no) hair will make them pop more!
XXOO

—Amy Gill, September 21, 2016

Please tell Sean, whoever he is, that he is my hero today.

As for you...that's what I'm talking about! I'm so proud of you.

—Liz Tilton, September 22, 2016

My Big Girl Pants are Filled with Lead!

September 21, 2016

The only good thing I have to say about this round is that when it's over I'll be 50% done with this type of chemo. Spiritually, I'm great. On a human level, I have a lot of trepidation about doing this again. As in, I just want to run away...to Bora Bora!! It's a little like putting your hand on a hot burner, learning that lesson but knowing you have to repeat it 3 more times. It's like I'd rather run around the block naked, bad. Eat a huge plate full of goetta, bad. Bathe in a tub full of frogs, bad. (And now you see where my deep, dark fears lie??)

Additionally, I have a lot of fear about them accessing my port. They have to punch through my skin with a needle every time to access it. Last time I was 2 days post surgery of its installation and it took two very long and painful attempts to get the needle in. I know it should go much more smoothly this time since the surgery site has healed but mentally, it's the once bitten thing.

I think we are better prepared for my week of downtime, this time. I've made casseroles! I plan to stay in bed and behave, not manage. There are no lacrosse tryouts. Last time, I was determined to go to a 2 hour tryout for Will. Scott sat me in a chair on the sidelines, slapped a big hat on my head, wrapped me up in a blanket to bake in the 80 degree weather and I slept through the whole thing looking like the guy from Weekend at Bernie's.

So, I'll be back in 7 days, presumably bald. I'm sure I will have something to say about that. Maybe I'll be wearing my 'real hair' eyebrows as I type. I told Scott last night, that with all the new things I'll be sticking on my face, it will kinda be like building a new Muppet every morning!

I'm giving thanks for the beautiful days, the fact that I feel really good and the continued support from my friends!!! It's meant so much to me. I really can't say it enough! I am channeling my inner Piglet and continually reminding myself that I am 'Braver than I think and stronger than I know' as tomorrow approaches. Most importantly, I am praying for my parents, children and Scott as they transition to bald me and also as they care for and support me physically and emotionally over the next week. It's a big job! I'm high maintenance! If last time is any indication, I'm in good hands.

Comments

You're doing great at being brave. Lots of folks are praying and God's got this..... And you won't have to run around the block naked - whew! Love you.

—*Martha Snider, September 21, 2016*

Thank you for the update... So grateful you are in good shape spiritually and surrounded by loving care-givers and friends.

—*Sue Porter, September 21, 2016*

If you do decide to run around the block naked, be sure to let me know. I've gotta see that!

—*Gabriella Balassa, September 21, 2016*

You have shown true bravery Amy . Had to deal with a stressful situation yesterday , I thought of you and what you are going through and realized nothing compares . Stay strong love you??

—*Lori Sikon, September 21, 2016*

What the hell is wrong with you?! Goetta is delicious.

Also, you do not need to be brave or strong. All you need to be is the opposite of Kemo. Your job is to nap.

—*Liz Tilton, September 22, 2016*

I am so proud of you and of course, I am praying daily, more than once. love, Aunt Sylvia Anne

—*Sylviaanne Derrick, September 22, 2016*

"Once bitten..." UGH! I cannot imagine how scary. Thinking of you constantly. Your faith and hope are going to see you through, and I know you are strong. But I'm still really sorry you have to deal with all of this. Praying for your entire family and for your calm and patience with yourself. You ARE in good hands.

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, October 2, 2016*

I Can Do This!

September 22, 2016

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Phillipians 4:13

"I can do this!" is something I repeat often. There are days that it feels like I say it hundreds of times and today might be one of them. I *know* I can do this because I rely on God's word and the fact that he fulfills his promises to me.

This morning on Facebook, these amazing children popped up singing a Josh Groban song that I've always

thought was a bit (a lot) sappy. As I watched and listened, the song became relevant and meaningful. I thought about all the ways I have been lifted up by those supporting me and the strength it has given me. I had to watch the talented children it 3 times and I'm sharing it so you can be amazed, too.

<https://www.facebook.com/JakeBoysUK/videos/554786778023699/>

Comments

A great song! Praying for a smooth day for you!

—*Martha Snider, September 22, 2016*

Yes you can??????

—*Lori Sikon, September 22, 2016*

Thinking of you and KNOW you can do this!!!!
XOXOXOXO

—*Patti Myers, September 22, 2016*

Thanks for sharing the sweet song! You are doing well! When are you going to publish all of these fun entries??
Nora Ephron, move over!

—*ruth ann siegler, September 24, 2016*

Chemo Round #2 is DONE!

September 29, 2016

It's done and I *only* have to do this "Red Devil" treatment two more times before I move on, but I'm not thinking about that today. I now know it takes a full week to recover and then I get a week of feeling great, which is where I am this morning! I am thankful for this Fall weather because it feels great and it is now hat season and hats are now part of my daily ensemble. Over the weekend, I realized that it had been exactly one month from my "no big deal, stage 0" surgery to, "Oh, sorry, it's actually invasive cancer" diagnosis, to completion of round two of the chemo. I think that's really great progress and in the midst of all of the chaos, confusion and turmoil,

God has delivered on promises, been merciful and walked beside us. Although chemo is extremely hard, I know things could be so much worse in a thousand kinds of ways and so I am grateful.

What I learned from the first round of chemo is that because it drains all my strength and energy, energy must be conserved on the "down" weeks. As someone who is used to a fast paced lifestyle, having my wings clipped proves challenging. This past weekend, on Saturday, I finally got out of the house for a field trip with Scott. It wasn't easy, but it felt good to be among the living, it was humbling and it gave me some interesting perspective. We went to Jungle Jim's to buy spices from Colonel De (highly recommend him!), so that Scott could make ketchup. Why? Because if you are Scott, that's what you do at the end of tomato season when you have surplus and you're stuck at home with your zombie wife. So we went, with the agreement that I would get in a wheelchair once we were there. Actually, what I was telling myself was that I'd grab a wheelchair and walk around with it and sit if I needed it. Right... I walked from the parking lot (maybe 100 yards) to the entrance of the store and into the chair I went. That was humbling. It was emotionally hard to *need* to be wheeled around and I was very aware that I was surrounded by so many people to were able to move around quickly and accomplish so much. That was ME just a month ago! There are so many everyday things I took for granted until they were abruptly taken away. I wondered if the shoppers looked at me and questioned why I was in a wheelchair. I don't look sick. Did they think I was faking? Did they really notice at all? Will I ever get my life back?!!

The second thing that happened was that my hair began to fall out. Nothing about that went as I thought it would. On the day after chemo, I began to feel a tingling sensation on my head and 25 hairs or so would come out if I pulled on it. On Saturday, my scalp began to hurt like someone was pulling my hair out and more hair was coming loose, but I still wasn't looking bald or patchy. If you had asked me earlier, I would have said that would have been the point where I would have shaved my head, but I couldn't. Maybe I was secretly holding onto the hope that it wouldn't all fall out. On Sunday, handfuls of hair were falling out in the shower, clogging the drain and impossible to wash off my hands. Scott said he'd shave my head and I think he felt that maybe he needed to share in this process however, that didn't materialize. We both conveniently ignored his offer, I still had hair, albeit thinning, and I was thinking that this was something I needed to do by myself. On Monday, Scott left for Nashville and I headed to the shower. I just stood there letting my hair rain down into the drain so that there would be no excuse not to shave it. When I got out, I peeked at my head and I still had hair (sort of?) but it was time, so I shaved it. I started in the back and only hesitated as I shaved off my bangs, which were the last familiar image of the me I've known for 49 years. I wasn't upset and I didn't cry. I put on a hat and haven't spent much time looking at bald me. Actually, when I'm home alone, no-hat bald me feels pretty great and liberated. I'm over it, moving on and when Scott gets home tomorrow night, he'll have new, exciting version of me! Cancer has not caused my baldness. The medicine to help cure me has, and if this is the collateral damage for potentially saving my life, then I am grateful.

Today, I am grateful that I feel good, that chemo is available to treat me and that shaving my head was no big deal. I'm also grateful for a self-absorbed 15 year old and a 12 year old who resides on a planet near Earth. Their reaction to Bald Mom has been one of little curiosity, no concern, and a whole lot of disinterest. My kids are pretty awesome and I continue to pray that this life event has as little negative impact on them as possible. I continue to pray for the safety and health of my husband, children and parents. I pray prayers of gratitude for all my friends and family who continue to be so kind and supportive. I pray for all those who continue to work to

treat and help cure me. As of a few hours ago, I found out that one of my blood counts is very low and I currently have no immune system and that puts me at high risk of getting sick. This means I am now grounded and also cannot have contact with people. Please pray with me that I do not get sick, as this could cause a very serious situation. Please also pray for patience. I was REALLY looking forward to enjoying my weekend and now I'm just going to be watching life go by with my nose pressed to the window.

One last note, a couple of people have asked if they can share this page with people who don't know me. The answer is, "Yes!" I have been thinking how I will repay the kindness shown to me and how to pay it forward. If sharing this helps anyone in ANY WAY or saves a life because they get a mammogram, then please share away. Please know I am happy to talk to ANYONE, answer questions, provide my support and share the information that I have gathered so far. It's the least I can do and I'm happy to do it! God is good! Happy weekend!?

Comments

What a wonderful update Amy! Glad to hear you are feeling better and that the "shaving" was not as traumatic as you feared. Think of all the money you are saving on hair cuts, coloring, styling products! ;-) Very sorry to hear you will be "grounded" this weekend - but if you want something to do, I have a boatload of papers that need to be sorted and filed.....you won't have to interact with anyone - just papers, papers and papers! LOL Love you dear and thank you for sharing your very positive, prayer filled, beautiful attitude. xo

—Carol Ney, September 29, 2016

Glad you are feeling better this week, but sorry you are grounded. Feels like your teen years, huh?.. Love you and prayers are ongoing for all of you!!!

—Martha Snider, September 29, 2016

My dear Amy, Knowing you, you will find things about the house to make your time quiet and happy. As I only have to do the legs above my heart two hours, I have found that quiet time is good for those of us who are always busy. Already you are sharing this letter of love and positive everything. I am indeed praying for you and those you love, and especially your family and for God to give you every minute of patience that you need. Love, prayers and patience, I love you, Aunt Sylvia Anne

—Sylvianne Derrick, September 29, 2016

Amy, thanks for the informative and inspiring update! So glad you've rebounded from this second round of

chemo and are feeling better. No doubt you will find much to do while you are quarantined in your wonderful home surrounded by loved ones and things!

—Patti Myers, September 30, 2016

Lesson Learned

September 30, 2016



A few months into my 49th year, I really began to consider what it was going to mean for me to turn 50. It was a time when I readily bought any facial product that hinted at a miracle, when I was scrunching my face for wrinkles and wondering how far south things sagged before they just fell off. I was thinking about how I was going to make the last half of my life awesome and was making some plans, but life is random and plans halted. I added battle wounds and a bald head to the list of things that just weren't making 50 look as fabulous and effortless as I had hoped they'd be. The mirror was not my friend, but it really never has been.

All of this leads me to Scott. I've known him almost 30 years and in that time, no matter where we have been in our relationship he has consistently done the following 4 things.

1. Opened the car door for me, every single time
2. Reached to hold my hand wherever we are
3. Told me he loves me multiple times a day
4. Told me he thinks I'm beautiful

It's number 4 I've always discounted because he tells me this first thing in the morning, when I'm knee deep in mulch, covered in paint, frazzled by a child, cooking dinner, sitting at LAX practice or a myriad of other less than glamorous situations. My response has been to consistently roll my eyes and think, "What is WRONG with him??!! You've GOT to be kidding??!" I wasn't hearing him. A couple of years ago he came to me and said, "It really hurts my feelings when I tell you you are beautiful and you just dismiss it". I did consider, for a few seconds, that in light of my advancing age ?, I really should think about what he was saying, but I didn't. I just wasn't hearing him.

A couple of weeks ago I was looking in the mirror, peeking at stitches and scars and thinking 'this just isn't going to end up being cute'. Scott came up behind me, our eyes met in the mirror and he said, in the same tone and voice as he has for the past 30 years, "You are so beautiful". This time I HEARD him. He has said it 100 times since then and I have heard him every single time. I don't know what his definition of my beauty is and it doesn't really matter. What matters is that I am beautiful in his eyes.

I regret that it has taken me this long understand what he was saying and that I have tossed away 30 years of a piece of his kindness. I appreciate the true beauty in all my friends and family... Each funny, quirky, creative, caring, lovely, generous, sarcastic, keepin' it real one of them! For me, I realize that I've lived my life in the trap of superficial beauty, never meeting the mark and assuming that was the standard by which people judged me. Maybe some have, but that's crap and like most things in my life now, I'm over it and moving on. I'm good enough just as I am.

Psalm 139:14. I will praise you; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are your works; and that my soul knows right well.

One last thing about Scott. Today he came home from Nashville to me wearing a hat on my shaved head. I was telling him that it was a pity that society didn't embrace female baldness because I was rather enjoying it around the house and that if we're acceptable I might just stay bald forever. He followed that up by telling me that if I wanted to go anywhere being bald, in a wheelchair or otherwise, he'd always be proud to be seen with me. He asked to see my new hair doo and as I hesitated, he said, "I'll close my eyes. I just want to give you a kiss on your head." How awesome is that and how awesome is he??!

Comments

Damn it Amy! It's Friday night- no one should cry on a Friday. My favorite entry.
Love to you and just a bit more to Scott on this perfectly rainy, perfectly wonderful Friday night.

—*missy potter, September 30, 2016*

Fantastic! You are both awesome! You just keep doing you!!

Feel good!

—*Laurel Fritzhand, September 30, 2016*

How awesome are each of you. I am so proud of you and I love you both. Aunt Sylvia Anne

—*Sylviaanne Derrick, September 30, 2016*

I am so thankful Scott is your husband and you are hearing him. You are beautiful inside and out; cancer isn't going to change that. Am making a copy of this post to treasure forever ... Just as soon as I stop crying! Love and best wishes to the two of you.

—*Sue Porter, September 30, 2016*

How precious that you now hear him - what special love!!!! You have always been beautiful - now you get it!!!
Love you with or without hair!

—*Martha Snider, September 30, 2016*

How special indeed! Love that you can now hear him and that he is still expressing his thoughts and feelings so well.

Many hugs and kisses to you both!

Can't wait to see your new, non-do look. I'm sure you carry off beautifully!

???????

—*Patti Myers, October 1, 2016*

That's a beautiful tribute, just like you!

—*Elizabeth Murphy, October 2, 2016*

I am in awe of just how much your man LOVES you. There. Is. Nothing. More. Important. Than. Being. Loved. Keeping you both in my prayers and thanking God for sending you your angel who truly knows how beautiful you are.??

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, October 2, 2016*

Please tell me he has a single brother. I can't wait to see your beautiful bald head.

—*Suzanne Carter, October 3, 2016*

Thank you for sharing. I am starting my morning with a warm heart and a tear in my eye.

—*Kathy Willis, October 3, 2016*

Beautiful Amy. Scott is truly a special guy.

—*Carol Ney, October 5, 2016*

This one choked me up.

—*Liz Tilton, October 23, 2016*

Adventures of a Bald Chick

October 3, 2016

Scott spoke to one of my nurses on Friday and the "No Contact" instructions I was given were reduced to "No large crowds, be careful and wash your hands all the time". That was huge! HUGE!! The bonus is that the kids have been disinfected, their rooms are spotless and I am now a majority shareholder in all hand sanitizer produced world wide. Best of all is that I got to go out to eat, make a brief trip to the mall and go to Krogers and church.

I wore my Vineyard Vines white ball cap all weekend and got lots of looks and double takes. I'm thinking that it is not because they were jealous of my hat. Truly, I can't view my baldness with anything other than a bit of humor. I had makeup on and was not looking sick so from the front it might have looked like I had a pony tail sticking out the back. If you moved to the side and the back of my head, I told a different story. You could just see people's brains sort of buckle as they passed me. The double take went like,

"Oh, normal person. Wait! She doesn't have hair. Wait! She looks fine, but there's no hair! Healthy...NO HAIR! What?!!"

I was surprised how close people would get to me and have that reaction. Like getting almost into my personal space and doing it. It actually got comical for Scott and me. The best story of the weekend was when I was waiting for the cashier in a crowded and confined restaurant lobby. There was a small 90 degree angle where I was standing and at my hip was a 4 or 5 year old boy with his mom who was just around the corner. This little guy was SOOO excited (Jumping up and down, excited!) about my lack of hair. As I waited and waited and waited to pay my bill, he was getting increasingly loud in an attempt to get his mom's attention. "Mom! Mom! Hey, Mom! This lady doesn't have hair! Hey, Mom! Look! She doesn't have hair! This lady doesn't have hair!". No response from mom. When I finished paying, I turned to leave and almost ran into the lady. I smiled at her, looked up and realized that the majority of the room had stopped talking and were sheepishly watching the situation. What's a bald headed girl to do? I smiled, gave a little wave to my adoring fans and walked out.

Conversely, as I left the Lily Pulitzer store, I realized that I had had a 20 minute continual, casual conversation with the lady who helped us and not once was I aware that she acknowledged my hairdo. I am grateful for those small pieces of normalcy.

The other big lesson I learned at church is that is MY responsibility, if I am out in public, to use hand sanitizer. If I cannot be touched, then I need to stay at home. I cannot expect that friendly and well meaning people aren't going to want to hug me or shake my hand. It was awkward for me to briefly explain my previous "I'm not shaking hands because of my immune system" rule, so I'm done with that. It's not necessary and I like hugs.

This is my new normal. I am adjusting every day and eager to see what unfolds. I'm letting go of rules. Gone is the "No One Is Seeing Me Bald" rule. Scott loves my head! The kids, who have never grasped the concept of privacy, have both walked into my bedroom, unannounced, and held conversations with Bald Mom, never batting an eyelash. Now, sometimes, they just get Bald Mom and they are cool with that. I don't think the public is ready for Bald Me, so for now, I'll just keep on my ball cap.

This week is another chemo week. It's also the first Homecoming dance for my daughter. Among the other things that I continually pray for, I am adding:

1. Prayers for a safe and fun Homecoming weekend for Meredith. Prayers for Will as he gets to play the drums with all the bands at the Homecoming game. Prayers that I can feel well enough to participate and be there for my children as they need me to be. I would hate to miss out on the fun!

2. That I can manage this round of chemo and stay positive and healthy.
3. I am grateful for nice neighbors, friends and family who are so supportive in so many ways!!
4. I am grateful for amazingly resilient children who are laid back and loving.
5. I am grateful for a school system who employs caring, supportive teachers and counsellors who have gone above and beyond for me and my children. This has been a real blessing and a testament to the outstanding school district we live in.
6. That my immune system rebounds, if that is possible. I don't know if this is how it will be until I'm done with chemo or if I have a chance to get it back.

Comments

Continued prayers for you and your family. I'm so sorry you're going through this!

—*Terri Spears, October 3, 2016*

Beauty and grace under fire!!! Love you!!!

—*ruth ann siegler, October 3, 2016*

I'm glad you're not hiding out in your house! Go out with your cute white ball cap on!

I will pray you can enjoy the kids during homecoming. But whatever happens, make sure you take good care of yourself, Amy!

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, October 3, 2016*

I have to commend you on your remarkable attitude. People really can be thoughtless; we've all gotten "those" looks from strangers for whatever reason, and I'm sure we'll all get them again at some point. But if you ever feel self-conscious, just remember that you are a strong, smart, funny, beautiful woman whose friends love her and whose family adores her. Let 'em look!

—*Gabriella Balassa, October 3, 2016*

Great entry! Thanks again for your open and honest thoughts on this journey. You are AWESOME, with and without hair?

—*Patti Myers, October 4, 2016*

Love this post! #BaldIsBeautiful

—*Brian Forrester, October 5, 2016*

I would have been cracking up if I was there at the restaurant with you!!
Praying for you and this next round of chemo

—*Carol Ney, October 5, 2016*

I am completely ready for the bald you. Oddly enough, I am also ready for the completely bald me. No, I don't yet have any reason for my hair to suddenly fall out, but I sometimes imagine how I would respond if it did. I think I would buy some rich and luxurious and divine-smelling oils, and I would spend lavish amounts of time enriching my baldness. Then, I would rub my head with both hands all day long.

—*Liz Tilton, October 23, 2016*

My Dream Beanie

October 6, 2016



Take a look at the picture below! Yes, my mother raised me better than that but I am obsessed with this hat. It's on Etsy. It's on my phone and if you run into me, I'm likely to show it to you. I fantasize about wearing it EVERYWHERE (okay, maybe not to church)! I fantasize about tattooing these words on my bald head and about wearing a big sequined shirt with this sentiment on the front AND the back. It's not that I haven't thought this a thousand times when friends and family have been diagnosed with cancer but now it's personal and I own these thoughts, so I'm saying it out loud! My words are not angry words but matter of fact. Cancer, all cancer, can just bleepity, bleep, bleep-OFF and, in my life, here's why!

Yes, it's highly annoying that, unprovoked, this Isis Sleeper Cell of disease stealthfully attacked my body, forcing me to quickly assemble a mighty army to wage war in the fight for my life. The collateral damage, however, has been widespread and, at times, very hard to watch. For that, there is no forgiveness or mercy. Not now. Not ever.

1. For all the friends, family, parents of my children's friends and strangers who were blindsided by the news and were left speechless or searching for the right words to say. For those who know and cannot say anything. For everyone who feels horrible for me and has jumped into action with offers of help, prayers, meals, texts, emails, phone calls, gifts and cards. All of this means SO much to me and EVERYONE has truly been a critical part of the support that helps keep me going every single day!!! Trust me, this was the last conversation I ever wanted to have with you. It's not what I wanted to interject into your lives. It should have been something happy, fun or funny...not this!

2. For my parents, who are in their 80s. For the fact that their only child is sick. For the fear and concern that is created when your child is sick and there is nothing you can do to fix it. For the fact that at this time in my life, I am the one who is supposed to be supporting and helping them, not the other way around.

3. For my children, whose lives should be happy and carefree. Life gets tough soon enough. Regardless of how this ends, this will be part of them and that's unfortunate and feels senseless and cruel.

4. For my husband, who has walked by my side through all of this, who has taken on additional duties without complaining, who provides such good care to me, is so intuitive and leaves me wanting for nothing. For the heartbreak of watching this strong man break down in tears and great heaving sobs out of concern, out of fear and from the unfairness of it all.

So, Cancer, no one likes you. You're a jerk! Go die!!!

And, if you see my parents, husband, kids or friends, give them a smile, a hug, tell them they're awesome and ask the how they are doing. Take a friend and go get a mammogram or do it for yourself! My friends and family are wonderful! I know really good people! God is good all the time!

Psalm 57:1. Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.

Comments

Will do--and many hugs to you, too, dear friend!!

—Patti Myers, October 6, 2016

Per form - wonderful journal entry Amy!! Hope you are feeling a little better after this last round. Wasn't that #3? or is 3 still coming up?

—*Carol Ney, October 6, 2016*

Love that hat! Eff cancer!!

—*Terri Spears, October 6, 2016*

LOVE the beanie and LOVE this entry!!! Love to Mr. And Mrs Tuten and ofcourse YOU and your family!

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, October 6, 2016*

Love and prayers for all of you!!!!!!

—*Martha Snider, October 7, 2016*

Love you more than The Andersons... and you know that's a whole freaking lot!!!! xoxoxo keep kicking ass in life like always! You're my girl!

—*Megan McCollins, October 7, 2016*

Keep fighting girl !! Always in my prayers??????

—*Lori Sikon, October 7, 2016*

Yep, f*ck cancer!

—*Brian Forrester, October 7, 2016*

Cancer. GO DIE!!! Perfect. Love it. Meredith looks very cute today in her pink bow.

—*Suzanne Carter, October 7, 2016*

Agreed! Cancer sucks and a bunch of other words too! Thinking of you and praying for you and your family.

—*Elizabeth Murphy, October 11, 2016*

For crying out loud, Amy...misbehave. Buy the f*cking beanie and wear it. BUY THE BEANIE.

—*Liz Tilton, October 23, 2016*

Count down

October 10, 2016

135 days until I have hair. ?. That is all.

Comments

You're a beauty - hair or not, inside and out. Love you.

—*Martha Snider, October 10, 2016*

That would make it Scott's birthday....you are a gift, I am sure, hair or not.

—*Kathie Houchens, October 10, 2016*

Love you!!!! Hugs and prayers for you today (and every day)!

—*ruth ann siegler, October 10, 2016*

I love you??

—*Lori Sikon, October 10, 2016*

You are wonderful With and without hair!???????

—*Patti Myers, October 10, 2016*

Yahoo!! Nice number...135! Its the little things that matter! Keep it up Tuten!!

—*kathleen rose, October 10, 2016*

October 12, 2016

This journey, which already seems interminably long, appears like a deep, pitch black train tunnel. As I inch my way along, I'm focused on a pinpoint of white light. Whether that light is Heaven or renewed health, I don't

know. Regardless, God is in control and it will be okay.

Today, I'm praying for positivity, strength, patience, to feel better and to have a good recovery week. I deserve it! I'm not sure if this has just been a particularly long recovery week or if I am struggling harder to recover, but all of this feels very hard to power through right now. I have faith that things will get better, though.

I am sooo grateful for the people who have prayed, sent cards, checked in and dropped off food this week. I could have never imagined how truly helpful and meaningful this support would be for me and my family. It's a testament that, in this crazy world, there are still wonderful, caring good people! ?????

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

Comments

Meredith comes in for her morning hug and I shoo her away because I have bronchitis. ugh. I hate that. Things will be brighter very soon! I am certain! :)

—*Suzanne Carter, October 12, 2016*

Sounds like a very rough week. Will recovery be easier when the next type of magic cocktails ? I sure hope so!!!

Much love,
Patti

—*Patti Myers, October 12, 2016*

Praying that this is better for you. Damn right you deserve better!

—*Lori Sikon, October 12, 2016*

Praying, praying, praying!!!

—*Martha Snider, October 12, 2016*

Praying, praying, praying!!!

—*Martha Snider, October 12, 2016*

One of my favorite verses! I know it is hard now - keep that verse close to your heart!!
xoxo!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

—kathleen rose, October 12, 2016

#3 Done!

October 14, 2016

Okay! It was horrible, again, and it got kinda depressing, which really just isn't like me but that only lasted a day and for that, I am thankful. Today, I'm 8 days past the chemo and I am among the living and feeling about 90%, so I'll take it. Tonight Will plays lacrosse and I'm ready to watch.

I made it until half time, last Friday, and was able to see Meredith cheer and Will play the drums on the field. When we left, I was done. I missed the Homecoming dance fun, but sweet Scott took Meredith to get her hair done, met and more than approved of her darling and polite date, took pictures at the park, drove them to dinner at the Cheesecake Factory, waited while they ate and then drove them to the dance. At some point, he brought me flowers, too! ?? My other big event was on Wednesday night when Scott suggested we go for a walk in the park and I thought that was a good idea. You'll be impressed that I walked a 20 minute HALF mile!! Slower than most turtles and sloths, leg muscles shaking, I ended back at the car, hands on hips, bent over looking like an Olympic runner at the end of the 100m dash.

Now that the end is in sight, I have been thinking about being able to accurately describe what a week of "Red Devil" chemo is like. I have English degrees and I like words, but I truly struggle to find adjectives when I try to answer people's questions about it. Everything sounds so dramatic, but the reality is that it *is* dramatic. Because drama is not what it is about, I'm going to write it down and turn the page. If people want to read it and gain some perspective or know they aren't alone, great. If it's too much, I get it. I'm not going to write about it today, but to that end, a couple of things that are on my mind...

20 years ago (yikes!), Scott and I did two rounds of IVF. It was a dismal time of chronic failures. We were alone, unsupported and every single person IN THE ENTIRE WORLD was getting pregnant. It was so bad for me that I quit going to baby showers because I just couldn't behave. It taxed us physically, emotionally and financially and we never got a day off. I also made the mistake of assuming that I was going *make* this happen, medically, on my own. I did not include God or pray or even consider that He might have a masterplan. I was miserable and desperate. What I did do, however, was journal through the second IVF. I have only looked at that journal twice and the last time was over a decade ago. I may never look at it again. I don't need to because in reading it I realized that situations that had been so painful had been forgotten, problems that had been insurmountable had been solved and God had been there all along.

Some day, I'd like to look back at the account of my dealings with "The Red Devil" and see that some things have been forgotten, that I am proud of my bravery and that this was all part of the cure. More importantly, I want to specifically detail it because I never want to lose an ounce of empathy for anyone I may meet who is going through this type of chemo. I want it as a reference, not a sea anchor. This disease has been a game changer and a life changer and although I'm moving on, I'm also compelled pay it back.

Secondly, it took until last week for me to meet anyone who has my specific disease. I met two of them in one day, both while I was getting chemo. Triple Negative folks are only 15-20% of the breast cancer population, so there aren't many of us and that just reinforces to me that people come into your life for a reason. They gave me hope, they were funny, they have finished treatments and they are thriving and surviving. As I listened to their stories, our journeys were similar. The common thread was this chemo. As we talked, there were knowing nods, pauses and unfinished sentences. We all acknowledged that there just weren't words. No words to describe, no words to help people understand...just no words. I'm going to work on that.

Today, I'm giving thanks for this beautiful weather, that I feel good, that my blood counts are up and for all the friends and strangers who pray for me by name. I am grateful for the generosity, love and friendship of people because it keeps me going. This is going to sound ridiculous but I am praying for the motivation and ability to drink enough water. I've been told that need to drink at least 2 liters a day to get rid of the toxins in my body. While my mind says, "Just do it!", my body says, "Hmm...yeah, NO!"

Comments

Delighted you are feeling better and have a fun weekend ahead of you!
I look forward to your journal entries and your amazing spirit!!!
Much love,
Patti

—*Patti Myers, October 14, 2016*

Prayers for you each day, baby sister, and DRINK the water!!! I probably drink more water than anybody you know! Love you!!!

—*ruth ann siegler, October 14, 2016*

If you want more torture than u have already, try to sit in a sauna to sweat out the toxins in the next few weeks in addition to the water! Sure, u can't fathom it right now, but rid your body of that red devil!!
And no doubt, I believe you WILL find the words to describe this sometime soon!
TTF!!!?

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, October 14, 2016*

Yep ... Drink the water! We went through lots of months of different infertility types of treatments - but I know that doesn't compare to the Red Devil!!! Love your great spirit and love you much!!!!

—*Martha Snider, October 14, 2016*

You are such a delight dear Amy! I love the visual of you leaning over as an Olympic runner after running the 100m dash! You are correct - Scott is a super person and your appreciation of him in your secret public journal is so special. Know that I pray for you every day, as well as all of your family. Together you will conquer (together - plus lots of water!!) Love you - C

—*Carol Ney, October 14, 2016*

I will take you back to Court Street....Drink! Drink! Drink!

—*kathleen rose, October 15, 2016*

1. Scott is my hero.
2. As you probably know, adjectives are limited and are often insufficient. Which is why poets like you must use metaphor.
3. This might be a good time for the poet in you to shake off her dust
4. God might be a Her
5. I have a Triple Negative friend who is thriving. When you feel up to it, I can introduce you.
6. I don't drink enough water, either. Today, I'll try to drink some for you.

—Liz Tilton, October 23, 2016

Letting Go

October 18, 2016

I had a great weekend of feeling fine and spent it zipping around doing fun things with Scott which included watching both kids play lacrosse. I'll be enjoying my good health until Thursday when I have to buckle down for this last ugly dose...and then we CELEBRATE!!!

These last four months have been eye-opening and life changing and not just in a physical sense. As I look back at each decade in my adult life, life has eliminated something; a lot of materialism, appearance and the need to control everything. It now feels like the home stretch of learning to let go of the non-essential, paring down, releasing more control and focusing on the simple, basics in my life.

I have always liked, appreciated and been interested in are china, silver and things that sparkle. It's just my thing. When we got engaged, we registered for and received a lot of beautiful gifts which I loved but also thought I *needed* to appear to be a successful bride, wife and couple. I grew up in a household where appearance, in all things, and regardless of reality, mattered. As I began to discover that I was really more of a "what you see is what you get" girl and not a "put your lipstick on and smile" girl, it was apparent to me that what I had been given did not define me or success. The reason I cherished these gifts was because of who had given them to me and what each person specifically meant to me. In fact, I can still tell you who gave us each wonderful piece with probably 95% accuracy. Moreover, we still have all that we received and have not really purchased much to add to these things in the last 23 years. There's been no need. Bottom line is that I let the materialistic part go and became much more real with myself and others.

When Meredith came along I was sucked in by all the marketing and books about how things *should* be. I was so in love with her and wanted her little life to be perfect and for us to look perfect doing it. It was hard work and I worked hard at it. I admit, it was fun, too, and it was rewarding. All those bows, socks, cute dresses and chubby thighs on my precocious, chatty little angel! With all the kind feedback, how could I resist? That worked until she was three. I jokingly tell her that I call that year, "The Year You Got Spanked Every Single

Day". It was the year she got opinions and her free spirit took flight. We had daily discussions about who was driving the bus and who was in charge. It was also the year we added Will. Sticky, somber, beautiful Will. The child who refused to talk, preferred to scream and would anything for a chicken nugget. I went from smuggly toting around my one beautiful, well-behaved baby to the wild-haired, frazzled grocery mom. The mom with the screaming one year old and his rainboot clad, shorts, turtleneck and princess tiara wearing, 4 year old, bossy cow, big sister. The sister who would run up and down the aisles at Krogers demanding Zippy Zoo vitamins. The child who would accost complete strangers, telling them a crazy lady was chasing her and that she didn't know who I was, all in an attempt to avoid getting corralled in the shopping cart. My perfect angels had flown away. I accepted my fate and just let it go. We were redefining what it meant to be in control. Appearance didn't matter. Did. Not. Matter! It was go time! I had to focus on raising these people to, one day, be successful enough to move out of my house!

And so we've been focusing on these children for awhile now and we're doing pretty well. As they grow, I let go. My control freak ways are not tolerated and work against me, so I let go, bit by bit, reluctantly and with fingers crossed. Good news is that my kids, above all else, are good people at heart and that's what matters...well, that and them finding their own place to live after college.

Now, I have this added element that involves my life. It's forced me to put myself first a lot which is weird but necessary and hopefully, temporary. I am learning to accept help from others and what it means to not be ultra independent. Medically, I'm learning what it means to totally submit and entrust my life to others without questioning. Personally, I'm learning to speak my mind and speak truthfully when others want to tell me how they think my life should be. I'm learning to let go. I've let go of the garden, some interior updating, plans to get a new car and buying tickets to events. I haven't made vacation plans and we haven't talked, for a long time, about purchasing a vacation home or where we may live in retirement. There will be time for that later. There are people I thought would be here to support me and really aren't. That's okay, I'm not upset and I understand that happens. I can't worry about that now. In their place, and along with so many others, have appeared old friends, strangers and really random, wonderful people, which has been delightful, inspiring and proves that there is still a lot of good in this world.

I embrace gratitude, daily. I always have but now it's refocused. I am so grateful to everyone in my life right now. I keep saying this, which is a testament to the magnitude of how much it means to me, but **every single** text, phone call, email, lunch, card, gift and prayer uplifts me, keeps me positive and moving forward. They feel essential to my recovery and are the greatest gifts I receive. I'm just so grateful!

My life has been boiled down to very few things these days. Prayer, gratitude, doing what the doctor tells me to and much love for my husband, children, family and friends of all sorts. In the future, there will be time to add things back in, if that is what I choose to do. From hair to daily chaos, less feels more in the best kind of way.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21

Comments

You never cease to amaze me Amy. So insightful, loving and caring. Another wonderful description of past present and future. Love you doll!

—*Carol Ney, October 18, 2016*

Amy, what a wonderful post! So full of heart, insights, and inspiration. Love you and sending big hugs!

—*Patti Myers, October 18, 2016*

Okay, Amy! You made me cry again. Love you to pieces for it, too!!! May God continue to bless you in a very special way. You are a tremendous blessing to so many of us. Praying for strength as you enter the home stretch. Go, Amy, go!!!!

—*Sue Porter, October 18, 2016*

Another wonderful and purposeful post from you!! The end is near and these moments will soon become memories that will re-shape you forever! Keep writing!! You are blessed! Continued prayers to you and the Fam!
TTF!

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, October 18, 2016*

I would drive five hours just to spend five minutes with you!! (you know it girl) and hopefully soon I can. Amy you are crazy strong and I'm proud of you ??

—*Lori Sikon, October 18, 2016*

Love your message of letting go We try to hold on to so much "stuff". Love you!!!

—*Martha Snider, October 18, 2016*

Dear Amy,

I love how real you are with your descriptions of your kids growing up. How refreshing it is to have the truth be spoken...after college, no matter how cute they are, they're out! All kidding aside, I am deeply humbled by your words of honesty. To let go is hard until it isn't important any longer. If we could just live that way all the time, not just when something life altering steps in and makes us wake up. Thanks for the wake up call. Letting

go...less is more. Thinking of you constantly, Tracy

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, October 21, 2016*

Dear Amy.

Your message is such an inspirational testimony to the beauty of simplicity and what is true and beautiful. Thank you so much for sharing your journey and the wisdom you have gleaned along the way. It strengthens my gratitude capacity. You and your family are in my prayers.

Love,
Rene

—*Rene Beck, October 27, 2016*

My Chipmunk Brain

October 20, 2016

One of the side effects of all these drugs is something I call "Chipmunk Brain". When it first started happening, I wasn't sure if I had some additional issue or what so I asked my nurse about it and she confirmed it was a real thing. They call it "Chemo Brain", but I'm so sick of that word so I've renamed it.

It's like a mental fog that ebbs and flows. I haven't quite figured what all triggers it but I know that being too tired might do it and too much visual stimulation definitely does it. It's a combination of something that feels like no attention span, memory loss and aphasia. I'm glad it comes and goes and is not constant because at this level it's just annoying. I've had a few instances of feeling agitated when I'm trying to tell someone something and cannot come up with a very simple word like, 'meatball'. I'm hoping that this is something that is temporary. It has given me with empathy for people who struggle with these types of things on a daily basis, as well as the people who love those people. Bless Scott's heart. He is so patient with me when I can't find words or when ask the same thing over and over.

Some things I've done with my chipmunk brain:

The weekend of the first chemo, when was determined to do stuff, I ordered some awesome clothes and Ugg boots from Nordstrom but did not remember doing it until the Fed Ex man showed up three days in a row with packages. I was way off on the sizing of some of the stuff (like Santa sized) and the Ugg boots were ugly, but they were on sale, so I see where I was going with that. The fourth day, Mr. FedEx showed up with a 5'x8' rug which was a total surprise. It's looking good in my front hall now.

I occasionally take take the scenic route. I don't go many places alone these days, but when do, there is a

good chance I will end up parked at some place familiar, like one of the kids' schools, wondering what I'm doing there and then trying to remember where I was headed in the first place. I can't give directions any more however, I can take you there. Of course, it might involve a detour through a parking lot.

Back in the good ol' days, I used to keep an extensive mental calendar of everyone's activities. Ha! Now, I rely on Scott, or we fly by the seat of our pants, or Post It notes or we just keep doing things like rescheduling the kids' missed annual checkups. I just rescheduled them for THE 4TH TIME!! Who does that?!!!

Things I'm not so good at right now.

Watching TV, reading, knitting or anything that requires more than 2 minutes of attention span. That means that while I am stuck at home and bored, I also cannot entertain myself. This is the only, ongoing daily struggle for me.

Finding words and completing thoughts. If I get distracted mid sentence, forget about it.

I use a dictionary, a lot, to look up familiar words. A couple of days ago, it was the word, 'Risotto'. At the time I was looking it up, I had no idea what category it even belonged in. Was it a type of car? Was it a plant? A city? A food, perhaps? Really??!

Anything with multiple choices is very hard which is why I keep Scott with me when I go out. About a month ago, we went out to lunch and I thought I was making a simple choice by ordering a grilled cheese. Easy, yes, until the waitress offered me 5 kinds of cheeses to choose from. Ordinarily, I would only ever choose cheddar, but my mind went 100 miles an hour, weighing options...so many options. Scott had to answer for me...and this poor waitress, Ugh!

The grocery is the worst, but I still go with Scott because I want to and I feel like I don't want it to defeat me. It is total visual overload. So many colors. So many options and brands. I am loyal to the brands I buy and there are things we purchase every single week. Now, standing in the cereal aisle, trying to make a decision would be an impossible task. When we go, I let Scott take the lead, I make 3 or 4 decisions and he answers the question of whether we want paper or plastic.

You might be wondering how I'm able to write volumes. It starts when I wake up in the middle of the night and a dialogue begins streaming in my head. By the time I get up, I'm ready to write. I work on it little by little during the day, constantly re-reading. I told my friend Missy that she'd be appalled at how long it took. Instead of 20-30 minutes, I've probably put in 5-6 hours on this blurb which I started yesterday. For now, it mental stimulation so I'm not worrying about how slow I am. I hit the "Submit" button when I finally got tired of looking for typos. Who knows how many there are. It is what it is. ???

Comments

This is beautiful, Amy. I smiled several times while reading. Love your online shopping. Keep fighting! Thinking of you!

—*Elizabeth Murphy, October 20, 2016*

Heck it's also called being a mom. It's okay not to be on your A game you are forgiven. I can only speak for myself, however many may agree balancing a family is challenging let alone what you are dealing with. This to shall pass then you'll be back to remembering "meatball" love you??

—*Lori Sikon, October 20, 2016*

Amy, pick a day I can take you out! To a movie, park, errands, grocery. Whatever you need. I'm happy to help! Please use me. ??

—*Terri Spears, October 20, 2016*

Forgetting words and ask a million questions that I just asked is me on a daily basis! Feel free to call me anytime...we can chat and entertain each other!

—*kathleen rose, October 20, 2016*

I like that you rename things.

—*Liz Tilton, October 23, 2016*

Buh-Bye Red Devil!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

October 20, 2016



Frenemy of mine, you have all my respect. You are formidable, a mighty warrior and the toughest thing I have ever known. For all that you have put me through, I hope you've done your job completely and delivered punishment one million times worse to this obnoxious cancer.

Today was our last encounter, so BUH-BYE Adriamycin (Red Devil) and your unshakable fatigue and all that goes with it. Adieu, Cytosin, you evil twin. And farewell, Neulasta. Although I am grateful that you protected my immune system, I will not miss the muscle pain and bone aches.

I thoroughly realize that the gigantic enormity of this moment matters most to me, but I did it. I DID IT!!! I promise you that Scott heard me say many times that I couldn't do it again and that I **wouldn't** do it again. Thankfully, he is a pro at talking me off the ledge. In 24 hours I'll probably be saying it some more, but at this time, I can see light at the end of the tunnel. One week from today I will be feeling great. Two weeks from now I will be starting 12 weeks of "Chemo lite". My hope is that it will give me much for freedom with fewer side effects. Maybe I'll get my life back. Next Friday, I will celebrate big. In the meantime, I am going to bed to power through the next 6 days.

God is good and the people he's placed in my life during this time have been beyond wonderful! Thank you!????????????????????

*I put a picture up but I can't tell where it attached. I also can't see who reads all these posts.
Weird. ?

Comments

Looking Great Amy!!! Way to put the Red Devil in its place!! You go girl!!! Stay Strong!!!

Xo

—*Laurel Fritzhand, October 20, 2016*

Amy - You are tough to the core and a rock star and will make it through this! Your writing is inspiring, poignant, and I wish I lived closer so I could cheer you on face-to-face every day. Thank you for sharing your thoughts, fears and hopes with your words. Staying strong for you!!!

—*Amy Gill, October 20, 2016*

After all you have been through, you haven't lost your sparkling personality or radiant beauty. Stay strong. The finish line is almost here.

—*Sue Porter, October 20, 2016*

I love your eloquence and your strong spirit...you are in my thoughts and prayers every day. Your attitude is an inspiration.

—*Kathie Houchens, October 20, 2016*

We salute you and your wonderful spirit!!!

Congratulations on reaching this milestone. Looking forward to celebrating when you're up to it!

??????

—*Patti Myers, October 20, 2016*

You look so adorable!! Glad you are planning a celebration!

—*Martha Snider, October 20, 2016*

woohooo!! Cute picture!

—*Suzanne Carter, October 21, 2016*

Yahoo!!! Saw the pic! You look great!

—*kathleen rose, October 21, 2016*

You clever girl! I love reading your words of strength and humor. I am amazed by how good you look, and more importantly, how positive your attitude is! Take good care of yourself. Much love & hugs to you, Amy??

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, October 21, 2016*

Amy, you must be the classiest lily pulitzer patient! Looking good!! God bless you and your family!! Sending hugs!!

—*kristen eickert, October 23, 2016*

Saw your picture, you look great! Wonderful attitude, prayers for you daily...

—*Darlene Houchens, October 28, 2016*

Documenting a week of chemo

October 27, 2016

After 2 months and 4 chemo treatments, the following has happened to my body:

Drugs I Have Taken -Adriamycin, Cytosan, two anti-nausea drugs and steroids. The anti-nausea drugs go first and take about 45 minutes. The other hour and a half are for remainder. The Neulasta shot comes the day after. There is also the weekly blood testing of my cell counts and a bunch of other stuff. These have remained within the "good" range so I'm happy about that!

Hair - I still can't believe it, and maybe it's a nice gift from Karma, but my entire head has a very thin covering. I probably have 75 hairs per square inch, which isn't much of a hairdo, so I'm thinking that it's a good thing that nothing is growing. I'm grateful for my baby bur cut! It can't compare to twisting my hair but at least it's something. Other parts of my body have not faired so well and have received the world's worst wax job. There

will be no tip.

Brain - At times foggy and includes aphasia and memory loss. "Scenic drives", which is what I'm now calling them, lend to amusement and a weekly adventure or two.

Skin- Is very dry on my face, feet and hands. As in 50 years of being an Icelandic fisherman, dry. As in Mohave Desert, dry. As in, I better not end up looking like Norman Bates' mother. I must give credit to Eucerin Rich Lotion for Very Dry, Compromised Skin (how dramatic!). It works and I use it all the time.

Eyebrows and Eyelashes - Weeee Hooo!! I've still got 'em!! The real human hair stick-on eyebrows are still sealed in their box. Please stay there!

Eyes and Nose - Continually burn, tear and run. I found out that it isn't allergies. It's just a really super annoying side effect of chemo. I am now that lady with the Kleenex up her sleeve.

Mouth-Road Rash at jaw hinges inside my mouth. It comes and goes, is painful and makes it hard to open my mouth. I use a lot of non-alcohol based mouth wash and that helps.

Taste Buds- Don't really exist, anymore. I can taste sweet, salty, sour and licked-something-dirty-under-the-hood-of-the-car, but not flavor. Oh, and I've recently added the taste of, mouth-full-of-baking-soda, which is just gross.

Throat-Painful sores deep in my throat. It is exacerbated by acid reflux (my fav!). Fortunately, I've only had this twice and it lasted 4-5 days each time. It makes it hard to swallow and food can get stuck, which is scary! The first time was my Newbie mistake. Someone graciously brought us an acidic food centered meal. It was delicious, BTW! The second time was scratchy toast that I made for myself. Who knew?!

Lumpectomy, lymph node, biopsy and two port incisions are totally healed. Sweet! I almost have full range of motion in my arm, as well.

Stomach- I must be careful to avoid acid reflux. Someone told me it is very common because chemo kills lots of cells and the stomach is very busy creating new ones. Who knows! I will go with it. 24 hours of eating rice or oatmeal fixes it. I also take the anti-nausea drug, Zofran, at the mere hint of getting sick. It's a double edged sword and a very thin line between all intestinal troubles.

Muscles- Sometimes are very weak and sometimes pretty okay. Overall, I have lost strength and stamina from being in bed so much. I told Scott that when we are done, I'm burning this bed and probably this house! I hope to improve, physically, with exercise, the new drugs and the absence of Neulasta.

Finger tips- They are numb so I drop lots of stuff. I also now let someone else test to see if the pasta is done.

Menopause - Check! The doctor was almost apologetic when he told me this was going to happen. I thought, "Bring it on! I've never used this stuff in the first place." Hot flashes are weird and Scott loves to point out that

he thinks I'm having one any time I ask if anyone else is hot. Can't a girl just be hot? Good thing he's being such an angel! ??

Attitude-pretty positive.

When I started this entry, my intention was to give a very detailed chronical of each of the 7 days chemo. I also thought that I'd have a million words to describe the worst of it. Today is day 7 and I'm just over it and moving on, so here's the long and short of it. Thursday to Friday night, I feel okay. Friday night through Sunday, it's a rapid decline with Sunday being the worst. Monday through Friday is a gradual process of working my way back to normal. Here's what I wrote last weekend about how I was feeling on Sunday: "Feels like looming death without the possibility of recovery". Those words are very real and accurate for me. They are also now behind me and only serve as a reminder to be caring and empathetic to anyone who travels that road.

Next week, I start 12 weeks of new chemo drugs. I am hoping to be much less tired and on my way to feeling better and having more energy. The nurse reminded me today to not get too excited because it's still chemo.?

Comments

Amy, thanks once again for informing us about your chemo, as well as the physical and emotional impacts. You are amazing! Thinking of you and sending big hugs!

—*Patti Myers, October 27, 2016*

What amazing changes - no one has any idea of these things ! I've had a few of them without having the chemo Guess which ones. Thank you for sharing and for your great positive spirit. Love you, girl!!!!!!

—*Martha Snider, October 27, 2016*

???

—*Jill Matson, October 27, 2016*

It is obvious how cathartic it is for you to write these entries. You have given me insight as no other. Thank you

dear Amy. Thinking and praying for you, Scott, your kids and extended family. Your positive attitude makes all the difference. Xo - c

—Carol Ney, October 28, 2016

Whenever I start to complain about something I bite my tongue and think of you. When a nasty woman in front of me at the stop sign yelled at me (. For what I don't know) I refrained from using a gesture I wanted to use. She too might be going through something. Thank you for keeping this real. Can't wait to see you this spring??????

—Lori Sikon, October 28, 2016

I am so proud of you for working through this with a positive attitude! It will keep you looking at what is important in your life: Scott, Meredith and Will!! Love you so much!

—ruth ann siegler, October 29, 2016

Dear Amy,

Thank you for enlightening me on the process and progress of what has happened on the course of your treatment. It does help to know what is going in, and to pray specifically for you during the hardest parts of the week.

Especially hoping the new treatment will come with lessening of "looming death without possibility of recovery"! That makes me so sad to know that's what that feels like. Ugh! Poor sweetheart. Take care and say yes to all offers to help you. Love, Tracy

—Tracy Wunder Malito, November 2, 2016

Bing and Rook

November 1, 2016



These are my English Springer Spaniels, Bing (6) and Rook (3) and I am as crazy about them as any pet parent. They have kept me company and have been my loyal companions throughout this. Aside from chasing an occasional deer, they serve as warm, snuggle therapists. I do want to point out that the order of laziness and time lying in bed sleeping is as follows: Rook, my daughter, Meredith, Bing...and then me!

This week, I start 12 weeks of lighter chemo. I'll be going every week, instead of every other week. I'm keeping my fingers crossed that I will be less tired, have fewer side effects and a much quicker recovery. They will be giving me Benadryl so I won't be able to drive myself home. ?

Additionally, my lovely friend, Sue, has asked me to say a few words at my church's women's conference this weekend. I haven't quite figured out what all I'm going to say but it will be based around the blessings of being supported by friends and strangers. I'm praying that whatever it is that I say is thoughtful and meaningful to at least one person in the audience. I am hoping that this will be one piece in my journey to pay it forward.

Photos





Comments

Glad to see your update. Will be praying that you feel better during these treatments. Love you!!

—*Martha Snider, November 1, 2016*

Please Lmk how I can help. I can give you a ride, keep you company or whatever.

—*Terri Spears, November 1, 2016*

Amy, am praying for you and a speedy recovery. Whatever you talk about at the women's conference will be from your heart and will be beautifully received by the hearts of others. You continue to be an inspiration and a blessing.

—*Rene Beck, November 1, 2016*

So looking forward to seeing you at the Armstrong Chapel women's conference Saturday. Thank you for being one of the featured speakers! I admire your desire to "pay it forward" and know your message will be a blessing!!

—*Sue Porter, November 1, 2016*

Good luck this weekend Amy!!

—*missy potter, November 2, 2016*

Good luck this weekend Amy!!

—*missy potter, November 2, 2016*

Good luck this weekend Amy!!

—*missy potter, November 2, 2016*

Amy, I'm so proud of you for speaking out! No doubt you will be fabulous--cuz you are!
Much love.

—*Patti Myers, November 2, 2016*

You will be amazing. Just as you are! Good Luck! I have been so moved by your blog. May God continue to watch over and keep you safe.

—*Elizabeth Murphy, November 2, 2016*

The voice will be yours and the words will be His.

—*Brian Forrester, November 2, 2016*

Amy, my dog has gotten me through some of my toughest times. Your dogs are adorable! I know what a gift their presence is. Sometimes they just sense what we need.

Take up on your friend's offer to drive you. Say yes and say it often. People want to be told what to do...that's why bridal and baby registries were invented! ?

Whatever you say in your speech, I know you will form a great message. You have a way with words.

Thinking of you daily~

Tracy

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, November 2, 2016*

Fantastic that you will be speaking at the conference tomorrow! You'll do fantastic Amy!

—*Carol Ney, November 4, 2016*

I have to remind myself to be more like my dog...to be there and be quiet and keep one eye open.

—Liz Tilton, November 6, 2016

Keeping Notes on Things

November 2, 2016

I've been keeping Post It Notes on various things because nothing about this situation has really been as I would have guessed it would be. I don't presume that my reactions are anyone else's but it's been important for me to tell my story as I see it. My intention is to LIVE and go forward changing lots of things based my interactions with people during this time. Going into this, I just assumed that I would handle this situation like any other situation and do it by myself. Never did I dream that I would need people like I have, or that all kinds of people would appear in my life, or that their impact would be so transformative, but that's what's happened and I'm carrying this forward for the rest of my life. Here are some of my notes.

1. Fear of the unknown is far worse than the reality of the situation. It's true! Previous to this disease, the thought of having cancer was enough to shut me down. People say, "You're so brave". Maybe, but it's a fight or die situation. You don't get options and you don't get time to chat about your emotions over coffee. Piglet was right! We are braver and stronger than we think or know and that gift is in all of us.
2. I need to put WAY more action into how I care about people. I now realize my mistake in defaulting to just praying about any and everyone because I just didn't know what else to do. I have avoided reaching out because I haven't known what to say and I haven't wanted to upset people who are already sick by bringing their illness up. I haven't felt that I had adequate words to make a difference or the perfect words to make it all better. I've been too scared that someone might die, so I backed away hoping I wouldn't get my heart broken. I simply haven't known what to say or do, so I've done nothing. I've totally ignored the situation, hoping it would just resolve itself. Nothing I haven't done has had any malice or bad intention. It's just been my inability to act in situations like these. I feel like I've been a schmuck and yet I am sympathetic and understanding as to why people do what they do, because I am one of them. I don't judge but I'm changing my ways. I'm applying all that people have done for me, to anyone who is dealing with something unpleasant, be it illness, death of a loved one anything else. Here are some things I have/haven't done for others, but have learned are okay/maybe not so okay, based solely on what I've experienced.
 - a. It's okay to say, How are you? How are you doing? This doesn't dredge up unpleasantness. I already know I've got an issue. This question shows me that you acknowledge what's going on and that you care. I keep my response brief. I know you don't want the total breakdown. That's what my CaringBridge page is for. ?

b. "Let me know if you need anything" is a great offer, but it's a phone call I will never make. Showing up with food and meals is not inappropriate, it's appreciated! Even if I can't eat I have hungry kids and giving Scott the night off from cooking is something we both appreciate.

c. Being a "Survivor" does not mean you are cured. It means that you are surviving; living under the cloud of the possibility of recurrence. I didn't know this 6 months ago. While I appreciate the intent and the encouragement, telling me that I'll be okay because you know someone who had breast cancer and is a survivor is something you don't need to say. There are a lot of types of breast cancer and many different types of treatments. While those words are offered genuinely, the fact is that all cancers have the potential to be fatal and that's the gun barrel I'm looking down. Part of the problem I have with Breast Cancer Awareness month is that it feels, to me, like it's been turned into a pretty pink package. We slap pink ribbons on everything, show a bunch of bald headed, smiling "Survivors" on TV and assume all is good.

d. It's okay to reach out with a card or email or text to pass on a word of encouragement even if you don't know the person or haven't talked to them in a loooong time. Some of the most touching things I have received have been come to me from strangers who are praying for me with my friends. This is truly powerful and humbling! (I've often thought that it probably doesn't make a difference if I reach out to a stranger or a long lost friend. Maybe they'd think I was being weird. Maybe it wouldn't matter to them. I couldn't be more wrong).

e. Great things to say to someone like me, especially when you don't know what to say are: I care about you. I'm praying for you. You are special to me. You are always on my mind. I love you. Less is sometimes a lot more and it is enough. I promise!

3. I'm still me...minus a lot of hair. Nothing has changed. Please don't change how you talk to me or how you treat me. If you ignore me in the grocery store, I notice. Every time I come away from a conversation where I've forgotten my situation, you've given me a gift and I am ecstatic! My friend, Liz, invited me (and my family) to her Thanksgiving celebration today. She was doing it to be nice, knowing it might be a struggle for me to do Thanksgiving myself. The bigger take away for me was that she was laid back enough to think it was cool to have a bald chick at her table. I miss my old normal every single day!

4. EVERY SINGLE email, text, call, gift, meal, card, IM, offer of help, flower bouquet, lunch, conversation, etc. is so appreciated! When you have your world entirely shut down in one day, these things become like air. They are healing and life sustaining. They are essential. I'm never going to get tired of saying this.

5. This journey of faith, trust, prayer, God and friendship has, from the beginning, created in me a need to pay it back and pay it forward. My friend, Brenda, and I have talked a lot about the

glaring gaps in how we handle the non-medical side of women's cancers (and issues, for that matter)The dialogue needs to change and the reality of access to support needs to be amplified. I look forward to the time when have enough attention span to delve into this.

Tomorrow starts 12 weeks of "chemo lite". I'll be going every week instead of every two weeks. I feel a bit nervous because I don't know what to expect. I know I will be getting Benadryl along with a newer drug called Carboplatin on top of whatever else they are giving me. I have high hopes for quick recovery. Maybe I can just sleep off the Benadryl and then pop out of bed feeling great. Too optimistic?? I am praying that the visit with my doctor, tomorrow, goes well and that this last leg of chemo goes smoothly. I am hoping that I get the opportunity to get a bit of my life back. As always, I am continually praying for my family, everyone who is supporting me, for my doctor and all medical staff, for things known and unknown, for peace and mercy, the comfort of God's hand on my shoulder and for a cure.

Comments

Yes, you are being supported - with prayer and love. ??

—*Martha Snider, November 2, 2016*

Thinking of you a lot and praying for you.

—*Terri Spears, November 2, 2016*

This is what you should talk about in your speech. Your honesty shines through and helps others (with and without cancer). I will never back away from anyone I know who has this horrible diagnosis. I have in the past but I never will again. Thank you for being REAL. Praying 'chemo lite' is easier on you and that you continue to feel more yourself than with the red devil.

Lots of love & hugs,
Tracy

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, November 2, 2016*

Always thinking about you and your family!! Big hugs!!!

—*Laurel Fritzhand, November 2, 2016*

I am praying for visit your with Doc tomorrow and that this last leg of chemo does the trick. Thank you for sharing the deepest parts of you. So many of us feel those inadequacies and fears when confronting anything that is life changing or unknown. But that is part of our human journey . . .much love and much suffering which for me points to the Christ.

Hugs, Rene

—*Rene Beck, November 2, 2016*

I love this Amy!! This is very insightful and I am sure helpful to many to know what to say and do.

—*Claudia Pittenger, November 2, 2016*

I love this! October annoys me to no end because of the profit companies make from the various "pink"

campaigns. So little of it goes toward research or treatment. "Awareness". Aren't we all "aware" breast cancer exists? Let's do something real, something that really affects the lives of those suffering through the stages. ugh. Now you've got me going!

And you're right about the "survivor" piece too. I told my oncologist last week about a weird symptom I've been having. I told him I worry all the time that every runny nose or sore toe is the cancer coming back. He said, "welcome to being a cancer patient". But I had a surgical cure! "No, you're a cancer patient and will always think like one."

I think I talked Meredith out of cheer tryouts just now. You can kick me later. Diving! woohoo!

—*Suzanne Carter, November 3, 2016*

Nothing better than keeping it real. Love reading your writing!

—*Brian Forrester, November 3, 2016*

You know how I feel about the whole pink ribbon thing!! Love you!

—*ruth ann siegler, November 5, 2016*

We've had the Gribble sisters, Vera and Velma, to our Thanksgiving. They had more hairs growing on their chins than you've ever lost from your head.

—*Liz Tilton, November 6, 2016*

Round #1 of Chemo Lite

November 3, 2016

First of all, when I was told that I had to get a port, they came to me all proud and showed me the "Power Port". It was going to be AWESOME because I could get blood drawn, and a thousand other things done, ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD, because it has some chip that's in it. I was supposed to be super impressed. Really?? I am actually a card carrying member of this wonder chip and the card is in my wallet, just in case I am in Namibia and need a CT scan. All this would be no big deal but the port only works part way. It allows fluids in but does not let blood flow out. This causes 2 hour delays on chemo day as they work to get the blood to flow. They can easily take blood from my hands or arms to do the blood tests but they work on the port...and it's just a lot...a lot of messing with me when this fix is easy. It's a lots when I am already there getting chemo...and seeing the doctor...it's just a lot of messing with a person who already doesn't like to go to the doctor or be touched by a stranger on any ol' day. It's just a lot. A lot! I'm just whining.

So, today I saw my doctor and he was pleasant and he didn't mess with me too much. I've been praying that I adapt and have a good relationship with him. He's an excellent doctor, I trust him implicitly and I know he cares, but he's not a hand pater. He can't be because in his professional he never gets the luxury of telling anyone they are going to be okay or that they are cured. Given this scary, life threatening stuff I have, I'd really like someone to say it's going to be okay, but that's not going to happen, ever, and I just need to get over it. I've sort of been listening to people at Chemo Club and I guess it is very common for people to develop anxiety about various random facets of treatment. My flight triggers are messing with my port, the taste of the flushing liquid they put in my port and meeting with the man who holds my life in his hands. I'm praying constantly about dealing with these.

So, back to what I really came to say tonight is that I got the new chemo, along with anti-nausea meds, Pepcid, Benadryl and Carboplatin. The oncology nurses said I would be tired but not as badly and there would be no nausea or diarrhea. Welllll....I got all three, plus hives, when came home. Tonight, everything seems to be under control and I'm feeling okay. I'm grateful that my blood count numbers continue to be great and I am hopeful for a good day tomorrow. I am really hoping for a good weekend so I can participate in family life. 12 weeks seems indefinite, but short. Impossible but not permanent. Just too much, but the challenge of a lifetime that I'm determined to win. I can do this. Like Scott says, "You already ARE doing this, Amy!"

I'm praying that as I enter this season of fun stuff that I have the energy and strength to enjoy the things I look forward to every year...Thanksgiving, celebration of the Christmas season, decorating, music programs, the month long celebration of my birthday and time off for my husband and children. I just want to miss out.

Comments

No doubt you will totally aced this next phase! Much love??????

—Patti Myers, November 3, 2016

Scott is right. You ARE doing it. And you WILL do it throughout the fun season. Praying for you!!! ?

—*Sue Porter, November 3, 2016*

Yes, you ARE!!!!

—*Martha Snider, November 3, 2016*

I agree with Martha and Sue! Hats off to Scott for telling you what you need to hear! You ARE!!! Go girlfriend! Prayers still coming your way! xoxo!!

—*kathleen rose, November 3, 2016*

Good thing you are a better patient than me.....I'd probably threaten to rip the port out if they couldn't get it fixed on the very next try! Praying this round is less stressful - but I have confidence you will face whatever it brings with your grace and positive mental attitude. xo - c

—*Carol Ney, November 4, 2016*

You haven proven that you are stronger than you thought you were. Sending hugs and positive thoughts your way. ????????

—*Lori Sikon, November 4, 2016*

Yes Amy, you are doing it, praying it gets easier... In a couple of weeks I will be available to drive you to your treatment if that will help. Let me know.

—*Darlene Houchens, November 4, 2016*

You ARE doing it and you are doing well! I wish that your port was more cooperative! Prayers for a good weekend for you!! Much love and many prayers for you!

—*ruth ann siegler, November 5, 2016*

Amy, I shudder at the idea of you being messed with on all those levels. That sounds SO scary. Most people can't handle being unintentionally bumped into or wait in long check out lines, and you're getting bombarded simultaneously. I wish I could HOLD YOUR HAND!

Let your friends drive you...they want to help.

I know you are trying to keep a stiff upper lip, and I know you ARE doing it, but it's okay to scream a little or a lot sometimes. And when you do, I will listen!

I hate cancer,

Tracy

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, November 5, 2016*

Like A Leaping Baby Goat

November 8, 2016

So, it's Tuesday after Round 1 of Chemo Lite and I feel back to normal. WOOO! HOOO! I feel as joyful as every leaping baby goat and I have a lot to be thankful for!! Swallowing, throat and mouth sores and "Chemo Brain" are a lot less. Fatigue did not happen!! The overall side effects are ONE BAZILLION percent better than before and I am already in the process of forgetting how awful I thought it was at the time. God is great! I had good days (feeling 90%) from Thursday to Saturday night, a good morning on Sunday, and then was sort of back in bed from Sunday, noon, through Monday. Today I feel great. My downtime consisted of a lot of intestinal stuff, physical tiredness with total alertness (so obnoxious) and a lot of muscle and bone pain, which was totally annoying. I'll be discussing, with my doctor, better ways to manage this on Thurs. I was thrilled to be able to watch Will in his lacrosse tournament Saturday morning!!!

I put on my big girl pants and read my speech at the women's conference on Saturday. I did a lot of praying, beforehand, for my words to have meaning. It was my prayer that if there was anyone in the audience who needed to hear what I had to say, that I was able to deliver my words clearly. I have no idea if that happened or not. It may sound trite to say, but I came away from my time with these women gaining more than I'm sure I gave. I was embraced and loved by women I didn't really know and connected with 4 women that had walked the path I am on now. Their journies are their own, but I came away with hope and the proof that there is life after the storm.

Below is what I said at the conference. I closed by reading my previous blog about Scott telling me I am beautiful. The topic was The Miracle of Learning to Listen and the conference topic was on Miracles.

"My parents raised me to have a servant's attitude...to always be giving back. I live my life under the banner of "To whom much is given, much is expected". There have been periods in my life that have included missions work, a lot of volunteer work and always a concentration to support my busy husband, raise happy productive children and assist my aging parents. I'm a support person. A Giver. That's what I do.

I have also always been a person of prayer and I know, without a doubt, that He hears me and responds in lots of small, miraculous ways. For me, anytime God responds, I'm receiving a miracle. I'm not always a good listener. And sometimes I miss the good stuff because I'm headstrong, I like to do things myself and I'm busy! But God is faithful and patient with me and sometimes, when He just needs to get my attention, He slams his hands down on the table in front of me and says, LISTEN!! It hasn't happened often, but I when it has, I have heard, quite clearly, the voice of the God, and so this is what happened since my diagnosis. He has said, LISTEN! So trust me, I am listening, I just wasn't expecting the message I received.

With this diagnosis and within a blink of an eye everything that I had been doing..the priorities of taking care of my husband, my children, helping my aging parents and my job were instantaneously gone. They were not the

priority. I was. For the first time in my life, my focus was only on God, me and surviving. My husband, Scott, stepped into the support role of a lifetime and through answered prayer we included a doctor to help save my life. I plunged head first into testing and the chemo. And at that point, I told a few people what was going on. Actually, one of the first people I reached out to was Sue Porter because I knew she'd pray with me. But it was hard for me to tell people because there's no easy way to break that kind of news to someone and I just didn't want to do that to people. My mother, on the other hand, was busy telling anyone who would listen and the cat was out of the bag. And so, we got the treatment going and things settled down. Scott and I were sort of standing there feeling alone but I was praying and God said, "Just listen" ...and the gates of support opened and people I hadn't talked to in years, people we knew, sorority sisters, children, teachers, people at Scott's work, Sunday School classes, prayer groups, neighbors, casual acquaintances and total strangers started saying things to me in various ways. Things I hadn't heard or listened to in a long time. Things I didn't know people thought about me. Things I didn't think I even deserved. "You're special". "You matter to me". "You are so loved". "I care about you". "I'm praying for you". "You are strong". "I believe in you". "I am here for you". "You are so beautiful". God was saying, "You know I love you but listen to those around you". They were words I needed to hear long before this diagnosis. Today, it's healing support, encouragement when I've needed it the most, a wonderful blessing and a MIRACLE to LISTEN and HEAR these words, because, no matter the end results for me, I know I'm loved.

I hope you never have to have your slate wiped clean the way I did to really listen to those around you, to really hear those words you deserve to hear, to know your worth and to know you are so loved and special, not only to God, but to everyone who knows you."

Today, Election Day, I am praying for our great country and its future.

Comments

Simply marvelous !!!!! You so beautifully expressed the essence of your experience! And you no doubt were "giving" to each and everyone in that conference room and way beyond!!!!
Much love, Patti

—*Patti Myers, November 8, 2016*

So, so glad you are feeling "normal"!! I'm sure your talk was meaningful to others and that they were blessed at hearing your story. You are such a blessing!!! Love you much!

—*Martha Snider, November 8, 2016*

All those words are true. I'm glad you are listening.

—*Brian Forrester, November 9, 2016*

Your contribution to Armstrong's women's conference about miracles was powerful and meaningful. Thank you for finding the strength and courage to do it! I see a miracle in a the four women you met who identify with your journey through personal experience.

—*Sue Porter, November 9, 2016*

Love the leaping goats! What a perfect illustration of how you are feeling. Love you immensely dear Amy! C

—*Carol Ney, November 10, 2016*

Amy,

First of all, such a relief to know all those horrible side effects were/are temporary.

Second, so proud of you for speaking so frankly about how the power of listening is important for all of us. You certainly touched all those women you addressed!

Third, when everything came to a grinding halt, I'm so glad you heard & felt all the love. God shows us when we least expect it.

You ARE special a "kid" to us all!

Love, Tracy

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, November 11, 2016*

Hmmm...

November 10, 2016

So in the year where Driver's License renewal requires an updated photo, will I be required to take off my hat??Hmmm...I think I'm just going for in case I'm on the lam 4.5 years from now. I want people to look at my mugshot and really think about whether it's me or not.

Comments

Amy, your beautiful face will always be true and recognizable!
No worries?

XOXOXO

—*Patti Myers, November 10, 2016*

You can always have it redone earlier than 5 years. However, with as pretty as your eyes are - I think you will wish to keep the pic for the full 5 years. xo - c

—*Carol Ney, November 10, 2016*

Arghhh! I wonder if Sinead O'Conner felt the same way when her license expired?! Ha!!

—*kathleen rose, November 11, 2016*

Perspective and Positivity 95% of the Time

November 18, 2016

It's been 10 days since my last post and I'm adjusting to the new normal of a Chemo Lite. It's not as awesome as I had hoped it would be. ?? I think I jumped the gun with my baby goat video because after hitting the "Submit" button, the new normal arrived. According to the doctor, it's the accumulative effects of chemo. For me, it is like getting the flu every week, recovering and then getting the flu again. I am tired, every day, with a window of 2-4 hours where I am just OK, but never great. I'm spending that time eating lunch with people in an attempt to hold on to some part of my life and that's been uplifting and wonderful. I have 24/7 body and muscle pain (like with the flu) which makes it hard to get rest. I have 10 more weeks of this. I'm counting it in weeks because two and a half months just sounds too long. I can do this!

What I've been thinking about is that quite a few people have said to me that I can't really be this positive and that it is okay to not be. I appreciate that! I'm keepin' it real, to the best of my ability. Truly, I am, but maybe I need to explain. I really am positive 95% of the time, right now, and here's why.

1. I am in conversation with God multiple times a day thanking him with a grateful heart for the support I receive from everyone, asking Him for guidance and direction, praying for my friends, family and medical staff, and asking that I feel His presence. He is with me, my friends, every single day, answering prayers, putting people in my life and showing Himself to me. This is a walk of faith and I walk in peace. I have hope!

2. I have turned over my medical care to a man I trust implicitly. I think I've mentioned this before, but I got great advice from my friend, RuthAnn (who also has breast cancer) who said to me, "Let God and your doctor handle this disease and you go out and live your life." And I do! No more Type A, micro managing for me. No Googling! No million questions, hoping to hear what I want to here. It's just me, doing my thing.

3. Mentally, I have two and a half more months of chemo and my thought is that nothing else bad can happen as long as I'm taking these drugs. I don't know how I'll feel at the end of January when chemo is over, but I'm sure there will be stress. There are big decisions, more tests, test results, radiation and a lot of unknown ahead. When I get there, God will be with me and we will go forward. Today, tomorrow and next week, I am not concerning myself with that.

4. I have only two choices. I can move through this positively or negatively. I don't think it's in me to curl up and face the wall. There's too much to look forward to in life.

There ARE things that bother me that aren't part of my positive program and the more tired I am, the more they are amplified.

1. I'm tired of being bald. I'm tired of *having* to wear a hat to avoid awkwardness in public. I'm so tired of it that I actually just took it off in Williams Sonoma the other night after being chased around the store by a lady who was too curious about what was going on under there. When she finally landed, I took it off and we stood silently, without eye contact, shoulder to shoulder in the knife section. Good thing those were locked up. ?

2. I am tired of being tired. FED UP! It has compromised the quality of my family's life, and especially Scott's life, since my worst days are on the weekends. He is a saint, so patient and kind, always, but I feel guilty as I am no partner right now. I know, in some ways, he is lonely and we have a long way to go.

3. I don't like going to chemo every week. I don't like seeing the doctor every week. I don't like being touched, messed with and poked. I'm trying to adjust to this but I'm not doing a good job.

4. I hate this disease. I hate that this isn't a quick fix and that there are no guarantees. I WANT MY LIFE BACK!

5. I hate my super awesome Power Port. I think I just have to have something to hate and this has replaced the disgusting surgery drain.

So, these are my gripes and I do try to keep them in perspective. On most days, I think I do a pretty good and consistent job of that because there is MUCH to be thankful for!

I got off in the ditch last week, probably due to excessive tiredness, but really ended up with an eye opening lesson. Last Thursday, at chemo, my port (SURPRISE!!) was not returning blood. Chemo goes in, but they cannot draw blood out to run tests. I had spoken to the doctor about this and asked that they just draw blood from my hand because the nurses were consistently working on getting blood out for 2 hours, to no avail, before starting chemo. Now that I go every week, being there for 6 hours, as opposed to 3-4, is just a lot. The doctor agreed and said that if they could get blood out, I wouldn't have to have a "Port Study". Well, it never worked, but they gave me Heparin and I was told that the study wasn't necessary.

On Friday, I got a call to be downtown at Christ hospital at 10:30 am FOR A PORT STUDY!!! ARGH!!!!

Now, this test is not a big deal. They inject contrast dye into my port, x-Ray it and see if there is a kink in the tubing or some other abnormality. This test is NOT a big deal, except it is the world's hugest big deal to me because I am TIRED and I HATE THIS PORT!!!! So, I'm mad at the situation all weekend and on Monday, I'm tired to the point of having tears in my eyes. My attitude stinks. I'm thinking, "This test better not take long and nothing better go wrong!"

When I get to the hospital, I valet my car because, damnit, I deserve it. I go into this huge lobby where everyone coming into the hospital waits and I find a seat as far away from anyone else as possible. It's not crowded but I'm a germaphobe and who know what *these* people have. I am waiting to be called back and here comes this older woman, who I am sure was perfectly lovely, and she sits right next to me. SHE'S WEARING A MASK! There are 85 other chairs she could have chosen, but no. Now I'm sure I'm going to die because she probably has Ebola! Yes! I'm sure she has Ebola!! Why else would she be wearing a mask?! I sit there because I don't want to be rude. I am definitely going to catch what she has and die!

I finally get called back to a 8 x 12 waiting room that has a whole other cast of characters in it. The nurse says that they do not have the order from the doctor to do the test but they are trying to contact him. I sit there across from an extremely large woman who is eating chips with her mouth open and they are spilling down her shirt. Next to her is her even larger daughter, head back, snoring like a chainsaw. These are such sensory triggers for me and I am praying for deliverance, but there is none. The nurse arrives back in 45 minutes and tells me that they have the order but it is wrong so they are trying again. Enter the stale beer and cigarette soaked family of 6 who sit down on the other side of me and proceed to get loud about how they are going to give the doctor the "What For". At this point it's almost comical but I still want to cry.

Finally, I am taken back to this surgical theater, because you go big and dramatic at a downtown hospital. The nurse puts me on the steel X-ray table, looks at my port, 1" needle in hand and says, "I'm too afraid to stick you to access your port". Great! Now, I'm too afraid for her to access my port. I'm never really comfortable with someone plunging in a needle that big right over my heart. She calls another nurse who is working in a different department and they argue because the other nurse doesn't want to be bothered with me. She eventually she comes and sticks the needle in. Not we wait for the radiologist, but he's not even in the hospital. We're pushing 3.5 hours now. When he arrives, he has no interest in me, but does the test quickly. I can see the X-ray and there is no kinking in the tube but I ask him if all is well. He launches into all this foreign terminology for 2 minutes and I am looking at him incredulously, thinking, "REALLY?!??" When he finally stops, I say to him, "So, does it work or not?" He looks at me, equally bewildered and says, "Yes, it works", turns around and walks out. OK! Whatever, and I leave. It's a bad day, I'm tired. This stinks and I'm going home to pound salt.

As as I leave, I walk through the now crowded waiting room and I am looking at the faces of people getting ready to be called back. I'm looking at the faces of the people who are accompanying them and I am aware of the humanity. The realness. I know that in this huge hospital, today, there will be people who never leave this place. There will be people who feel fine and are give the news that they only have a little time left. There are people who will be diagnosed with chronic, debilitating illness, people who face amputation, blindness, excruciating pain. There are people who will leave this place alone, losing the one person they love the most. And there are people here who do not access to the insurance, health care or quality of treatment that I receive,

and people who will lie in beds, alone, without love and support from anyone.

I get in my car and drive through one of the poorest sections of the city on my way home. I'm still looking at faces and people. I pass men wrapped in filthy clothes and newspapers, sleeping on cathedral steps. Forelorn men, heads down, sitting on curbs, 40s in hand. Shiftless youth looking for action, a group so giggling preschoolers out for a walk with their teacher and a young woman, barely dressed, toothless and haggard, trying to make money. These are people who will never leave the 2 mile radius in which they live. There is no redemption for them and this will be their life until they are no more. I have two and a half more months of this and absolutely nothing to complain about. I needed to see this to right my path, correct my attitude and return to being grateful and positive.

Today, I am praying for you. For friends and family and my medical team. For things known and unknown. I pray for a cure and an end to all cancer. I pray for Scott who is so dutiful and shoulders so much these days. I know it is hard for him but he doesn't complain. I pray that I stay focused on gratitude, patience and not whining. God is good and faithful to all of us.

Psalms 100:4-5. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name. For the Lord is good and His love endures forever: His faithfulness continues throughout all generations.

Comments

What a great post and a great attitude. You have every right to bitch and moan all you want to - but your loving, caring spirit comes through. From the Facebook article, we don't get it. Love you and continue prayers for all of your family!!

—*Martha Snider, November 18, 2016*

Continued prayers. Let's get together again soon.

—*Terri Spears, November 18, 2016*

So wish I was there with you. I enjoy your "tours". Damn it girl just when I start to cry... you make me laugh with the vivid descriptions of your journey. Love you??. Hang in your hair with be down to your butt soon!!!

—*Lori Sikon, November 18, 2016*

no words...it stinks...I can't even say "I know how you feel" or "I feel your pain." But I can tell you that I am praying for you...every day!! I hope that helps ever so slightly. Keep writing! Hang on to the sliver of good attitude! You are amazing...even if you don't feel like it!

—*Kathleen Rose, November 18, 2016*

Amy, so very sorry this treatment is so awful. You have every right to feel all the emotions you're having--especially with all the side effects that could dampen anyone's spirits. Very happy that your faith has brought you comfort and peace of mind.

Let's lunch soon! Many hugs and much love to you and your family.

—*Patti Myers, November 18, 2016*

I love reading your posts. Love you, Amy!

—*Claudia Pittenger, November 19, 2016*

Perhaps my feelings are a tiny bit close to the surface these days, but this made me both laugh and cry. Literally.

—*Liz Tilton, November 23, 2016*

Dear Amy,

You lend such perspective of your life right now. Thank you for sharing it ALL!

The mental picture you're able to paint is helpful for those of us who don't understand firsthand. I have friends and family who've had cancer and they've described some of their experiences, but not in the way you have. I really appreciate your showing what it means to have to endure this journey on all levels.

As far as that Study is concerned, I can't imagine that whole wait downtown and the initial aggravation of sitting there, thoughts swirling and banging together. Going back and forth between irritation, anger, fear and then

feeling sorrow, empathy, thanks and eventually hope is an emotional roller coaster.

Having flu like symptoms and being SO exhausted, trying to keep your chin up for your family, makes me want to cry for you. Knowing Scott wants to be dutiful, as you explain so beautifully, but knowing he had his own worries, makes you such an empathetic wife. You would not hesitate to do the SAME.

Be true to yourself and take care of yourself. That is a good lesson to teach your children. Your grace, real feelings, humor and faith all show them it's okay to be down even when you truly believe you're taken care of. And just an idea, go ahead and be bald if you want!

Smile with those sparkling blue eyes and don't look back!

I am proud of you for putting your faith in both your doctor and God. No matter what, and I know you know this, He will see you through.

Lots of love and healing prayers,

Tracy

—Tracy Wunder Malito, November 28, 2016

I adore your posts. Nothing but honesty. Love you!

—Carol Ney, December 4, 2016

Somebody Call Me A Whhhaambulance!

November 30, 2016

I got chemo the Wednesday before Thanksgiving because Chemo Club was closed Thursday and Friday. The club was packed when I went and the staff was hurrying people through because they closed at noon. They forgot to take my temperature, which was probably a mistake because I had been nursing Cincinnati sinus congestion for 3 weeks. When I left, I had a lot of energy from the steroids and spent the next 11 hours decorating the inside of my house for Christmas. I was grateful for that time and loved every minute of it because I adore everything about the Christmas season! How I married someone and am raising two children who could give a fig about decorations is beyond me. I have failed somewhere. They want the decorations up but have zero interest in putting them up which, to me, is half the fun!

We had a nice family dinner at Cooper's Hawk (recommend!) on Thursday with my parents and aunt and uncle and then, that evening, the sinus infection went into overdrive. Had they taken my temperature on Wednesday, they might have been able to head this off at the pass, but that is water under the bridge now. So, I was sick, with a big coughing cold, on top of the normal side effects of feeling like I have the flu, plus no sleep and the worry of having to keep my temperature under 100 degrees. Over 100 degrees and I have to call the doctor, which I know is not good. I'm not sure what happens at that point, but I also know I don't want to find out. For someone who never gets sick, I was a miserable, whining mess, testing the limits of even Scott. Somebody call

the Whhambulance!! Monday, I talked to the doctor's office and they gave me a ZPack (spelling?). I haven't had one of those before and I don't know what's in it, but it seems to be working well. I have chemo #5 of 12 tomorrow and I am hoping that my blood counts are sufficient to be able to do it. I definitely don't want to get delayed a week because of this cold. I blame Cincinnati weather. No one can be healthy when it is 60 degrees one day and 30 degrees the next. Let's just pick a season and go with it. Seriously.

So, this is what I have been thinking about.

1. It has been so long since I felt good that I have forgotten what "good" feels like. That sounds depressing to write, but I actually think it is an okay thing. It keeps me from wishing I felt awesome and being frustrated that I'm not going to get there at this point. Feeling 40% is my new normal for the next two months. I probably didn't do a convincing job making that sound remotely positive. Oh, and "Chemo Lite" has been renamed "Chemo Pretty Bad But Not Super Bad". Its side effects are more formidable than anticipated.

2. I don't think this is a "thing", but maybe it is because I'm thinking about it. OK...it's a thing. Where are all the bald ladies?? It took until last Wednesday (3 months!!!), at Hobby Lobby, for me to run into another bald woman. I wanted to race up to her and give her a high five but she didn't look well or happy, so I left it alone. Being bald, I am so aware that WHEREVER I go, there is no one else who is ball cap bald like me. Big crowd, small crowd, it's a weird sensation to be the only one. Where are my peeps?? I want to be a part of that crowd of bald, smiling, laughing breast cancer ladies you see on brochures. WHERE DO THESE PEOPLE LIVE???? When I'm the only one in the crowd, it's not so easy to own it because I'm just different, people notice and I only want to fit in.

This brings me to something else. When I started this journey, I promised myself that I would get up, get dressed and put on makeup every day and I've stuck to that promise because things I can control are important to me. When people see me, they often comment on how healthy (normal) I look, which is a good thing. Of late, however, I've noticed that my eyelashes are thinning. Solution? Eyelash extension this Friday!!! I tried to conserve mine with false eyelashes, but the glue, like mascara, was not helpful to my conservation efforts. So, for the last week or two, I've just been au naturale in the makeup department, which on any normal, healthy day, is not a good look for me because both my eyelashes and brows are very blonde. Without make up, I definitely look like any negative image you see of a "chemo patient".

The interesting thing is people's reaction to me without makeup. I guess I really shouldn't be surprised. With bronzer, lipstick, mascara and a ball cap, I catch some people's attention. I can tell they are a little curious about my hair but they move on pretty quickly and I assume they chalk it up to a lifestyle choice or me being on the healthy end of the treatment side of things. Me without makeup and in a ball cap is a totally different story. People stare, do double takes, point, show their friends, discuss. It's amazingly obnoxious. I don't know why I thought I'd be immune to this. Some people look concerned or look pityingly, but it doesn't feel good because it's not a wanted response. They open doors for me. They even open doors for Scott, and that *is* kind.

Last night, a woman near me ate an entire plate of spaghetti barely taking her eyes off of me. I just can't possibly be that fascinating. Moreover, what's with people not recognizing that I CAN SEE YOU when you're doing all this??!! It's just like some folks that I see often but now choose to ignore or not speak to me because

they've heard I've got this thing going on. Yes, I notice. And, yes, I know I'm overly sensitive and I do know this is only temporary but this is the here and now and seriously?!!! Are we going to go back to normal and pretend this didn't happen after I get my hair back? It's going to be weird, people, because I'm probably not (I'm not) going to forget and "grace" isn't my middle name. I might ought to pray about that. I do understand that these are normal, curious reactions from strangers and that people don't mean to be offensive or naturally know what to do. I get it, but there is also my side of it and I'm just keepin' it real. Going forward, I will be very careful to not do these things to other people in my current situation.

On the plus side, the minority of obnoxious people just make (the majority) my awesome friends shine all the more! I LOVE and appreciate all the wonderful people in my life who carry on, treating me no differently than they ever have. That is definitely a HUGE blessing in all of this and I am grateful!

I've got way more positive things to focus on and I'm moving on!! Birthday month is coming up! I'm in the habit of celebrating all month long and am working on ways to make it shine, starting with those eyelash extensions!!

Comments

Amy, your wonderful spirit shines through--with or without makeup!! Since you've started this journey, I've encountered several bald women, each of them in very public settings. Two at two different luncheons, one at a concert, one manning a sign-up desk, and yet another two attending plays. I was so impressed with how comfortable they acted and sharing smiles, talking with them was easy--especially thanks to your comments on how you feel when you're out and about. It's hard to understand someone staring at ANYONE else for the extended period of time you experienced. WTF???

I hope your cold is better soon and please do find out what's in that Zpack! It sounds awesome. What are other cancer treatment patients saying about the stage you're now in? Is this "typical"?? Please keep thinking healing thoughts. All of us that care about you are!!!???????

—Patti Myers, November 30, 2016

Hi, Amy,
Glad you got a few good hours to do what you love...decorating! I bet your house is warm and cozy. Good vibes, too!
Not so happy about 'chemo not so lite' and pray there's some sort of build up so it gets a bit easier each time. Looking at it week by week is definitely the best way. I know sinus infections are the WORST and I'm hoping you're feeling all better from that immediately. Such a drag and I pray your temp stays down. The endurance you have.
Flaunt those lashes, babe! Now people will stare at you only for THOSE EYES!?

When people stare at you, it really is just a reflection of how they feel about themselves and their own lives. Don't take that personally. It has nothing to do with you. Again, always proud of your ability to turn it around to focus on the positive people in your life. You've got to keep it real, but also block out the bs. You shine, Angel!

Much love,

T

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, November 30, 2016*

Glad you're doing well. And you didn't notice the woman sitting next to us at breakfast!? She was bald, with a cute hat! LOL She ate alone and I seriously wanted to ask her to join us. ??

—*Terri Spears, November 30, 2016*

Glad to see an update. Know you will have a great birthday month and that your home will be lovely. I think so many folks just don't know what to say and some are afraid to ask how you are doing. You are beautiful with or without eyelashes!!!

—*Martha Snider, November 30, 2016*

When my sister catches someone staring she asks, "Do I have sh*t on my head?". Rather direct, and effective. Keep on keeping on kid! I'm praying for you every day.

—*Brian Forrester, November 30, 2016*

as always I'm inspired by you. Wish I had half your talent as a writer. I wish I could be there to comfort you during all of this . I wish I could confront those who have no clue how to behave in public when they see someone who is going through hell. I'm wishing a lot tonight for you Amy saying a prayer love you.

—*Lori Sikon, November 30, 2016*

This year, I simply dug all the Christmas lights out and threw them on the front-porch railing and called it done. It's looks hilarious..like a light bomb exploded. It makes me happy.

Also, you used the phrase "might ought to," which is a phrase I love but which I've been told is colloquial and not in the least bit grammatically correct. I still use it as often as I can...as well as "might could," and "might should."

—*Liz Tilton, December 6, 2016*

Eyelash extensions

December 2, 2016

I got eyelash extensions today on what's left of my very blonde lashes. Mascara wasn't working on my watery eyes and, moreover, its birthday month and I needed this little pick me up...so did Scott. I was a little hesitant to try extensions but it was the right move.

Comments

Close up photo????

—*Martha Snider, December 2, 2016*

Photo to follow, right? What an inspiring journey you are on. Thanks for your gift of blogging.

—*Kathie Houchens, December 2, 2016*

Right on sister!! Who couldn't use a lash extension?!!

—*Kathleen Rose, December 4, 2016*

wonderful!

—*Carol Ney, December 4, 2016*

It's My Birthday Month!!!

December 8, 2016

In looking at the calendar awhile back I realized that I'll be getting chemo, next week, ON MY 50th BIRTHDAY!! ? That required an eye roll and then I just had to laugh. ? Six months ago, I was thinking about how I was going to make my big birthday fabulous. I guess I really outdid myself!!

When I'm beyond all of this and feeling fabulous, I'll just celebrate 50 1/2 or maybe 51 and have even more to celebrate!! What I'm going to do next Thursday is bring cupcakes to Chemo Club for all my wonderful oncology nurses and I'll party with them. I also have a cute date that night, at Carlo and Johnny's, so things can't be all that bad!!?

I have to say, on my birthday, I will be grateful that my disease isn't worse than it is. A lot of people don't get that chance. I will continue to be thankful for my doctor, nurses and the medicine that is working so hard to kill this garbage. I will be especially thankful that I am not just now going to ProScan for my annual mammogram, finding out that it is abnormal and that I need a biopsy. I am thankful that I am already six months into treatment. This time may have been the difference between hope and no hope.

His eye is on the sparrow and I know He watches me.

Comments

Your birthday will be special because YOU are! Keep on keeping on.

—*Kathie Houchens, December 8, 2016*

Hope every day of your birthday month is filled with fun. How can it be that I was your Sunday School teacher when you were 15.....??? Glad you will take the party with you. Enjoy each day.

—*Martha Snider, December 8, 2016*

Your attitude is THE BEST. So proud of you, Amy.

Keep looking up!

"For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, December 8, 2016*

Amy! 50! Wow...you look amazing!! You keep on celebrating!!! You are a gem!! Xo

—*Laurel Fritzhand, December 8, 2016*

Oh Amy! Chemo on your 50th! I love the cupcake idea! You are truly amazing! I would love to be there when

you celebrate it they way YOU would want to celebrate it. Love to you, Claudia

—*Claudia Pittenger, December 8, 2016*

Many congratulations on the 6-month mark!! I love your cupcake idea for making your birthday a celebration for the chemo staff and patients--that is GREAT!!! Every day is precious, but one's birthday is extra special. How wonderful to share your specialness with others! Much love and looking forward to a belated birthday bash when you feel like it??????

—*Patti Myers, December 8, 2016*

It will be your Birthday year! When it's time we will celebrate properly... with lots of laughs can't wait?Love you

—*Lori Sikon, December 9, 2016*

What a fabulous entry! Yes - His eye is on the sparrow Amy. Love you!

—*Carol Ney, December 9, 2016*

50 is great.....Love you, baby sister!!!

—*ruth ann siegler, December 10, 2016*

Smoke and Mirrors

December 14, 2016



This past weekend Scott and I had events to attend Friday, Saturday and Sunday. None were baseball cap appropriate so I purchased myself a sable head wrap that I absolutely LOVE!! In fact, I'm sitting in a coffee shop right now, wearing it, while Scott talks with his Stephen Minister. I don't care. My rules! I say it goes with anything! Moreover, I ordered another one in Siberian Lynx today. I like the way it looks but I think I also like it because, in some way, it feels like having hair.

Going into the weekend, I knew I had 3-4 hours of energy per event, so I budgeted wisely. I rested all day Friday to attend a high school friend's wedding that night. It was lovely and it's always heartwarming to see love in blossom. I was out of energy (which flips off like a switch now) after dinner so we excused ourselves and I went home to bed. Saturday, I got up at about 9:00 (late for me) and went to Jungle Jim's because it's an outing that Scott and I can do, plus I needed to get a gift there. Scott doesn't sit still well and these weekends and weeks of me being in bed are hard for him, so I try and get out and do an activity with him on the weekends. He wheel-chaired me around and I was exhausted when we left. I went home and slept the afternoon away while he went to Will's basketball game. Saturday night, we went to Scott's company party. When we got there, we took a selfie and I put it on Facebook. I made it through dinner, went home and then to bed and there I stayed until noon today (Tuesday).

Something caught my attention on Saturday night when I got home. As I stood in the mirror, I took off my sable head wrap covering the place where hair used to be. I took off the skull cap which covered my bald head. I took off the flesh colored banding that holds the skull cap on so that no one sees my bald head. After that, I peeled off the fake eyelashes that went on top of what is left of the eyelash extensions which are in place to keep people from knowing I barely have any. I wiped off the eyebrow pencil covering the areas where there used to be eyebrows. Then came off the bronzer that shows people I look healthy and finally, the lip liner which masks the fact that they are now very thin. I was left staring reality in the face. I hopped into bed and excitedly logging onto Facebook to see if anyone had commented on my picture.

81 Facebooks "likes" (that's a huge number for me) and many lovely comments, which were appreciated more than you know.

But the reality...the reality...the real me...

81 people liked the picture and that felt good to read, but it was because I was a liar. I FAKEbooked. The picture doesn't feel authentic because it's not and that doesn't really sit well with me. It is some sort of facsimile of who I used to be. I keep my situation off of Facebook as much as possible because I have "friends" who are only acquaintances and my personal life is not their business. To them, nothing has changed and that's the way I want it.

Maybe my picture is right where it belongs. One a website filled with fake news, perfect pictures of children, fabulous lives and fantastic friends and places. Everything is better on Facebook because almost no one, including me, puts on the pictures from their real, ordinary, average lives. Who'd want to "like" that?

5 more weeks of chemo. I am tired all the time. If you pray, please pray for patience and perseverance. The side effects are cumulative, hard and depressing but I am fully aware that things could be worse. WAY worse. That being said, I've been casting my fair share of burdens on the Lord because He says I can. God is good!

page.

Comments

Hey Tuten! Your smile was as beautiful as ever too that evening! Just love that you are sharing all of you with all of us! ???

—*missy potter, December 14, 2016*

Praying for patience and perseverance! I'm so glad you made it Friday. You looked amazingly beautiful!

—*Terri Spears, December 14, 2016*

Beautifully processed and expressed. BOTH/AND....we need both the reality and the pretend.

—*Kathie Houchens, December 14, 2016*

Or maybe it is important that we see you kicking cancer in the balls and living life anyway. Suiting up and showing up is a part of life. That's what I see. That feels authentic. I love to read your writing!

—*Brian Forrester, December 14, 2016*

Love you - real or fakebooked!!!

—*Martha Snider, December 14, 2016*

Amy, on fake book it is a beautiful picture of you! Your light always shines thru! You can't fake that! Keep up the good fight!! Xo

—*Laurel Fritzhand, December 14, 2016*

Amy, Listen to the words of your husband..."I love you, you are so beautiful."

Do you think not every single one of your true friends don't share the same sentiments?

The real you always comes through...thank God. 5 more weeks...5 fingers (well, 4 + 1 thumb) make a fist.

Punch out that chemo and all its miserable effects.

I am so sorry you are exhausted and having to deal with this when everything seems Merry and Bright. As you know, people only put up that front. Fake book is such a funny and appropriate nickname. But that just proves that everyone has hope they can live up to the best version of themselves (myself included). That makes us human.

Thank you for always keeping it real...so refreshing...and human. Thank you for sharing your cancer journey with us. I find it illuminating. I want to know.

Praying specifically for your endurance now more than ever. Keep putting on foot in front of the other. And keep resting and taking care of yourself. That's a good example to your kids that it's okay to nurture yourself as well as them.

Thinking of of your family and you so much during these holidays especially. By the way, I love the Stephen Ministry. And knowing your faith is ever present is a witness to Christ...the best gift of all.

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, December 14, 2016*

Love the photo - but you should post the "real" one here. Although - it doesn't matter. You are beautiful inside and out always. No photo necessary to see that. xo -c
(and by the way - I LOVE LOVE LOVE the sable head wrap!!!)

—*Carol Ney, December 14, 2016*

I totally agree with everything Tracy posted! You are an awesome, fantastic person--inside and out. In fact, it's your inner self that is shining through all this agony and fatigue. Just keeping focusing on only 5 more weeks--you are doing beautifully!! Much love to you and yours

—*Patti Myers, December 14, 2016*

Amen!

—Kathleen Rose, December 14, 2016

I personally LOVED seeing the post, not because it appeared to be fake, but because it was a smiling, jovial Amy full of Life and holding onto your Love and taking on the day of challenges that so many of us can't even begin to understand fully! Your rollercoaster ride is scheduled for dips and at times may feel like its about to careen off the tracks. But stop and listen. Look in the mirror and say "I'm doing this" and ward off that devil who is attempting to sit on your shoulder. YOU are doing this Amy and God and your friends, sisters, parents, children and Scott are a witness to it. Wear that sable - you wear it well!!!

TTF !

—Sallie Starr Paracca, December 14, 2016

Well said once again.. however you shouldn't think it as ". Fakebooked it" for a brief moment you and your husband enjoyed some part of the evening! Nothing h wrong with trying to look your best.. ps you ROCKED that hat. You have so much damn courage I'm in awe of you!! Love you

—Lori Sikon, December 14, 2016

It's Fabulous at Fifty!

December 15, 2016

Not sure what I thought today was going to be like, but I woke up in a great mood. I'm liking 50 and I'm loving my new fur headband. Actually, I woke up with profound gratefulness! Like I've mentioned, this would be the time I would have normally gone for my annual mammogram! What a **tremendous gift** that I am not turning 50 today and just discovering that I need a biopsy, that I need surgery, that I have cancer, and on and on and on. That is no way to turn 50 or begin 2017!! The gift and divine intervention of diagnosis 6 months ago has given me time to stop progression of the disease, time to be treated, perhaps made the difference between life and death. I am grateful!!! Grateful in a way I cannot express. Grateful because I know the diagnosis was not luck, karma or happenstance. God's hand is in this and I will write more about this later.

Today, I'm at Chemo Club and it's packed. I wish I could take a picture. There are 2 hip 30 year olds with their friend who's getting treated. They are drinking Starbucks, gossiping and laughing about people from work. Next to me is another 30 year old with her mother and husband. She is just starting on the medicine I currently take and they are sitting on pins and needles because this stuff can cause severe reactions. The nurse told them to notify her if *anything* feels off. They are nervous but think she'll be okay. A 25 year old woman, who has lost her hair, looks gray and her nurse escorts her to the bathroom. Her friend looks helpless and sad. There's a man

in business's attire. He's asleep in his heated recliner. Maybe he has come for work to get fluids. The lady across from me is in a baseball cap. Her hair is starting to grow back and I heard her tell someone that she has finished chemo, just done a scan and is now cancer free. I want to talk to her and ask questions but I'm afraid to. Cancer is somewhat personal. I wonder what it would be like to get the same news. I wonder if I'll ever hear those words. I wonder what it feels like to find out that you are not cancer free and I desperately don't want to know. I desperately don't want to be that person, but I know my time is coming and I will be waiting for my life or death answer.

There is an elderly man with his wife. You can tell theirs is a relationship of decades. A lifetime of love. There is an ease and calmness between them. Younger couples always an air of nervous desperation. I get it. There is a very elderly woman and her elderly daughter. She is not well at all. As her daughter wheels her in, they dropped off a large tin of homemade Christmas cookies. In a time of sickness, they are giving back to this amazing staff, with gratitude. A husband and their son are here while she gets treatment. The son is bored and the husband paces as he talks on this cellphone. His eyes are constantly scanning the room. My two chemo friends were here earlier but have now left. One of them has breast cancer that has spread to her lymph nodes, like me, but hers has also gone into her bones. I worry about her. Mentally, I am on my knees, grateful for 6 months of treatment. 6 months of time to stop the progression, time to treat this disease, time make the difference, perhaps, between life and death.

Comments

Thank you for being so brave and committed to your faith. It's very inspiring! Continuing prayers for you on this journey. Thanks for sharing. Love you!

—*Jennifer Blum, December 15, 2016*

—*Amy Gill, December 15, 2016*

Happy birthday Amy!!! While you may not where you wished to spend your birthday (Aruba???), you have described you are in a pretty special place. Keep rockin that fur head wrap, your positive attitude and your grateful heart. xo - C

—*Carol Ney, December 15, 2016*

Thanks for sharing! So happy your birthday is going well and, more importantly, that you are happy with 5-0????

Your wonderful attitude will keep you forever young at heart! Happy birthday, dear friend??????

—*Patti Myers, December 15, 2016*

What a beautiful positive outlook! I feel blessed to be sharing your journey through this journal! Praying for you always... may your Christmas be filled with peace and love.

—*Darlene Houchens, December 15, 2016*

I love this post. You are amazing. Happy birthday.

—*Claudia Pittenger, December 15, 2016*

Happy Birthday... here's to being fabulous at 50

—*Jill Matson, December 15, 2016*

Happy Birthday Amy! Your post is so descriptive, I felt like I was right there in the room with you! Stay Strong! Know that you continue to be in our prayers and you are always in the palm of God's hand!

—*Jerri Hanus, December 15, 2016*

Fun Fact

December 16, 2016

Fun Fact: I am essentially bald but I get up and wash my remaining little sprouts every single day. ?

Comments

You are doing way better than me Amy!! I didn't even take a shower yesterday. Didn't stop me from going out and doing stuff. When I was young (40's) would have never DREAMED of exiting the house without a shower. Now - its like "I don't stink so why dry out the crepe paper wrinkly skin EVERY day?" ;-)

—Carol Ney, December 16, 2016

Oh, tee, hee--Weird upside of being bald is less time and money with styling products and devices?
Love you!

—Patti Myers, December 16, 2016

I think I would be rubbing good-smelling, good-feeling oil on my scalp and my little sprouts several times a day.

—Liz Tilton, December 19, 2016

Bravery, Fighters, Survivors and Pink Ribbons

December 20, 2016

In the 6 months that I have been dealing with this situation (that's what I'm calling it now. "The Situation"), I have not joined a support group. Scott works with a Stephen Minister through our church, and this person acts as a Christian one-on-one support person, as listener and friend. This has been great for Scott. I can envision I might be ready for support once I am beyond chemo and am trying to reassemble and cope with life beyond it, but I'm not ready now. What I have done is met other breast cancer chemo patients along the way and they have reinforced what I've been thinking all along. I never know if I'm just the wingnut, but I do know how I feel and the women I've met concur, so I thought I'd share.

From somewhere in the marketing universe, the words "fighter", "bravery", "Survivor" and "Pink Ribbon" have emerged and, maybe, these words resonate for people who are post chemo, in remission or some other state of which I have no experience. All I know is that they don't belong to me (or the other women I've talked to, but I'll just speak for myself).

I am not a "Fighter". I am the war torn landscape on which the battle is fought. The Fighters and heroes are the

researchers, doctors, medical staff and oncology nurses who work, daily, to cure this disease in me and everyone else who has cancer. God is the calm breeze that flows across the land, settling into the small spaces with peace, comfort and unwavering love.

I am seldom brave. Bravery belongs to my family and friends, who, upon learning of my diagnosis which has left them feeling helpless and terrified, have resisted the urge to run and instead, rise to support me, with even the smallest of gestures.

I will never be a "Survivor". Like everyone else who has/had cancer, unless there is a cure for my disease or something else kills me, I will only be "Surviving". As long as there is a chance for reoccurrence, there are no "Survivors" and that is important to know.

Pink Ribbons are like Smiley Face stickers. You can put them on anything but they don't do much.

I don't mean for any of this to sound negative. Before this situation happened to me, I used and understood these words as I thought they applied to others. I just find it curious that at the time when those words would seem to apply most (during the first stages of treatment), they are inaccurate. Who decided those words apply to me?

As I move beyond chemo, toward other steps and healing, I will be interested to see if I look back and think, yes, I was brave and I was a fighter. Will I embrace the Pink Ribbon? Maybe. Just not now. If I had to define myself at this point, I would say I am Persistent, Hopeful and Prayerful. That's who I am.

Four more treatments left. I am worn out and tired all the time but I can finally see the end. I will be focusing on my family and importance of the birth of Christ this week. He is the immeasurable gift, my hope and my salvation. Merry Christmas!

Comments

You truly are persistent Amy!! Merry Christmas. xo - C

—Carol Ney, December 21, 2016

My mom is not a fan of pink ribbons. When people call her a survivor or give her things with pink ribbons she laments - I think the ribbons are a constant reminder and I don't need to be reminded! :)

—Kathleen Rose, December 22, 2016

Grateful

December 29, 2016

It's been about 120 days since I made the people I wanted to share this journey with me aware of The Situation. Since then, the circle of sharing has grown and I am appreciative.

Since July 9, 2016, the one thing I have not done is cry about any aspect of The Situation. It's not that I am denying myself that option and it's not to say I won't in the future. Right now, it's a problem that needs fixed and I'm working on that.

What has brought me to tears, left me misty-eyed and sometimes without words is the continual contact that I have received from people. Not one week has gone by in 120 days, that at least one person hasn't reached out to me via email, text, mail, with flowers, food or gifts. People have taken time out of their very busy lives to let me know they care and they are praying...even during the holidays. It's humbling. It feels SO good and it's such good medicine. Writing this leaves me tears-eyed, but like I've said before I know good people (and they know good people who pray for me, too).

Dear Lord,

Bless the friends, family and strangers who take the time to show me their love and support. They are examples of your great love for us all. Thank you for their presence in my life.

Comments

Continued prayers

—*Terri Spears, December 29, 2016*

You are such an inspiration of how faith works in our lives. Thank you . Hugs, Rene

—*Rene Beck, December 29, 2016*

Thinking of you every day and looking forward to seeing you soon!
Much love and many hugs!!!

—*Patti Myers, December 29, 2016*

So many people do love you - and I'm one of them!!!

—*Martha Snider, December 30, 2016*

A testament to a life well lived, and so much more ahead of you!

—*Brian Forrester, December 30, 2016*

Keep on praying and sending your thanks to God! He's with you always and so are the many people who are
Root Toot Tuten you on sister!!!
Many blessings for a magnificent 2017!!
TTF!

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, December 30, 2016*

Darlin - its your party so cry if you want to! (meaning - a party of knowing how very much loved you are, for
you are) xo - c

—*Carol Ney, December 31, 2016*

My Health Situation

December 30, 2016

To date, I have completed 17 of 20 weeks of chemo and 9 of 12 weeks of the latest drugs, Taxol and Carboplatin. These latest drugs are not as intense as the first round but their side effects accumulate and with 3 weeks to go, I am out of steam, power and energy. I am very physically tired (not fatigued and not sleepy) 6 days a week. Ironically, my best day is chemo day. Every day, I spend about 20-22 hours a day in bed, in a recliner or asleep. I consolidate trips downstairs and really have to think about whether I want to go downstairs (we're talking 5 steps) in the first place. My leg muscles are very weak and both my hands and feet have a good deal of neuropathy. I am a bit tentative about what the next 3 weeks are going to bring but I'm going to power through it. My doctor assures me I won't be wheeled in to see him on my last treatment. I kinda feel like I doubt that.

My darling husband informed me, tonight, that I am "WAY more bald" than I was two months ago. He followed that up with, "but you can't tell". ? Bless his heart, I'm just fast-forwarding past whatever that conversation was. I know he's right. I now have a total of 7 eyelashes. 4 on one eye and 3 on the other. The extensions are long gone. I also have 3 eyebrows left. Pitiful and sad...BUT! 56 days until new hair! I can remember writing earlier about 135 days until hair so we're making progress! I'm so ready for hair!!!

I've started Effexor, an anti depressant that is supposed to suppress my sensitivity to the lack of Estrogen in my body. This should help me sleep for more than two hours at a time and not wake up to these tenacious hot flashes. They are the devil! I just want a full night's sleep!"

I was told by my nurse, today, that because of the intensity of the chemo, it will be a year or more until I am back to normal. I will be making progress toward that every week so I feel very encouraged and my motivation is high. I will also be getting physical therapy rehab beginning in February so that I can regain strength.

So, I am on the precipice of a lot of good things happening. The upcoming months will also be a tense time as I wait to see test results and how well this chemo worked. I am relying on God for comfort, peace and grace. He has a plan and a direction for me. I know that and I trust it.

Everything is possible for one who believes. Mark 9:23

Comments

Know you are happy to be on the countdown of the days ahead. Will be praying for good reports as you look forward to building strength. One day at a time..... God is faithful! Love you.

—*Martha Snider, December 30, 2016*

I so love your approach as you enter these final stages of treatment! Also, great news about some help so you can really rest well!!! And lucky for you, you cannot see your eyelashes or eyebrows when you are sleeping? I'm so amazed by your spirits and fortitude. Love that you have just THREE chemo treatments left. Sending LOADS of love.

—*Patti Myers, December 30, 2016*

As I read your post this chant kept going through my mind: Here we go Amy! Here we go! dun-dun! The dun-dun is supposed to be that big drum from the marching band! You have a lot of people cheering you on though this yucky (to put it mildly) time! I like hearing we used to be at 100+ days and now we are down to 50-some!! One day at a time! Keep moving forward! Big prayers for the new medication to give you sleep!!! xoxo! Happy New Year! Its going to be a great 2017!!

—*Kathleen Rose, December 31, 2016*

Don't be tense! Positive!! Positive results! (and if your new drug helps you sleep - pass me a few please) ;-)

—*Carol Ney, December 31, 2016*

Wow, considering those trips downstairs makes me never take for granted anything ever. And certainly not

complain.

Just rest and take every opportunity to allow others to make those trips up and down the stairs FOR YOU.

Three weeks - you got this.

Keep one foot in front of the other and keep moving forward so soon this is all very soon behind you. I know you will have the waiting for results, and that will be a whole separate set of feelings to deal with, but just try to be. Don't worry about that now.

Just focus on the day to day, focus on your breath, your beautiful heartbeat and not eyelashes or eyebrows or hair. That will all come back.

I heard this great quote, "The windshield is so much larger than the rear view mirror because God wants us to look forward not back."

Here pulling for you every step of the way, dear Amy. Praying for sleep-filled nights.

???

—Tracy Wunder Malito, December 31, 2016

Two More to Go!

January 7, 2017

Two more chemos to go! Seems like it should feel like a short time but it doesn't. All I know is that I am ready to be done. 5 months of chemo has been a lot for me, physically. I am about as worn out as I can stand. I am physically exhausted and alert. My legs feel like noodles. I forget what it feels like to feel good but I know I want to feel good again. I bought new walking shoes, yesterday, in anticipation of fresh air, sunny days and renewed muscle power. Bring on the healing!

I met with my doctor on Thursday and he set me up for my radiation consultation on 1/25. That way I'll be ready to go ahead with radiation 3-4 weeks after chemo stops (1/19). I thought they would only be radiating the lymph nodes under my arm but they will do the upper right half of my chest (from the sternum over to my under arm and from the bottom of my ribs to my collar bone). I'm not sure what I think about all of that. It feels like a lot! He also told me that because I'm "so young", radiation will take longer...maybe 5 weeks? I did ask him, if the cancer does return, will it come back in my breast? The answer is "probably not." That makes me uneasy since this current one was so stealthy. On a positive note, they will be monitoring me every 3 months for 3 years, with blood tests so that they know what's going on and can deal with it, if need be. I meet with him again in two weeks so he can give me my "Survival Plan". It feels like the upcoming months are going to be a lot but I'm feeling calm right now so I'm not going to do any speculating or worrying.

I was very happy that I got to see Will play basketball in Friday night and lacrosse this afternoon. I love to watch him play! Now I am out of energy and done doing things until next Thursday, my second to last chemo! ?

I am praying prayers of gratitude for my friends that continue to support me. It continues to mean everything. Also for Scott, who takes care of me, in all ways, and never, EVER complains. For my children, who don't think I'm any less cool than I ever was and continue to love me. I pray that I continue to feel calm and peace. I pray for the new doctors and medical staff I will be working with. I pray that if I need strength and bravery, that it will appear.

Comments

You are strong and continue to live out your faith. Love you and continue praying.

—*Martha Snider, January 7, 2017*

Continued prayers. I think of you everyday.

—*Terri Spears, January 7, 2017*

So glad to hear the end is near!!! Hooray!! You got this Amy!!

—*Jerri Hanus, January 7, 2017*

Amy-you are amazing! People surround you and support you because you are special!! Stay strong!!! Xo

—*Laurel Fritzhand, January 7, 2017*

Pretty soon those noodle legs will be al dente! Good for you getting your new walking shoes and trying to keep pushing forward through the exhaustion. So proud of you. I can't even imagine how uneasy the unknown would be, but all I do know is your best arsenal is your positive energy and solid faith. God bless you as you start to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Thinking of you all the time and keeping you in my prayers, dear Amy.

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, January 7, 2017*

Wow--so,so glad you've only got two more chemo treatments!

When all this began, it seemed like such a huge mountain to climb. Many congratulations on doing so well and keeping your wonderful soul so strong and intact on this journey. You are awe-inspiring. We're continue to think of you daily and send, as always, many loving, healing thoughts.

Many hugs and much love

—*Patti Myers, January 8, 2017*

Do you get to ring a bell when you are all done? Two more to go - woo hoo!

—*Claudia Pittenger, January 8, 2017*

Peace and love to you Amy!! xoxo!!

—*Kathleen Rose, January 8, 2017*

Prayers daily, remember, I am available if needed.

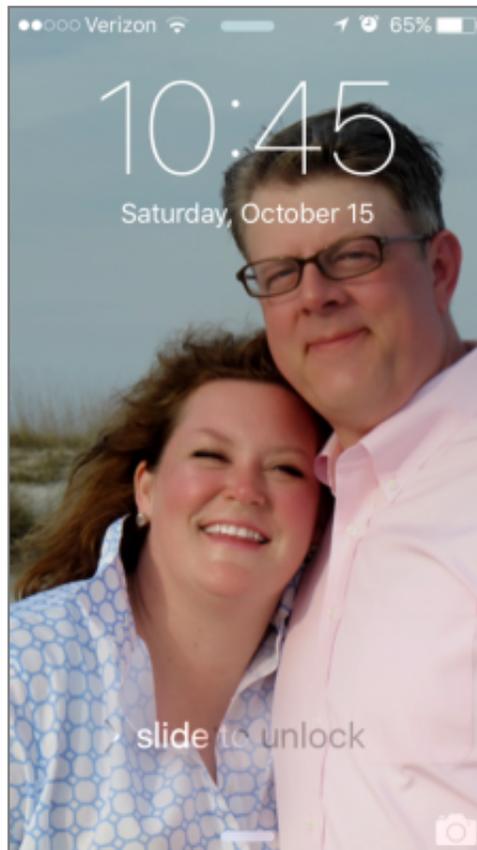
—*Darlene Houchens, January 8, 2017*

You are doing everything right - kudos to you sweet Amy! (and I'll do your first 5K with you once you get those noodle legs back to uncooked)

—*Carol Ney, January 9, 2017*

Pictures! Includes a bald pic. What is seen cannot be unseen. ?

January 8, 2017



** I'm sharing some pictures from the last year and one taken tonight. ?

When Scott was home between Christmas and New Year I noticed on his phone's screen saver that there was a picture of him and me. In this photo, I'm at my happy place...the beach. My hair is long and dark brown, my head is thrown back and I'm laughing (see below). In my mind, this is the picture of me, authentic and truly happy. Looking at that photo prompted me to look at other photos of myself pre- July, 2016. Although I know it's me in these photos, they are images I just don't recognize any more. That me disappeared last July 10th. That girl is gone. I miss her naïveté and her free- spiritedness. I'm sad she's not coming back but I think that is mostly because she has not been replaced. Right now it feels like I am in a caterpillar-morphing-into-a-butterfly stage. I'm not really anything or anyone right now, and that's okay. Most days I still look into the mirror and am partially shocked that I am *actually* bald, even though I've been like this for 5 months. Most days, I look at Scott and say, "How did we get here??!!" Most days, I'm wishing time away in anticipation of better days. I'm in limbo. I'm waiting for good things to happen.

So, if things go as my doctor has planned and God is merciful, my life will start to get a lot better in the near future. While I know the foundation of my former self still stands...my faith, values, loyalty to friends and family, appreciation for earth's beauty, need to laugh, etc....so much will be different. Physically, I am different. I'm thinner. I've aged. When my hair comes back, what will I look like? Will my hair be curly? A different color? Will I decide to live life with reckless abandon or be too scared to move? Is there a kinder, gentler me somewhere or will I speak my truth? Will I keep only what is truly important and necessary? Will I regain my fierce independence or rely on the stability of Scott? How will this disease define me without consuming me? And, what seems most important to me right now, how can pay back all that has been given to me during this time? Do I have the capacity to be a Stephen Minister? What can I bring to the table to ease the way of others on this path? Can I ever be so kind, graceful, eloquent, supportive and caring as my friends and family have been to me? I don't know, but this journey can't be for nothing and I will pray that this experience has a higher purpose and that I will be used as He sees fit.

I'm curious to meet the new me. That would be the me with an awesome new head of hair. I'm totally over being bald...it's too cold outside for this nonsense.

Photos







Comments

Beautiful with and without hair! Can't wait to see what grows in - I think it could be totally different. God will use you in a special way for sure!

—*Martha Snider, January 8, 2017*

Good for you Tuten! It's always been about your eyes for me! Those baby blues!!! And that giggle too!

—*missy potter, January 8, 2017*

You look great. ?

—*Jill Matson, January 8, 2017*

So love your thoughts and pictures! As time and circumstances occur, we evolve and you are doing so with such thoughtfulness.. You inspire us!

Much love always,

—Patti Myers, January 8, 2017

I am so very proud of you Amy! Finally getting over your fear of being seen without hair. As I've told you multiple times - your beauty is from within. The fact you are also beautiful externally is just icing on the cake. Love you dear!

—Carol Ney, January 8, 2017

Your questions remind me of a young teenager, looking at the world ahead with so much unknown but knowing the broad and unlimited options that lie ahead. The difference is you are much wiser, stronger and more beautiful inside and out. Your "morph" analogy is 100% accurate! Where you let your butterfly wonder will be all up to you Amy!! I'm pretty sure Mrs. Tuten told you years ago that you can be anything you want to be and it's still true. Mom's don't lie! Expand your dreams and let go of any fears left because you are stronger than ever! And you can do anything!

TTF

—Sallie Starr Paracca, January 8, 2017

1. A kinder gentler you - haha! No way! Speaking the truth - that fits you better :) And I totally could see you spreading the good news!
2. No need to pay anyone back. You may not realize it but this page/journal/bible study has been such a gift to me and I know others!
3. Stay warm my friend! Spring will be here soon and you can stretch you wings!!

—Kathleen Rose, January 9, 2017

You will be who you've always been. ??

—Terri Spears, January 9, 2017

This is beautiful as are you! You were, you are and you will always be!

—Elizabeth Murphy, January 9, 2017

Those eyes...

—Brian Forrester, January 9, 2017

Love this post, Amy! You're beautiful! ?

—Leigh Cummins, January 9, 2017

You are a beautiful person with or without hair! And whether you become a Stephen Minister or not, you will

be - and are - a tremendous support and shining light to others.

—*Sue Porter, January 11, 2017*

Second to Last Chemo! Saying Goodbye is Hard!

January 12, 2017

In 7 days chemo will be over! That's very exciting and I'm ready to be done with these drugs!

On the other hand, I am very sad to be leaving Chemo Club and the oncology nurses I've been hanging out with for the last 5 months. I'm sure there is some medical definition for this separation anxiety, but it's what it is and it's how I feel. I know these nurses and I know about their families, as they do mine. We laugh together and they are always quick to ask what they can do for me. Without exception, they have all been caring, compassionate and perfectly lovely. They are always professional but they feel like friends. When they are working with me, their attention is focused only on me. When they are with another patient, the focus is only on that person. We are all special here. I'm sad to leave the comfort of this place. I know where the good snacks are, where the warm blankets live and in this room of 24 seats, #20 has become my chair. This has been my safety place because cancer does not grow here. Now I am heading out into the world and while I'm ready to face it, it's scary, and that's the truth. I will have a new Radiologist and nurses at a different location which is down the street from my house. There will be new people to trust. I can do this!

My chemo PT rehab class starts on Monday (1/16) and I have a consultation with the Radiologist on 1/25. Soon after, radiation begins and it will be 5 days a week for 6 weeks. After that, I will be back to see my oncologist, some time in April, to see if I am cancer free. It feels like it is going to be a long 4 months of holding my breath. I'll be working very, very hard to live in the moment, take one day at a time and enjoy life. It's what I should have been doing and need to do, every day, from this day forward, as none of us are guaranteed the future.

Lastly, I am not the person you want around in case you have a hangnail, are bleeding profusely or have a medical emergency. I don't do well with people in distress. It's not my skill set. I'll bring you food and pat your hand and I know how to dial 911, but that's as much safe assistance as I can provide. That being said, my

respect for anyone in the medical profession is high. It seems to me that it takes a very unique person to be an oncology nurse. My nurses are always happy, personable and engaged with everyone at Chemo Club. I would think that this place and this job could be totally depressing, given that 100% of the people here are here for not so nice reasons. I commented once about how they could possibly do this job and the response was that most of the nurses here had personal experience with cancer or cancer in a loved one. Regardless, it's impressive and they have my respect, without a doubt! These people are tough.

And another last thing. I've been sitting here people watching. And, as always, the person who brings the super-size crinkly bag of ultra-crunchy chips is sitting close to me, happily munching away with their mouth open. I just love that so much!?

Across from me are a man and woman in their 70s. They aren't married but they are obviously special friends. He's been a good conversationalist and distraction for her. They talk about the places they've traveled and where they'd like to go in the future. I heard him say to the nurse, "I'm here for the long haul and until she's done and healthy again." ?? Later, he says, "You've got this, Baby. Only 7 more months." They are now both napping.

Another man and his wife are a few seats down from me. She wrapped up chemo a few months ago but is now back so something must not have gone as planned. She's a trooper and always pleasant. Across from them is a woman who is here for fluids and has just gotten the good news that she is cancer free. She is telling anyone who will listen. It's been going on for a long time. I'm watching the husband and his eyes are sad. I know he wishes she'd just stop. I also know he's thankful that his wife is wearing noise cancelling headphones.

And there is a new patient here and she is in her 20s...cute and perky. She's wearing one of those scalp freezing caps in an attempt to save her long blonde hair from falling out. Both of her parents are here with her and all of them are understandably nervous although each is trying not to give it away. The girl is acting like chemo is no big deal so that her parents don't feel upset. She's doing work. Her mom cannot sit and is trying not to fuss over her child, all the while making irrelevant conversation. She doesn't know what to do. The father sits, stands and repeats, then he wanders, scouting out our club. He's at a loss. This is their baby and she is sick. I cannot imagine. I think of Meredith and tears fill my eyes.

This place is full of caring and love. I'm going to miss this place!

Comments

Amy, I am quite sure they will miss you, as well!!!

It's been quite a progression since you first talked about your surroundings while getting chemo. How wonderful that you have found joy and comfort in this place no one wants to be!

You remain inspiring!

Much love

—*Patti Myers, January 12, 2017*

So glad you have been surrounded with loving, caring people during these months. I know they have loved getting to know you also.

—*Martha Snider, January 12, 2017*

Love your strength and bravery. Not sure I could be as strong as you. Thinking one of you daily. Let's get together when you are up to it.

—Terri Spears, January 12, 2017

Stay strong my friend. I'm sure they will miss you as well.??Thinking of you everyday ?

—Lori Sikon, January 12, 2017

My daily devotional guide offers a message that may speak to you: "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven...Moving to a new situation can feel scary... Trust God to lead you forward to even greater fulfillment." Love you.

—Sue Porter, January 12, 2017

I think you underestimate your ability to be empathetic, Amy. I expect this journey has changed you in more ways than just losing your hair.....you can handle a hangnail! Love you dear!!

—Carol Ney, January 15, 2017

You are amazing! I haven't read a single one of your entries without feeling every word!

—Randi Ziegler, January 20, 2017

The Last Day of Chemo

January 19, 2017

The Numbers

194 days since this ordeal began

127 days since chemo began

108 days without hair

100 days in bed

17 doctor visits

16 rounds of chemo

16 port punctures

20 blood draws

4 Neulasta shots

0 eyelashes, eyebrows or body hair

I've had

Tons of support from *FABULOUS* family and friends. Thank you! Thank you!!

1,000 reasons to be thankful

Hundreds of prayers said, heard and answered

194 days of unwavering support from Scott

8 wonderful oncology nurses

1 fabulous hematologist/oncologist who went the extra mile for me

1 amazing breast oncologist working hard to heal me

And today is the last day of chemo! I did it!! I'm done. I AM DONE!!!! I leave Chemo Club with no sadness or sense of loss, as I thought I would. I'm outta here with gratitude and I ready to move on!!

I'm moving on to:

More gratitude

More prayers said, heard and answered

New nurses and a new doctor

Increased energy and strength

An awesome new hairdo

Eyelashes and eyebrows

No neuropathy

Continued support from friends, family and Scott

Chemo physical therapy

Radiation to make sure the crud is deader than dead

A brand new, healthy life!

God is good!

Comments

Been thinking and praying for you today! Love your heart.

—*Kelly Rasulis, January 19, 2017*

Hooray! Hooray! God is good!!

—*Claudia Pittenger, January 19, 2017*

Hooray!!!!!!

—*Martha Snider, January 19, 2017*

You are adorable! Can't wait to get your call for an outing!! xo - C

—*Carol Ney, January 19, 2017*

Awesome news Amy! One day at a time! One day at a time! Wonderful new beginnings await!!

—*Jerri Hanus, January 19, 2017*

Yippee. That's such amazing news. Amy-1, cancer-0 LOL

—*Terri Spears, January 19, 2017*

WAHOO!!!! Many congratulations! And SO love your tabulations. Thinking of you every day with lots of love.

—*Patti Myers, January 19, 2017*

Congratulations, Amy! You fought with courage, faith, tenacity and a remarkable sense of humor. I so admire you and praise God for being with you on this journey. With love and continued prayer i send best wishes for a fabulous future!!!

—*Sue Porter, January 19, 2017*

Indeed, God is good!

—*Brian Forrester, January 20, 2017*

So incredibly happy for you! Will continue prayers as you go through PT and get your strength (& hair!) back?

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, January 20, 2017*

Done but Not Over

January 27, 2017

It was great to not get chemo yesterday. I have spent the last week feeling like I have for the past 3 months but the thought of feeling better has me excited and motivated. I am sending good juju to my hair follicles, eyebrows and eyelashes. The "real hair" stick-on eyebrows never got opened so they have been donated, along with a bunch of Glucerna, to the Chemo Club basket so someone braver than I can use them.

A bunch of stuff has happened in the last 10 days, so to update:

On 1/16- I started a PT program specifically for chemo patients at Christ right by my house. I knew I was weak but had no idea how weak. At my first appointment, they did an assessment of my arms and legs. My upper body is a little weak but most of the damage is from my hips down. They had me march for 2 minutes and I completed that but had to stop and rest 3 times. Then I walked for 5 minutes at zero incline and 1mph (that's about 700 feet). I went home utterly exhausted and slept for the rest of the day. I have been back 4 times since then and am making progress. Yesterday, I walked for 10 minutes, 2 times, at 3% incline and 2 mph. I am also lifting weights with my legs, working on a balance board and doing walking and exercises at home. All I can say is that IT IS SO HARD! I have no choice but to do it because I am resolved to be stronger and have more power and energy.

On 1/23 - I met with my family doctor. Because of the steroids I have been taking, my blood sugar is high, so I am now off to see an endocrinologist to get that under control. He also gave me a prescription for a drug that

helps with neuropathy. I'm hoping that it works, stat, because numbness is strangely painful and affects my balance and sleep.

On 1/25 - I met with my radiation oncologist at the same Christ location. He was wonderful, as were his staff. I learned about the radiation I will be receiving - I will not be radioactive, I have to get special lotion and deodorant for my radiated skin as I will be dealing with a sunburn and the radiation will make me tired. They made a cast that I lie in to get the radiation and my chest has Sharpie marker Xs, covered with tape. 3 hours of toplessness around a bunch of people and all modesty is now gone. The doctor asked if I wanted to wait to start, but I'm on this, so I'm starting next Tuesday. It will be 5 days a week for six weeks. I can do this!

Today is the first Friday without chemo or steroids. I feel pretty good and I'm hoping I will stay that way, maybe all day. That would be great. The main things I am struggling with right now are bone and muscle pain at night. That, combined with my inability to stay at one body temperature makes for fitful sleep, which is annoying.

I am grateful for the great doctors, staff and care I have received. I have also been so appreciative of the friends of friends, people I don't know, who have prayed for me. It's really a special thing and very humbling to know that strangers would take a piece of their day to pray for me. To that end, should you want to join me in prayer, I have 3 friends in difficult situations. My two breast cancer friends named Sandy are having complications with their chemo treatments which are delaying their ability to get chemo. My friend, Terri, is newly diagnosed with cancer and is dealing with a lot of unknowns right now. I pray for their healing and that they are able to feel God's constant love, presence and His hand on their shoulders as they keep moving forward.

Comments

Congrats on no chemo!!! I love it that you are able to think of others!! Rock on Tuten - rock on!!!!

—*Kathleen Rose, January 27, 2017*

What a beautiful testimony! You are STRONG! But we can all use a tad more. Thus - I need to go to a class with you. We can work on our "core" with all of the laughter that will ensue (I hear laughing is a really good

abdominal tightening exercise) xo sweet Amy

—*Carol Ney, January 27, 2017*

Thanks for thinking of me while you have all your own crap going on. I'm praying for you. You are a source of strength to me and I can't wait til we can get together again. Love ya ??

—*Terri Leighton, January 27, 2017*

WOW!! You are making so much progress! Wonderful to hear. Be patient, like a fine wine, and listen to your body. You have time to run and it's a marathon, not a sprint. You are doing this and I can't wait to see where this journey takes you next Amy! God bless you and the many people who are helping you!
TTF

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, January 27, 2017*

Glad you are getting strength back.... one day at a time. Love you and your thoughtful heart for others.

—*Martha Snider, January 27, 2017*

Continuing to pray for you and yours, and joining you in prayer for others.

—*Sue Porter, January 27, 2017*

One day at a time. Wishing you all the blessings to get past all of these challenges!! ?

—*Lori Sikon, January 28, 2017*

Radiation #1 of 30 is done!!

February 1, 2017

If the first Friday without chemo was good, the first Saturday after chemo was fantastic! I was up and active for 16 hours and able to go to Columbus to celebrate my uncle's birthday. Then, with a change in plans, Scott and I had a lovely dinner at Cinque with a gift card given to me by one of my great neighbors. When I got home, I was so giddy that I had been able to be so active, I couldn't go to sleep. Truly, I did not want the day to end and I remembered all the days I said to Scott, "If only I could have a half day (1 day, a couple of hours, etc.) of feeling good. Do you think I'll ever feel good again?" Saturday was Heaven! I've been playing catch up on sleep since then and still rest quite a bit, but the difference in not getting chemo is dramatic and exciting. I read

something about being post-chemo that made me feel better. It was something to the effect of "Don't feel guilty about resting during the day. It's called Recovery". I'm having a hard time dealing with the fact that I am not going to be back to normal for months as I continue to recover. That's especially hard for me now that I am feeling better.

I continue to work hard at PT and it continues to kick my fanny every time. My therapist takes no pity on me. On Tuesday, I was able to walk ten minutes, two times, at 2mph and 3% incline, and I'm lifting more on the leg weight machines. My biggest struggle is balancing, which is mainly due to the neuropathy. I'm taking Gabapentin for it now and am getting some zinging and tingling in my hands and feet which is a sign of nerve regrowth, but I have a long way to go.

From what I've read, hair starts to show up 2-3 weeks after you stop chemo. Tomorrow is 2 weeks. Unless a miracle happens overnight, I am still a cue ball. You would think that in all of this, I would have learned some modicum of patience, but no. I want my body healed IMMEDIATELY!! Now that hair is a reality, I'm totally over owning my baldness. Where's my hair??!!

Radiation got postponed to today, which was not a big deal. I'm not sure what I was expecting, but it was definitely a lonely and invisibly strange experience. I was by myself in a large room with a window into another room that had a couple of people in it but I couldn't see them. In my room was this large white, circular machine with a board in the middle where my cast was. I was told to lie on it and be very still. Someone came in and adjusted me. The machine had several flat screens attached around it and something that looked like the glass panel of a Xerox machine 6 inches from my face. The TV screen above me had my ID photo and identifying pictures of my naked chest. Where were the pictures of the beach and kittens??! This was not relaxing!! The machine rotated 360 degrees around my body, clicking and beeping while it took X-rays. Then, from the ceiling, a monotone voice said, "Now radiation is beginning." I continued to lie there, super still. Silence. I was alone and there was nothing. No sound to hear, no laser beams that I could see. I was being treated by something powerful and totally invisible and it was entering my body and killing this crud. A pretty surreal feeling. The good news is that it took all of about 4 minutes. Any longer and the Jimmy Legs would have been jumping. One down and 29 to go!

If you prayed with me for my friends last week, the good news is that one of them had surgery and is now cancer free. I will be checking on the other two tomorrow. This weekend, I received a prayer quilt from people at a church where my aunt is involved. It's made up of pretty pink and blue squares and blue decorative string knots have been tied all over it. With this gift came a card with the signatures of each person who had tied a knot on this quilt and prayed for me. Just such a powerful ministry and a touching thing to know that strangers have prayed for me. I can't quite describe it, but I will never pass up an opportunity to pray and do for strangers now that I know what it means to people like me.

Hoping for hair!

Comments

I just love your positive attitude. Thank you for being there for me when you have your own crap going on.
Love ya

—*Terri Leighton, February 1, 2017*

Wonderful to hear you had a great day! Wallow in the happiness of the good days, this will make the bad ones a little easier... Still praying for you, Scott and the children.

—*Darlene Houchens, February 1, 2017*

So glad you feel better each day. Waiting for hair photos!!!! Love you.

—*Martha Snider, February 1, 2017*

Amy, first of all, I am SO HAPPY you are done with chemo and now are starting to feel better. It's a good sign that you are impatient for your hair...sense of normalcy that makes you just plain human!

Second of all, I want to give you gratitude for explaining the details of radiation. I know (as do we all) a few dear ones who've gone through it yet never really told the detailed experience. Thank you for letting me (us) know what it's like..."lonely and invisibly strange" sounds so isolating. I'm sure no matter who has shared their story, every person's experience is extraordinarily personal.

Lastly, thank you for sharing this journey, dear one.

I know Scott and the kids and your entire family (and support system who sees firsthand what you're going through on a daily basis) are so relieved to see you feeling more yourself. And you must rest, do what you need to do!

29 to go...YOU GOT THIS.

TTF, Tracy

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, February 2, 2017*

Such great news! So happy that chemo phase is over and the you're already feeling better and more energetic!

By the next time I see you in early March, will no doubt see some sprouts ?

Much love!!

—*Patti Myers, February 2, 2017*

Thank you for your description of a radiation treatment. I've never had any idea of what that would be like - but I can tell you....seeing my naked chest for any period of time would be quite unnerving to me - so KUDOS TO

AMY! The silence and quiet healing you perceived/felt is wonderful.
And so glad you had a giddy weekend with Scott! Sounds heavenly.
Call me so we can get you out soon! Love - C

—Carol Ney, February 13, 2017

More Changes

February 9, 2017

Last Friday afternoon I felt great and got to spend the afternoon with one of my favorite people. That was followed by a whirlwind weekend of activities, including Will's LAX game where he did a great job playing goalie for a half, and a not-so-epic performance at his basketball game the next day. Regardless of the coaching talent and player commitment, 6th grade basketball is always part comedy and tragedy rolled into one. Saturday night, Scott indulged us (caved in to Meredith's request) and we went for Chinese, which we rarely do. At some point in Scott's young life, he had a paper route that led him through the back door of a Chinese restaurant and he was so grossed out at the food on the floor of the kitchen that, at almost age 50, he is still not over it. Because of this, the children and I suffer. ? So the weekend was good and I felt great. I must have told Scott 50 times how grateful I was for renewed health and how wonderful I was feeling...until I looked down at my hand at church on Sunday.

My right hand (the surgery side) was a little puffy. I pulled up my sleeve and my arm was a little puffy, too. Awhile back, my oncologist had told me that 25% of breast cancer patients get Lymphedema. I knew there were exercises you could do to make the swelling go down but I didn't know what they were. Immediately after church, I Googled the exercises but what came up were gruesome images of what this **permanent** condition can become. On the way home, I got teary. Partly because I was thinking that I've been through enough and that I don't deserve this. Partly because it was such a let down after a good weekend. I only briefly thought about why I wasn't freaking out. Now that I've been through all of this, my reaction to negative things is not to start managing things but to immediately pray and turn it over to the professionals. I know I'm not in control. I also rationalized that MAYBE the puffiness was a reaction to MSG in the Chinese food. That made me feel better. On Monday, I woke up still feeling good. When I went to radiation, I had the nurse look at my arm. I don't think she was too alarmed but she made me an appointment with the Lymphedema Clinic next Monday. She also told me that those pictures were of cases that weren't treated immediately and that the key to treating Lymphedema was to address it early. When I left radiation, I went to the grocery by myself for the first time in 6 or 7 months. I actually shopped, got a bunch of stuff and did not get tired. Writing this, I realize how strange (pitiful) it sounds and also recognize what an accomplishment it was for me. After that, I went home and slept and woke up tired several hours later. I should have known something was coming. That night, I had terrible bone and leg

muscle pain which led to practically no sleep. When the bone and muscle pain comes, the only relief I get is to continually move my legs in a bicycle motion or by sweeping them back and forth across the sheets, seeking out the cool spots. I also sleep with the window half open because being cold eases the pain. So thankful it's not summer.

On Tuesday morning, my knees were buckling, my legs felt like I had run a marathon and my hands and feet were in real pain. It is a strange sensation to have partially numb hands/feet that also hurt and are hypersensitive. My feet now feel like I'm walking on one of those spiny plastic outdoor mats and my hands are so sensitive that I cannot button anything, etc., all while being more numb than usual. Makes perfect sense! After radiation, I went to PT and told her about my buckling knees and my concern about getting on the treadmill. As always, she took no pity on me and told me to get on the recumbent elliptical bike instead. She also told me that my leg pain and weakness was due to all the weekend's activities and suggested that I do nothing on Weds. The weird sensations in my hands and feet are caused by regrowing nerves. That's good news, so I'll quit complaining about that. Of course, no one knows how long it will last. It's annoying!

Wednesday, I saw my radiologist and he looked at my arm, which was almost back to normal. I'm pretty sure that he thought it was nothing (or the Chinese food). He also told me that Lymphedema is much more common in people who have had a lot of lymph nodes removed. I only had 2 taken out. I'd like a diagnosis, one way or the other, but maybe that's information to get on Monday at the clinic. I went home after my appointment and rested all day, like the PT lady said to do. This morning, I'm feeling good again. Radiation is over (#7) and I'm done with today's PT. It was supposed to be my last day but my therapist has requested another 6 weeks of therapy because I'm not strong enough. ?? PT=Pain Train and I guess they are right. No pain, no gain! I can do this!

I was thinking, again, why I can't get it through my head that this recovery is going to take months to a year and that I need to calm down and respect that. I decided, yesterday, that I am applying how I felt on the good weeks when I took the "Red Devil", to my situation now. When I took the "Red Devil", I would wake up one morning and feel great all week. That doesn't apply here because while I may feel great, my body is still weak and I'm still working on getting stronger. Lesson learned, finally! I'm going to take it easier this weekend and just enjoy myself.

Other things:

I was instructed by my doctor to purchase a \$40.00, 4oz. tube of lotion specifically for radiation patients. Apply 4 times a day. I don't know if it's working but it feels good and will feel better as a tax write off.

I have not had any side effects from the radiation yet. No tiredness or sunburn.

My hair... The few hairs that I never lost are regrowing!?! They are a little over 1/4" long and some have 2-3 tiny spirals in that length. Others are straight and some are bent at a 90 degree angle like they are threatening to do something funky?. I also have new fuzzy, downy hair all over my head. I think it's white and it feels like velvet. Not sure what this combo is going to eventually look like and I'm glad I have a good colorist/stylist. I can't wait until I can see a full head of hair, no matter how short it is!

A lot of the indelicate side effects of chemo have gone away and I'm so grateful to feel so good better these days. The friends I have been praying for are doing better and I am so thankful for that, as well!! Things are on the upswing and that keeps me motivated and positive! God is good!

Comments

So glad to hear how well you feel. Can't wait to see your new hair too. Love you.

—*Martha Snider, February 9, 2017*

You're amazing! You are such an inspiration to me. Love you ??

—*Terri Leighton, February 9, 2017*

Oh Amy, I do love you!! Keep up the great attitude, find a good chinese place with no msg, tell Scott it is good to face old demons, and have a great February!! Indeed, GOD is good!! xoxo!

—Kathleen Rose, February 9, 2017

Yes, I remember wondering if I was ever going to feel normal again. It does take time. Love you! All the time, God is good!

—Claudia Pittenger, February 10, 2017

I think we should start praying for Scott's Chinese food neurosis! Glad you got to share the fun weekend with the family and remember, it's a MARATHON! Your strength is growing everyday! Keep up the fantastic progress but one day at a time!!

TTF

—Sallie Starr Paracca, February 11, 2017

Wow - wish I would have read this before I saw you yesterday! I would have asked to see the little bent hairs! Anyway - you look fantastic. As for Chinese food.....all of you have to do is order "without MSG". My father does it all the time. (but I know how Scott feels about his past disdain. I worked in a mall near a caramel popcorn kiosk which my friend worked at. Too many free samples and too much of the CONSTANT smell of caramel popcorn around me.....I can't eat it to this day) I like your PT - she sounds lovely ;-) Keep up the positive attitude Amy and keep this inspirational and insightful entries coming. Love ya babe - C

—Carol Ney, February 13, 2017

The Uniform

February 18, 2017

I love looking and laughing at pictures of college date parties with my Pi Phi sisters. It was the late '80s and we were dressed like Puritans. Lisa Birnbach would have been proud! Big collared, long-sleeved blouses, ankle length, lined wool plaid jumpers, tights and patent leather shoes were de rigueur for such occasions. During the day, we wore long khaki skirts from Gap, Skyr turtlenecks, Bass loafers or Bean boots, pearls, headbands and oversized sweaters from LL Bean. It's a wonder that any of us got dates as no matter what we wore, *everything* was left to the imagination. We put a lot of effort into how we looked when we stepped out of the sorority house. Inside the house, after classes or just hanging out was another story. This is where we honored sisterhood and life long friendships were made. In the bedrooms of that big house is where the gossip, the scheming, the uncontrollable laughter and talk of boys and last night's activities occurred. It was serious and important business and as such it required us all to have a secondary wardrobe. It was an assortment of less than reputable, comfy clothing that we lovingly referred to as "The Uniform". It included broken-in Greek letter

sweatshirts, old date party t-shirts from various fraternities, knee-length cutoff Army shorts, sweatpants and heavy, white cotton socks scrunched down to the ankle . This is where I learned about comfortable clothing...this is where I learned to love comfortable clothing. This is why, today, I have several "uniforms" and a thousand reasons to put one on.

When I got diagnosed and it became clear that this garbage and the chemo were going to take away from me more than I was willing to give, I began to search for things I could control. I settled on vowing to do two things: showering and getting dressed every day and to "Keep Chemo Cute" by wearing my favorite bright-colored clothing. I knew it was almost an impossibility that I would follow through on my intentions. How would I resist the neatly folded stacks of leggings and snuggly shirts just waiting to comfort me? With resolve, I set out to accomplish my goals and was motivated by my success. Get out of bed, shower, get dressed, repeat! Easy! As the chemo began to kick in, I would get out of bed, Scott would help me get in the shower, I'd get dressed and lie down on the bed. Time went on and the chemo left me exhausted and in unceasing pain. I would get to the shower, sometimes 4-5 times a day, and I would sit on the shower floor with the hot water raining down on me until it ran out. It was a place where the pain lessened and no one bothered me. In this solitude and release, I began to pray. Over the weeks, it became my constant place of prayer, regardless of where else I prayed. I prayed with gratitude and thankfulness, for friends, for sick people, for those who were supporting me, for strangers, for our country, this world and all its people. I asked for forgiveness and I praised God for His unceasing love and presence. As time went on and things in my course of treatment changed, I continued to return to pray. Now that chemo is over and I feel, physically, on the upswing, praying on the shower floor is part of my daily ritual. In fact, today, I was there twice. It comforts me physically. More importantly, it is an undisturbed time of mediation and time with God and that's important to me.

After all those showers and the realization that I might have to set up a GoFundMe account to pay the water bill (only to discover that it was the electric company to which I owed the big bucks for heating all that water), I kept my word and have gotten showered and dressed every single day. That doesn't mean that I haven't ended up in a Uniform some days or that, at times, the lines between Uniform and what's socially acceptable haven't been blurred. ?

It has been a special kind of privilege to have been supported, lifted up and prayed for by my sorority sisters. These are women I have known for 30+ years and they embody Pi Beta Phi's values and meaning of true friendship. How awesome are they and how lucky am I?

Comments

Continued prayers! ??

—*Terri Leighton, February 18, 2017*

What a great message. Sorority bonds are deep and long lasting! Glad you have those special sisters.

—*Martha Snider, February 18, 2017*

Isn't it a wonder we ever had a boyfriend in college?!?! Laura Ashley loved us!! I still say we were classy girls and I could NEVER be in college today with what they wear now!! Thanks for the fun memories and know that we all are lucky !!! Pi Phi Love!

TTF!

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, February 19, 2017*

God bless hot showers and getting up and dressed every day. Even if it was the uniform! Don't forget the bows in our hair and the ray bans! What a special time we had during our time at OU as a Pi Phi. I'm praying for continued strength and optimism...it's contagious. Much love, sister!

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, February 19, 2017*

I miss those days of big baggy clothes - especially now that I have added a few pounds!! Sending lots of Pi Phi love and mine!!!!!! xo!

—*Kathleen Rose, February 19, 2017*

Beautiful, Amy. Keep those brightly colored shirts to match your brightly colored personality! xo - c

—*Carol Ney, February 20, 2017*

Health Update

February 21, 2017

I have a lot to be grateful for regarding my health.

Good Stuff

After seeing a doctor, a nurse and a Lymphedema specialist, the consensus is that I don't currently have it. The slight swelling in my arm went down after my initial freak out and hasn't returned. I got the message, quite clearly, that my radiologist and nurse thought I was over reacting, but can you blame me? The education I got from the Lymphedema specialist on the lymphatic system was actually interesting and informative. She ordered me a compression sleeve and glove for plane trips or any swelling that may occur later. Given the outcome, I'm putting this situation to bed and am no longer worried about it being an issue.

I didn't get strong enough in my first 6 weeks of PT so I have been told to continue for another 6 sessions. My first physical therapist is now on vacation and I have a new lady. She goes easier on me, which I am thinking is a good thing. Before, I was taking the days in between PT to recover, which left me with a lot of pain and no ability to do much else. Now, I am working out and feeling the burn, but I'm also able to go do other things every day. I'm sure part of that is just recovery, but it seems like I am feeling stronger and making more progress this way.

Over the past couple of weeks, I had been dealing with a lot of constant leg and lower back pain. The professionals I have consulted have not given me any answers. In fact, the only answer I have gotten is, "everyone deals with radiation differently". That wasn't any help so, through process of elimination, I determined that I was dehydrated. I know how to fix that, and the problem is now solved.

I've completed 14 of 30 radiation treatments and tomorrow I'll be half way through. I haven't gotten sunburned yet and I do not feel any more tired than I already am. It would be a HUGE blessing if I could get through the remaining treatments feeling better or no different than I currently do.

Neuropathy- My feet and hands continue to be painful, especially at night and when I'm on the move. If this pain didn't indicate nerve re-growth, it would certainly be in the negative column. I can tough this out but I am certainly ready for feeling a lot less pain.

Not So Awesome Stuff - Nothing!

I continue to pray, with gratitude, for those who are still praying for me and supporting me in so many ways. Even though I am through the toughest part of this treatment, their presence in my life is incredibly important to me. God is good!

Comments

You are so strong- and I love your attitude - and I love you. Glad things are progressing positively.

—*Martha Snider, February 21, 2017*

I love your positive attitude, and with all you are going through you manage to lift ME up! I'm so grateful for you to be part of my life. Thank you ??

—*Terri Leighton, February 21, 2017*

I continue to pray for complete recovery . . .you are your way . :) Rene

—*Rene Beck, February 21, 2017*

Yes He is! Xoxo

—*Jennifer Blum, February 21, 2017*

Praying for full restoration and recovery with the least pain possible. Sending much love!

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, February 28, 2017*

135 days ago...

February 22, 2017

Before I begin, I'm half way through radiation today! Woo hoo!!

135 days ago, I wrote about this date. That's a lot of days ago! It's a lot of hats, a lot of ball caps, a lot of cold head and sweaty head. I "owned" baldness and I shied away from it. A lot of the time I forgot I was bald and wondered what people were looking at...until I remembered. I got a lot of looks, some compassionate, some annoying. Sometimes I took off my hat for people who couldn't stop staring, just so they could get a reaaaally good look ?

I never wanted pity and always just wanted to fit in, but that's not what you get on this journey.

I've learned from this in ways too many to count.

My children have been supportive, funny and accepting. We laugh about the one long hair that never fell out and how I need a barrette. And Meredith says often, "Awww, Mommy, you're so cute" as she stands over me and jokingly pats my head. It has not been an issue or a source of embarrassment for them. I'm just as cool or annoying as I always am with them, no matter where we are. God's hand has been in this since the first hair fell out and, as a mom, I am beyond grateful.

So, today is day 135. It's also Scott's 50th birthday! I told him that I was having a hard time coming up with a gift big enough to commemorate such a big occasion. He didn't have any ideas, either but what he said to me, with such sincerity was, "The only thing I want is for you to get better".

That was a gift for my heart!

I've been bald for 155 days and before I go wake up Scott and give him a birthday kiss, I'm

here to announce, I HAVE HAIR FOR REAL!! It's baby soft, it's all over my head and it's snow white. I couldn't be happier! Now I'm off to celebrate Scott for the rest of the day and night! No one deserves that more

than him!?

Comments

Happy Birthday to Scott!! You go girl!! Big hugs!!

—*Laurel Fritzhand, February 21, 2017*

?

—*Terri Leighton, February 21, 2017*

Yay!!! I hope you all have a great day!

—*Jennifer Blum, February 21, 2017*

Happy Birthday to Scott. Happy Hair Day to you.

—*Martha Snider, February 22, 2017*

I love your optimistic attitude...it's contagious! And look! Here's some good news...buzz cuts are trending this spring and so is icy blonde hair color! You're a trailblazer! http://thezoereport.com/beauty/hair/spring-2017-best-hair-trends/?utm_content=lead&utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2/22%20ZB:%20Haircut%20and%20Colors%20That%20Will%20Be%20Huge%20For%20Spring:%20TZR%20IG&utm_term=zoebeautiful-engaged-only

P.S. Happy Birthday, Scott!

—*Steph De Falco, February 22, 2017*

Happy Birthday to Scott and wishing you both a wonderful day of celebrating 50 and baby hair!!!

So happy you have had such a marvelous support group throughout this journey.

Much love,

Patti

—*Patti Myers, February 22, 2017*

I am slow on my response. So happy you & Scott have such a strong marriage and a wonderful family life...best gift hands down. I'm amazed by how incredibly smart and perceptive children are. They so "get it" without even trying! That's why they're my favorite humans.

Hooray for hair! I know how ready you are and I'm so happy for you. What a journey. Thank you for sharing your story and being real all along the way. No one can fully know all you've been through, but by you sharing

what you've learned, we have learned, too. Thanks and keep on celebrating Scott, yourself, your kids and life! God bless you, you sweet, strong, funny and loving woman.

—Tracy Wunder Malito, February 28, 2017

March 2, 2017

I am down to 8 more radiation treatments. The next three will continue to be full radiation of my right chest and the last 5 will be focused on some spot. I'm not sure what that spot is. Radiation continues to go well, although it is taking a bit longer these days as they are x-raying me almost every visit. There are millimeter changes in my chest area and they need to X-ray to measure and make sure the radiation is exact. I am still wearing Sharpie marker Xs, covered in clear tape, all the time. When they turn on the laser and make the beams colored, I can see in the reflection of the machine's glass plates how these Sharpie Xs line up and make intersections on me with the laser light.

It's a bit of a letdown to go from feeling pretty good to now going back to being tired, but it's manageable. I take a two hour nap some days and wake up feeling great. That's totally different than any chemo nap where I'd wake up and still feel bad. I have a little radiation sunburn at my collarbone and my breast alternates feeling like it's been slammed in a car door and then having hot needles pushed through it. Not fun but doable AND this will be over soon. Last thing is that I am back to battling dehydration. Seems such a simple fix but I'm a failure at staying hydrated. Oh! And how could I forget my hair! White baby fuzz is going away now and I have a darker five o'clock shadow growing. Maybe in 3 weeks I'll be hatless.

Lastly, I wanted to share what happened this week. It's no secret to anyone who knows us that Scott and I are totally invested in our kids' lacrosse. We love to watch them play/practice and we have endured blistering sun, driving rain, snow, etc. for this privilege. Will has been lucky to play lax, basketball and football with a talented group of boys for the past 6 years and for as great as these boys are, their parents are equally fine. At the end of practice the other night, one of the coaches came and gave us an Under The Weather (check them out!), clear pop up tent that seats two. Three couples had gone in on this generous gift just because they are good people and they wanted me to be able to continue to watch lacrosse, no matter the weather. I have to say, I was really left speechless. I've been on the giving end of things like this, but never the recipient of anything quite like this. I've often wondered what kind of impact "Paying It Forward" makes to the giftee and now I know. It's the right thing to do if only to reinforce that there are really good people in this world. Scott and I really liked these couples before and now I'm humbled, grateful and I know how BIG their hearts are. Like I always say, I know

good people!

Comments

Continued prayers for you. You deserve any kindness sent your way. You have been a great sense of support for me. Thank you!

—*Terri Leighton, March 2, 2017*

So grateful you shared! Glad to hear you are nearing the end of radiation!!! Love you doll!

—*Carol Ney, March 2, 2017*

What an awesome story! God is good!!

—*Jerri Hanus, March 2, 2017*

What a nice thing - for two nice folks. Yep, you know some good people. Love you !!!

—*Martha Snider, March 2, 2017*

Thanks for the informative update on the current state of your treatment and, of course, your hair!!!
Can't wait to see you.

What a wonderful and perfect surprise the tent is! Yes, you do so much for others and glad you're on the receiving end of a Play-It-Forward gesture?

Much love??????

—*Patti Myers, March 2, 2017*

Amy, thanks for sharing, you are almost there. I am sure you and Scott are worthy recipients and will pay it forward. Hugs and prayers....

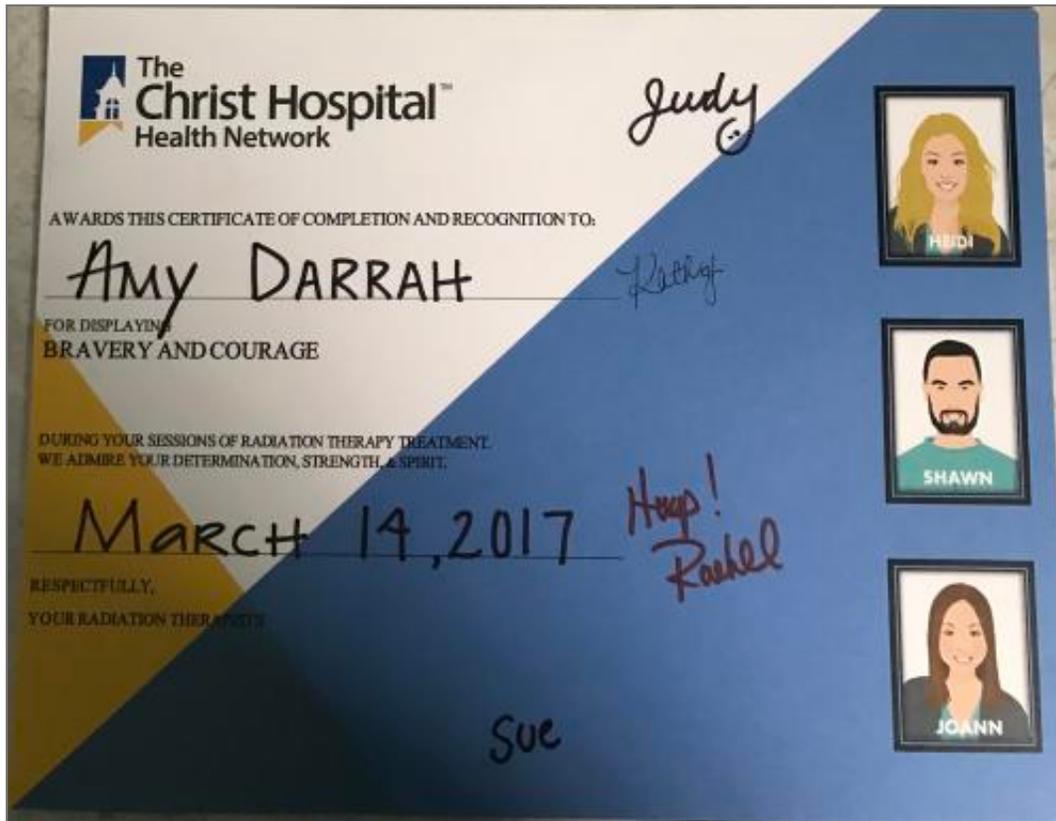
—*Darlene Houchens, March 2, 2017*

Lax people are good people!!

—*Kathleen Rose, March 6, 2017*

DONE!!!!!!!!!

March 14, 2017



249 days since this adventure began and today was the last day of treatment. WOOOO! HOOOO!

6 weeks of radiation is done! I got to ring the bell at the radiologist's office and they gave me a certificate for good behavior.

Now, I am packing for two weeks at the beach. I deserve this and, more importantly, Scott REALLY deserves this, as do the kids. We'll be a family doing fun stuff and I am working hard to, once again, be Scott's partner and not his patient. We are leaving the dogs with a house sitter and focusing on family.

The effects of radiation will carry on for the next two weeks and I am VERY grateful that I am feeling pretty good. I don't have stamina for the entire day and I still rest when I need it, but I think I'm doing well. I have a

significant tan on half my chest and a few sunburn marks but no pain there. The only other side effects that are lingering are the leg pain and neuropathy. I feel like I have come through ALL of this very well.

I am grateful to God and every single person who has lifted up prayers, thought good thoughts and supported me in a myriad of ways. Without a doubt, all of this has carried me through with a lot of positivity which, I know, has affected how I've responded to treatment. THANK YOU!!!

The next step, when I return, is blood tests to see the if the cancer is gone and make sure it isn't anywhere else.

Until then, no worries! My toes will be in the sand. I'm convinced that the ocean cures a lot of things and is good for your soul. ?

Comments

#AwesomeSauce

—*Brian Forrester, March 14, 2017*

Whooo Hooo! Go, beach bunny!

—*Martha Snider, March 14, 2017*

Well Done! And thank you for all the time you took to share your journey with us so we could be praying as needed. Enjoy the ocean! Yes, sand and surf are wonderful for the soul.

—*Gail Derreberry, March 14, 2017*

Yay!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Enjoy the beach!!

—*Kathleen Rose, March 14, 2017*

Congratulations!! So happy for you! Have a WONDERFUL and relaxing time at the beach!!

—*Randi Ziegler, March 14, 2017*

Have a marvelous getaway! You all deserve it!!!
Sun and sand--how perfect?

—*Patti Myers, March 14, 2017*

You deserve a GREAT vacation!!! Enjoy. Glad your treatment is over ! ?

—*Terri Leighton, March 14, 2017*

Very deserving! Enjoy!

—*Darlene Houchens, March 14, 2017*

That is fantastic news! You have MORE than earned some beach time. Enjoy!!

—*Steph De Falco, March 14, 2017*

Amy, enjoy! Beach, warmth, family--can't get better than that! You ALL deserve it. Hugs and love~Tracy

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, March 15, 2017*

Woo hoo!

—Carol Ney, March 15, 2017

Hat free, carefree!

March 21, 2017



Hat free, care free and just thankful for every second! I knew we needed this escape. I just didn't realize how badly.

God has a special fondness for South Carolina!

Comments

Yea for you guys!! Have a ball!!

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, March 21, 2017*

So cute!!!!

—*Martha Snider, March 21, 2017*

Awesome. You are beautiful, inside and out! ?

—*Terri Leighton, March 21, 2017*

So glad you are enjoying a carefree (and hatless) vacation!
Much love?

—*Patti Myers, March 21, 2017*

Hooray!!! Happy for you guys!!!

—*Tracy Wunder Malito, March 21, 2017*

So happy for you guys! Have a wonderful time and love every minute!

—*Randi Ziegler, March 22, 2017*

USE SUNSCREEN!!!

So glad you are having a wonderful time xo-C

—*Carol Ney, March 22, 2017*

Love! You are SO cute!!! so is Scott :)

—*Megan McCollins, March 22, 2017*

Enjoy every second! You both look great....

—*Darlene Houchens, March 22, 2017*

? enjoy every minute!!

—*Lori Sikon, March 23, 2017*

Back from the Beach...sigh!

April 10, 2017

Well, two weeks at the beach is over and I have very little to report because the weather was great! We rented beach chairs, an umbrella and essentially parked our fannies on the beach and did nothing, and doing nothing was a lot of FUN! I did get to spend some time with family I don't see often and that was WONDERFUL! I also went putt-putting with family friends and horseback riding with Meredith but passed on the paddle board and kayaking. The only enlightenment I had was that when I removed myself from my environment, it was very clear to see where the stress lies. I am very grateful for two stress-free weeks. We all needed it more than I ever thought we did.

Hats are a thing of the past for me. I said I was going hatless at the beach, and I did. I guess my new post-chemo hair wasn't as "normal looking" as I thought. Not a big deal and it actually caused two cancer-surviving women to speak to me. One was at a church we attend at the beach and one was at putt-putt. It was so unexpected and so welcomed. They recognized and accepted me as one of their tribe and that felt really good and very validating.

So, now I'm back. Re-entry is never easy for anyone. I know that. I closed my eyes, dialed and made my first 3 month appointment with my oncologist (April 26th) to do the blood work to find out if I am cancer free. I am feeling pretty calm but, no doubt, it is on my mind. I hope it's gone and I hope it hasn't spread. I really can't let myself think beyond that. My friends who are years out, surviving and still getting their three month check ups say it gets easier. I am trusting and believing them. This journey is ALL about trusting and believing.

A lot of good stuff is happening which makes me happy and grateful

-I am feeling a lot better. That is HUGE! I still get tired every day but I have more stamina and energy. When I go places, I am able to compare how I'm doing now to how I did a month ago and there is definitely progress.

-Leg pain is almost gone and I do not have hot flashes any more. Yay, Effexor!!

-I have an appointment, next week, to get my hair trimmed!! That's right! I have enough hair for a trim and the start of a real hair do. My hair is now a weird ashy blonde. No gray and too short to know if it's curly. I've gotten so used to no hair/short hair, that I think I'm going to keep it really short for awhile.

-Scott built a chicken coop and we now have 6 chicks to distract me. They are adorable!

-It's planting and gardening season. I am very excited that I will be home this summer and will be able to really spend time in my garden (And with the children...of course?)

-After a battle, 600 phone calls and 40k forms, my long term disability was approved!!

Stuff I'm still dealing with

-hand and leg neuropathy. ??

-an appointment with an endocrinologist next week because my blood sugar skyrocketed while I was taking steroids

-the tests on the 26th

What I pray for, daily...along with other stuff

I thank God for loving me and for being the God of love. I thank Him for sending Jesus to die on the cross for my sins and through belief and salvation, the eternal life I will receive. I ask Him to forgive my sins. I thank Him for watching over my parents, children, Scott and me with health and safety. I ask that my actions and words reflect Him and that He set examples before me to keep me on track. I ask blessings, individually, on the people who support and pray for me. I ask for blessings on my doctors and their staffs. I pray, individually, for those I know who are dealing with cancer, for their health, for a cure and that they feel God's presence in their lives. I pray for a cure for me. I pray for President Trump and his family...that they seek God and pray for guidance in personal decisions and decisions that affect us all. I pray this for all the world's leaders. I pray that all people seek love, not hate and peace, not war. Then I pray for other things. God is good!

Comments

Glad you had a relaxing, fun vacation! You sound so upbeat--yay!!
Looking forward to seeing your new do?
Loads of love?????

—*Patti Myers, April 10, 2017*

So glad you got to be at the beach -- a happy place!!!!

—*Martha Snider, April 10, 2017*

Chicks for Easter...how wonderful! Can we expect Storybook Eggs to go with Storybook Honey?? ;-) So glad you had a fun and restful vacation!!

—*Steph De Falco, April 10, 2017*

What a beautiful testimony, dear Amy! That was so wonderful those ladies came up and talked to you about being part of "the tribe". Can't wait to see your chicks - and I wish to hear more about "where the stress lies". I think I'm pretty good with dealing with "stress" - but obviously I'm just fooling myself (as I've been awake since 4!) I wish you, Scott, Meredith and Will a most blessed Easter. I will be at 8:20 service. I hope to see your effervescent smile and alarmingly blue eyes - but if the Bunny delays you, I totally get it! I, like you, am grateful for many things. Not the least of which is meeting you all those years ago cooking Thanksgiving dinner. Miss you darling! xo - C (and I want to see your "ashy blonde" hair!)

—*Carol Ney, April 10, 2017*

Amen and AMEN!!! Happy Easter and blessings to you always!!
TTF?

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, April 11, 2017*

So glad that you were able to spend two glorious weeks with your family enjoying life at the beach. Praying for happy results on the 26th . Thinking of you ??

—*Lori Sikon, April 12, 2017*

BIG Test Coming Up On Wednesday!!

April 24, 2017

I've taken a hiatus from the medical side of things since vacation, reveling in this freedom, a glorious Spring and each day's steps toward regaining strength and endurance. Slow and steady, grateful and appreciative of each small thing. Wednesday is the day I go to see my oncologist for testing to see if this cancer is gone. I know God already has a plan and knows these test results. Over these past months, I've put my trust in Him in ways I've not done before and His grace has been abundant, shielding me and my family from so many things that could have gone wrong but didn't. His presence has kept me far more calm through this process than I ever thought I was capable of being. Now we are at the point where we see if all the hard work has paid off. I feel pretty serene but my brain keeps asking why I'm not overcome with worry. After all, there's a lot on the line. I think I've just learned what truly and wholly trusting God is for me. I'm not saying I don't occasionally hear the monsters who padlocked in the cellar start climbing the stairs. They're there but my God is stronger.

I found this on Pinterest today and like it.

Something very beautiful happens to people when their world has fallen apart. A humility, A nobility, A higher intelligence emerges at just the point when our knees hit the floor. Marianne Williamson

Is this not when we can see, most clearly and without obstruction, how God is moving in our lives? When we can truly, physically, feel His presence? When we are aware that He is not looking down on us from the far reaches of Heaven, but standing next to us with His hand on our shoulders? It is for me and going forward, I aim to live with this intimate connectedness as I really can't fathom proceeding any other way.

Among other things I am praying for right now, I am specifically praying for continued renewing health and that I am the patient my doctors need me to be. I pray for a cure, that this cancer has not spread, that it's gone and that it stays gone. Mostly, I pray that if the tests do not return as I would like, that God is merciful and that His grace continues to be sufficient for me, as I know it will be, and that it also extends to my friends, family, doctors and all who walk this path with me.

If you pray and feel so inclined, please remember me. I don't know how long the results take. I was told that it isn't a quick process but you'll hear it here, first, when I find out. My God is an awesome and mighty God!

Comments

Continued prayers for complete healing. ?

—*Terri Leighton, April 24, 2017*

Praying with you! Love this post.

—*Claudia Pittenger, April 24, 2017*

Philippians 4:8

Thinking and praying for you..... feel His strength and be patient...TTF

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, April 24, 2017*

Continued prayers !!!! Love you.

—*Martha Snider, April 24, 2017*

Amy, you continue to be an inspiration! We continue to think of you and hope that you "pass" the tests with

flying colors?????
Sending lots of love always

—*Patti Myers, April 25, 2017*

continued xoxo!!

—*Kathleen Rose, April 25, 2017*

I Am Scared but I Can Do This!

April 26, 2017

I have to leave in a few minutes for this blood testing and to see my oncologist. I feel scared. I feel scared to drive down the road where the building is. I'm scared to see the room where I got chemo. I'm scared to let them touch my port and put a needle in to flush it. I don't want anyone to touch me. I'm scared that I will be afraid and cry. I don't do that. I can do this! I'm braver than I think. I can do this! I CAN do this!!

Comments

Yes you can and God will help you. XOXO

—*Jennifer Blum, April 26, 2017*

Yes you can!!!! Being scared is natural, but you can do this! And please remember you have all the support you need by your side.

Much love ???

—*Patti Myers, April 26, 2017*

Praying for you Amy. To feel the Lord calm you and reassure you He's got this. Love you bunches!

—*Kelly Rasulis, April 26, 2017*

I can drive you and go with you! Just ask.

—*sueporter513@gmail.com Praisegod202, April 26, 2017*

Yes, you are brave but it's ok to cry too!!!!

—*Martha Snider, April 26, 2017*

You got this! HE's got this!!!

—*Brian Forrester, April 26, 2017*

You can do this. Thinking of you??

—*Lori Sikon, April 26, 2017*

I Did It---Just An Update

April 26, 2017

I did it and survived. The anticipation was worse than the reality but isn't that the way it always is?

The visit with the oncologist was quick and uneventful. Just orders to come see him every three months for a check up and blood work for the next five years. Five years!!

I had to go into the chemo room to wait for a blood draw. Each oncologist in this group has their chemo patients come on different days. Thursday used to be my day. Walking in was not scary, but sad. Tired, sick, fatigued

people. A vision and smell that I have forced myself to forget but one that hit me in my gut as a shocking reminder of bad things left behind.

I had an absolute moment of panic and grabbed the nurse's hand when she got near me with the needle to flush my port. I don't know what that's about but like Scott said tonight, I don't need to justify how I feel. It is what it is. In the end, the port got flushed and I survived.

So this is the new routine and I now know I can manage it. My doctor said, today, that going forward, these 3 month intervals will either be the easiest or hardest 5 years of my life. I choose the easy road of faith, love and living every day to the fullest. God is good!

Comments

Awesome news Amy! So glad to hear. Relax and enjoy the good life!

—*Jerri Hanus, April 26, 2017*

Hang tough girl. You are a bad ass!!

—*Terri Leighton, April 26, 2017*

Yes He is!!!! Good news. Love you!

—*Martha Snider, April 26, 2017*

The best news! Keep the faith just like always! Lots of love & hugs~

—*Tracy Malito, April 26, 2017*

So., so happy--and relieved too!!!!

You did it!

Time to celebrate all you've been through and how well you have managed this journey.?????

—*Patti Myers, April 26, 2017*

Oh, Amy! I love you! I love your faith! Yes, I understand the easy and hardness of it all! Oh my! Continued prayers as always! Claudia

—*Claudia Pittenger, April 27, 2017*

Wonderful Amy!!!

—*Carol Ney, May 3, 2017*

Test Results

April 28, 2017

i found out this morning that the test results were all normal and that I am cancer free! It is a day to celebrate!!

My God is an awesome God! My doctors are dedicated and top in their specialties and my friends and family are exceptional in their constant love and support of me! I'm the most grateful girl in the world!!

Comments

PRAISE THE LORD!!!! Whoo hooo!!!! YIPPEEE! Thank you, God.

—*Martha Snider, April 28, 2017*

I can't LOVE this enough!! That God! What a guy!

—*Jennifer Blum, April 28, 2017*

Such awesome news!!

—*Brian Forrester, April 28, 2017*

Congratulations!! That is such GREAT news!!

—*Randi Ziegler, April 28, 2017*

Yay!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Praising God for such wonderful news!!!!!!!!!!!! xoxo!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

—*Kathleen Rose, April 28, 2017*

Yippee. So happy for you.

—*Terri Leighton, April 28, 2017*

Saying that is fantastic news is a bit of an understatement! I am so happy for you.

—*Jill Matson, April 28, 2017*

That's the best news ever, Amy!!

—*Steph De Falco, April 28, 2017*

You are my hero! Congratulations on your cancer free diagnosis! This is the best news ever???

—*Melanie Moreno, April 28, 2017*

You are an inspiration in so many ways!

—*Kathie Houchens, April 28, 2017*

That is great news Amy! Your story is inspiring. Praying for continued health and comfort.

—*Sally Abbott Race, April 29, 2017*

Some Thoughts on my Mother

May 3, 2017

My father's first wife and my mother for the first six and a half years of my life, until her death, was, in my memory, a petite, beautifully dressed lady who loved life and people. Her blonde hair always glistened in the sun and in the winter, when she'd return home from an evening out with my father, I'd run to greet her, burying my face in her fur coats as the cold surface melted into such warm softness. I remember loving that feeling...and the crispness of her cotton dresses...and the silkiness of her bed jackets.

She loved music, parties, children and most especially, me. She had been an elementary music teacher in Indian Hill and my father sometimes recalls that in the days before me, any time they left the house and she saw students, they ran to greet her. She was the Pied Piper of children. My childhood was a happy one, filled with

creativity, friends, singing around the piano while she played and a lot of time with just her. We were both only children, so deeply loved, and as her mother nurtured her, so was her focus on me. I remember picking flowers out of the yard to bring to her as I would come in from school and we would play in her costume jewelry boxes on her bed, almost every afternoon. It was a time of unconditional love. She was my best friend and I loved her so.

And then one morning, she disappeared and was gone forever. It would take me decades to recover. My father's good intentions to shield me from the inevitable would prove to be the wrong move, leaving me isolated, alone, scared and searching the heavens for some sign that my mother was still there...and she was.

I would later come to learn that my mother had been born with a heart condition and in my grandparents' attempt to preserve her life, they had traveled to the Mayo Clinic for evaluation. What they were told was that she would not live past the age of 38 and that is exactly what happened. I had always wondered how, upon learning such news at age 18, she was such a bubbly, happy soul who loved life so much. It would seem perfectly rational, to me, to be depressed, throw in the towel...just wait for death, but not her! She couldn't have been more opposite, in my view.

Previous to last July, I would have thought anyone might have had the same reaction to getting a cancer diagnosis such as mine. It is so scary, it looks so hopeless, there are only dark clouds ahead. I have the kind of personality that would readily adapt those reactions. To my surprise, quite the opposite happened to me and along the way, people kept commenting on my positive attitude. It was no act and there was no effort involved in my attitude. It simply was and continues to be what it is. In the face of crisis, I didn't want to be unhappy and miserable (even though I think I had every right to be) and so I wasn't. It's as simple and as unbelievable as that. I guess maybe I did make a choice. I chose to love life. I chose to trust. I chose to hope and I chose to let people care for me and that made all the difference.

I've been thinking a lot about my personal gratitude and have always considered myself to be a grateful person. I'm still trying to get my head around this new type of gratitude, who I am now and what that means. I don't think the changes are huge but they feel significant. Scott is right when he says that I don't need a reason or reasoning for how I feel. I, however, am still looking for the 'whys' and more answers. And, all of this topic is for another time, anyway.

I continue to thank God for his mercy and the great test results. I feel like I can't be thankful enough! I ask for blessings on my friends and family who continue to be there with support and love. I pray for those who I know who are in crisis and have health-related matters. I pray for cures, resolution and relief. I pray for my parents who are struggling right now. My father has just spent 8 days in the hospital, had his toe amputated and is now recovering at Twin Lakes. Changes and decisions need to be made. I pray that my language and actions are ones that they accept and that they will let me help them to provide relief and lessen the burden of their daily lives. So many other things to pray for but these are at the top of my list today. God is good!

Comments

Beautiful testimony, Amy.

—*Carol Ney, May 3, 2017*

Praying for you and your parents.

—*Kelly Rasulis, May 3, 2017*

What a lovely, loving entry!?????

No doubt you will be a great and inspiring help to your dad and Jane as they face these new challenges. Sending much love and big hugs

—*Patti Myers, May 3, 2017*

Continued prayers for you and your parents. What a great story about your mom ?

—*Terri Leighton, May 3, 2017*

Amy, I didn't know your mother passed away when you were such a young child. Thank you for sharing her story with all of us. That is just like you, to share your truth. For being real and open with everyone who cares so much for you and your family...it makes a difference in the life of "fake book".

I am so sorry about your dad and his current health issues. It is difficult to see a parent go through hardship. I'm guessing he tries to be strong for his family, just as your mom was.

How right you are that being positive is a choice we all must make in life, no matter our circumstances. I applaud you for continuing to be an inspiration to all who know you, especially your own daughter and son.

They are so lucky to have such wise and loving parents in you & Scott.

Something tells me the apple doesn't fall far from the tree...

Much love, prayers of thankfulness and hugs~ Tracy

—*Tracy Malito, May 3, 2017*

Amy, what a beautiful heartfelt post! You express your feelings so well. I didn't know about your Dad. I will be praying for all. Jane is a strong beautiful lady also. They are fortunate to have you as well.

—*Darlene Houchens, May 3, 2017*

Dear Amy, I am certain Ginny is very proud of you. What great love and attitude she modeled for you! I will be in prayer for your mom and dad. And you as you help guide and support.

—*Gail Derreberry, May 7, 2017*

Beautiful amy. You clearly have inherited her spirit and heart, even though she was only with you for a short time.

I'm so happy and GRATEFUL that you are well! Xoxo

—*Sam Ditka, May 26, 2017*

Wow...I didn't see this one coming, Amy...and now it occurs to me that you've had a lot of mothers. Although I've probably wondered about the mother of your first memories, it never dawned on me that you actually had years and experiences with her. How short-sighted of me. I really wish I'd asked about her. Thank you for writing this!

—Liz Tilton, May 30, 2017

I Guess This Is Good-Bye...in the best possible way

July 10, 2017



Yesterday was the one year anniversary of this whole adventure and today I'm closing this page down with high hopes of never needing to use it again.

Although this began as a way for me to chronicle a journey whose outcome has yet to be determined, the truth is

that it became a significant support system, as I knew people were reading along and I looked forward to all the feedback I received.

I've never looked back at what I've written here. I've already forgotten a lot that was so painful and the only thing I see, occasionally, are the dozens of bald photos and selfies I took so I could see what I was looking like along the way. It's a little horrifying and pretty humorous the ways in which I was "owning" baldness and then wasn't owning it at all! To everyone who spent time with me during this time, never once did any one of you make me feel anything but normal and that was a huge gift!!

People talk a lot about bravery and courage in situations like mine and I suppose it takes a certain amount of both. For me, however, faith and hope carried me through. Faith in God and His promises. Faith in my medical team. Resolute, unwavering faith. And, I had Hope. Hope. The kind of hope that walks hand in hand with faith, knowing that days, moments, situations and life will be better, even we find ourselves in the darkest places. God is faithful and does not abandon us, ever!

I still have quite a few physical issues that have not fixed themselves and maybe they never will. That's ok. I've been given too much to whine.

More significantly, so much good has happened in the midst of chaos and it is with all of this that I go forward. Let me just name a bunch

My faith is not stronger but clearer and I am vocal about it.

I thought gratefulness was one of my strengths before. Now it is amplified all the time.

I have made friends, reconnected and connected with a lot of fabulous people. They given me more than I ever thought I deserved, lifted me up, made me laugh and have loved me, each in their way. They help me heal.

I know what **truly** matters to me and it isn't much. My life is simplified, purposeful and focused.

I live one day at a time, only planning ahead when necessary.

I let things go. So much in life is beyond my control so I gave up trying to drive the bus. The freedom from this, for me, is almost euphoric.

I'm not holding back. I'm doing what makes me happy. Yesterday, it was several trips down the water slide at the pool.

My husband is everything I could ask for, and more, in every single way. I just don't have to ask ?

I have awesome new hair.

And I have a new wardrobe thanks to losing a bunch of weight. About an English Springer Spaniel and a half's worth. That's all I'm going to say about that.

And a new interest in food to replace my previous culinary interests. I'm finding a lot of fun challenges in shopping, cooking, growing and educating myself thoroughly in organic food within the Paleo/Flexitarian range.

My garden has replaced the floor of my shower for prayer and meditation. It's much better out there, any time of the day or night.

And, when I return to work, I hope I can find a meaningful job supporting people dealing with difficult situations. I pray that my words and actions are correct, sensitive and caring. I'm still learning.

And with that, I think I'm done here. I have 3 major doctor's appointments this month. 7/12 with my oncologist to see if I'm still cancer free 7/19-a mammogram and visit with my surgeon to see if I'm cancer free and 7/26 with my radiologist. Not sure what he wants but he's cute and very nice. Please pray for me, if that's something you do.

I leave this with a grateful heart and gratitude for anyone who has read this journal.

Oh, yeah, and don't forget! Mammograms save lives!

And one last thing...you don't have to know what to say or have the perfect words. Just say something. Your friend knows what's in your heart ?

Comments

This. Is. Everything.

Amy, your spirit shines every day and every post. I've always loved you, but admire you more and more. Your strength and GRACE are beautiful testaments to your faith and gratitude. Xoxoxoxo

—*Sam Ditka, July 10, 2017*

You are amazing! XXOO

—*Amy Gill, July 10, 2017*

You are amazing and I'm so grateful for you. What a journey this last year has been for you. Thank you for sharing your pains and frustration, along with your hopes and victories. Much love for you Aim ??

—*Jennifer Bryan, July 10, 2017*

Dear Amy,

I am so proud of you truly digging deep and fully sharing your details of your cancer journey with all of us. People may not think their loved ones want to know the little ins and outs we don't know about, but this girl always appreciated your honesty. It helps me understand others who've gone or are going through cancer treatment.

Thank you for sharing you love for Scott and your children! Thank you for sharing your faith!

Lastly, thank you for sharing yourself...your thoughts, fears, emotions, whether it was from being in a waiting room or dining/shopping/out with your headscarf on. The pictures you were painting help me feel like I knew what was going on in your life. I think you have a gift for writing, too!

Am forever grateful to have you in my life, and if I didn't let you know enough before-I've always felt close to you. You're a kindred spirit.

Love you,

Tracy

—*Tracy Malito, July 10, 2017*

Simply amazing! You showed your heart thru these writings and I beg you to never delete or forget them. Take time to look back and reflect on what you went thru and where God brought you. One journey is over but I know you well enough to say that you have many journeys ahead! Hold your children tight and your husband tighter - you made It!

God Bless and Pi Phi Love!!

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, July 10, 2017*

Wow, a year. I still say that God's timing was perfect - our dinner at Bob Evans the day before you received your diagnosis. You are amazing Amy! I am glad I could walk with you in your journey. Love you, Claudia

—*Claudia Pittenger, July 10, 2017*

Thankful for your strength and faith that you have shared. We all need to give up trying to drive the bus..... love you..

—*Martha Snider, July 11, 2017*

Love you brave girl!!! I admire your attitude.... we all need a little!

—*Melanie Moreno, July 11, 2017*

Thoughts and Well Wishes

Amy, I have loved you since kindergarten. We always appreciated each other's crazy and that's a blessing I cherish. You have certainly gotten me through some rough times, and you will make it through this. ??U

— Jennifer Bryan, September 15, 2016



— missy potter, September 17, 2016

Amy,

Thanks for including me in your healing group. I know you're going to kick this evil invader out of your body while keeping your sense of humor intact. You're loved and supported by a great group of women, we're here for you and we've got your back!! Let me know how I can help, I can easily drive in for the weekend. Sending love and light and lots of hugs!!

— *Heather Lowles, September 17, 2016*

I lo ve you, Amy. I knew that God would take care of all things. Aunt SA

— *Sylviaanne Derrick, April 28, 2017*

Tributes

Tuten we are Rooten for u sister!!! Lots of prayers, courage and ofcourse, PI Phi love to YOU! You have this!! Be strong and stay focused! See you at Pawpurrs!

—*Sallie Starr Paracca, September 14, 2016*

—*Sylviaanne Derrick, September 15, 2016*

Well, I know it's not much and I wish it could be more, but I wanted to make a donation to an organization that is important to you.

—*Gabriella Balassa, December 14, 2016*