

Diagnosis: CANCER!

by Ruth Long



The frosty autumn leaves sparkled under the brilliant early October sun. My husband and I sat at the breakfast table over a second cup of coffee as he asked, “Are you sure you don’t want me to go to the doctor with you for your checkup this morning?”

I thought of the fields of beans that had already lost their leaves and the corn hanging heavy on the stalks awaiting the arrival of the combines to complete the harvest before the winter snows came. “No,” I replied. “The doctor will just say she wants to schedule some more tests in a few weeks because of some suspicious symptoms. You have so much work to get the crops harvested. I might need you at a later appointment.”

Soon I was lying on the hard table as the doctor examined me while we visited. Suddenly her hand froze as she felt the large lump in my right breast. Her whole demeanor became tense. “I’m very concerned about this,” she confided quietly.

“Concerned?” The brash question escaped my throat, sounding like a tinny squeak.

“I think it’s cancer!” When spoken by a doctor the word made an indelible mark on my heart. I detected a serious tone of deep compassion in her voice as the doctor softly uttered that loathed word. It bounced loudly around the dark recesses of my mind as I tried to grasp the gravity of the situation while attempting to control my feelings of shock, fear, panic and denial.

“No! No! No!” I screamed silently, as no sound came from my lips. I had been living in the Sweet State of Denial for many months. Sure there was a lump in my breast, but it could not be cancer – not in my body. Recently another lump had appeared under my arm, but I had gained some weight. That was just a glob of fat... wasn’t it?

I found myself staring at the ceiling where there was a lighted tile of blue sky above flowering branches. I felt as though I were lying in a pasture on a clear summer day. I slipped back into the Sweet State of Denial as I lazily wondered how much the pilot would see if a plane flew over!

Then I became aware that the doctor was talking to me. She was saying something about a mammogram and other tests she wanted done. Now I was wishing my husband were there, holding my hand and helping with decisions. I agreed to allow the tests to be scheduled. Now I would have to make time in my busy schedule as a self-employed CPA to come back to the hospital another time, I thought. Instead the nurse hooked me up for an EKG on the spot while the doctor left the room. She soon returned ordering, "You are to go to radiology as soon as we are done here. They are waiting for you!"

After the mammogram, the radiologist wanted to do an ultrasound on the left breast so as to not miss anything while they concentrated on the right side. I convinced the technician to let me see an image of the lump under my arm, although it was against the rules for her to do so. To me it looked like a mouse with tiny twigs growing in every direction. (Is that why a CAT scan was ordered a few days later?)

I was still very certain they were wrong – surely this was just a cyst gone wild. I began to ask everyone what the chances were a mistake was made. The doctor replied that the chance was low, very low. The radiologist responded that the odds were slim to none that it was not cancer. Before doing the biopsy, the surgeon indicated the probability of cancer was about 90%. I was ecstatic!

Because the cancer had also spread not only to my lymph nodes, but also to several bones, the whole diagnosis is that I have stage IV metastatic breast cancer.

I am learning to move out of the Sweet State of Denial into the Sweet State of Trust – Trust in God's Word. I no longer need denial for protection. Now I lean on the assurance that the prayers of the righteous avail much and on the promise that God will never leave me. I know that God has a plan for my life... a plan for good and not evil. I rejoice as each day I experience the reality of God's providence in my life.