

NANCY'S LEGACY

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April 30, 2023

Over the last 8 years many clients have asked about “my story”. Questions like, “What put me on the road providing mobile thermography service despite having a thriving marketing business for over 25 years?” and “Why do I seem so passionate about women’s health and the value of preventative screening?” These have been questions I have asked myself while soul searching my future repeatedly. But as I have progressed toward retirement age, I understand that my drive to continue to bring this service to others is now a “calling” and no longer a job. My story has been deep and difficult to grasp with too many victories and defeats to recount. So many have been left wondering. But now, after exactly 11 years, I am finally ready to tell “my story” and here is where it begins.....

Nancy rarely missed a day of bowling with her weekly league in over 40 years. So dedicated she was to her group, called the “Tuesday Morners”, that the only time she missed playing with her team was when her children were home sick from school. But after making a call to find a substitute that January morning in 2011, her next call was to her doctor. Over the previous week she had felt pain in her lower back that started as just muscular discomfort. Experiencing mounting concern though, the pain now felt different. Two weeks later, results from a CT scan showed that Nancy had fractured her lower spine. But how? There had been no injury or accident, but the telltale sign of the underlying issue had been seen in the upper cervical area that was only incidentally imaged during the CT scan -- Nancy’s breast cancer was back, only now it had metastasized to the bones in her spine.

Being the optimistic person she was, Nancy began the process of cancer treatment, yet again.

Five years earlier, and despite a current mammogram with no finding at the time, Nancy felt a lump at her bra line just under her right breast. A “nuisance bump” which caused irritation was enough that her doctor sent her for an ultrasound. A 2cm mass was seen in that imaging and a biopsy was ordered. Results indicated Stage-2 cancer and she would need treatment to eradicate it. The treatment was radical – 3 months of Chemotherapy infusions, then surgery to remove the lump, followed by 6 months of weekly radiation treatments. The ensuing process left her hairless, exhausted and without enough lymph nodes in her right armpit to process lymph fluid properly, leaving her in a compression sleeve that she needed to wear every day. The sleeve and the necessity of a wig or hat were the only outward indications that she had suffered the trauma of cancer treatment after a final scan 9 months later deemed her “cancer free”.

Now the cancer was back and as it often does, the breast cancer had metastasized to her bones. The new treatment consisted of hormonal injections or infusions, frequent blood work and bone density x-rays to determine if the course of treatment was effective in stopping the progression of the cancer. Surgery was never an option for these cancer lesions. Nancy's decision to forgo another radical treatment that included Chemotherapy was firm. The prior experience had left her in fear of the long-term consequences of those drugs and their side effects. Instead, she opted for hormonal treatment along with radiation as her course of action. Due to the location of the cervical lesions, radiation treatment consisted of molding a stiff wire mesh mask over her face and head that immobilized any movement at all during the MRI-guided radiation treatment. The oncologist started her on a course of hormonal drug treatments that required grueling retests every 3 months to monitor progress. Despite the second course of drugs showing no progression of disease, the decision was made every quarter to switch up the treatment until after 12 months there was just no evidence of regression of the disease.

On a mild winter day in late 2011, Nancy walked away from her 11-minute appointment with her oncologist with a prescription in hand for pain medication and the directive to seek palliative care. Never did he discuss her lifestyle situation with her – no nutritional advice was ever given, no conversation ever occurred about the stress she was encountering at home and no hope in any modality other than the drugs he was offering. He refused to see her again unless she was willing to consider Chemotherapy treatment. But she could “call the office if she needed a refill on the prescription” - truly a sad and appalling way to be treated by a professional healthcare provider.

Now faced with her prognosis and her own mortality, Nancy had big decisions to make. What the doctor never knew or inquired about was the stress she had been under during her year of treatment. Her husband began the sharp decline of a Lewy Body dementia diagnosis. Added to that, there had never been any direction given to her regarding the elimination in her diet of the low fat – high carb/sugar foods that were providing her cancer all the support needed to grow without nourishing good cells which could have supported her treatment progression. Her Vitamin D level was never checked. Had her genetics been tested they would most likely have suggested she had a predisposition to difficulty in absorption of that important hormone - as most women do.

After encountering traumatic fall episodes by her husband in their home and the increasing stress of his disease progression, Nancy had to make the difficult decision to place her husband of 48 years in assisted living. Thus began the routine of daily visits with him until she could no longer keep them up. Within 2 months the spine lesions had proliferated to her brain and were now causing headaches, making it difficult for her to drive. Despite the urging of her children to seek alternative courses of treatment, the

effort proved too little too late in the course of the disease to effect change. Nancy's health continued to decline until she was no longer able to live on her own.

After 36 years of business ownership in tandem with her husband, active travel to 5 of the 7 continents, 2 grown children and 3 grandsons, Nancy had truly been looking forward to her later years of lunches with friends, fun dinners with family, the first season of Downton Abbey, and time spent in quiet contemplation and prayer with her Heavenly Father. But the disease progression had taken over with a vengeance and simultaneously in the same week she and her husband were both placed on hospice care. She was also assigned around the clock nursing care in her own home.

Determined to see her friends and family one more time, Nancy asked her children to put together an open house for her so she could see them all. Well-meaning friends and family poured into her home for 2 hours that Saturday in February of 2012 while Nancy - dressed in her best outfit and sitting upright in a chair with her nurse at her side - hosted every one of them with a smile and a laugh over the good times they had together. At the end of the event, Nancy was tired and went to bed - never to get up again. Behind closed eyes Nancy's journey toward her Heavenly Father took place daily as the family took turns sitting vigil over her.

On April 10, 2012, her husband of 49 years passed away peacefully in his sleep. When her children approached her to inform her of his passing, and despite no earlier indication to her that he had, she already knew in her heart that he was gone. Too weak to process her grief for more than a few minutes at a time, Nancy finally succumbed to her disease and slipped away during the night 20 days later.

Instrumental in starting a Prayer Shawl Ministry at her church, a friend to too many to name in 5 continents of the world, the ability to laugh herself into hysterical tears, the desire to be with her grandsons - especially her youngest at 14 who placated her by watching Stuart Little over and over again - having read the Bible 8 times, and loved the music of "Cowboys" like Gene Autry and George Strait, Nancy's life was over and her time on earth could have just ended with these memories going to the grave with her. But in tribute to her and the journey of her life, this story will now stand as a legacy to her memory.

You see, Nancy Ruth Hayes was born on November 7, 1935, 30 years later she became my mother and my best friend. A confidant who always saw the good in everyone with grace, patience, and unconditional love. She was a friend to my friends and a positive force in my life who taught me to love God, be fiercely committed to my family and to have a work ethic like no other. So, at the age of 50 (3 years after her death from metastatic breast cancer), I chose to make my life a testimony to her life by taking my experience throughout her cancer journey (along with my grandmother's breast cancer diagnosis and death in 2001) to women in my area by providing a service that brings

one of the most valuable screening tools available for early detection of breast cancer that I have found.

I have had the privilege of providing this screening service in a mobile capacity, making it more accessible to more areas, for more women to have a non-invasively breast screening. Women can be proactive about their health, and without fear. This allows women the ability to see any change or imbalance long before a mass can develop. In the process, I endeavor to educate and empower women to make decisions that are right for them as they strive for better health and a better way to safely monitor it. It has been my pleasure for the last 8 years - and counting - to put myself on the road in all kinds of weather, circumstances, and conditions to provide this service to remote locations like western Maryland and the lower Eastern Shore. I have also provided this service as often as possible in areas like central Maryland and southern Pennsylvania. My goal is to make this screening as accessible as possible to all who need it.

And my prayer? Well, that's simple... it's that *Nancy's Story* can make a difference in your life too and that the time you spend with me during your screening service learning about ways to ensure proactive health, will be a useful empowerment to you and create a positive tribute to Nancy's legacy for years to come.

Thank you for reading Nancy's Story. If this story has had an impact on you and you need hope, support or prayer for your life circumstances or you would just like to provide a comment to me, please reach out anytime. Like Nancy, I, too, can be a listening ear to hopefully bring some positivity and sunshine into your life. Afterall, God's directive to each of us is to "...love one another, as I have loved you..." (John 13:34).