

Thankful Thanksgiving



HERALD PHOTO BY CAROL MOORMAN

Sharon and Brian Neuman and their family are thankful for all the support they have received while Sharon copes with cancer. Pictured above (from left) is Anna holding Jasper, Sharon holding Elizabeth and Brian with his arm around Nathan.

Many forms of support lift Neumans during cancer diagnosis

by Carol Moorman
carol@saukherald.com

Rural Melrose—A basket overflowing with inspirational cards sits on a kitchen counter. Nearby, more cards are taped to a door in Sharon and Brian Neuman's rural Melrose home.

A calendar of meals to be made and delivered by the Melrose Area Women of Today hangs on the front of their refrigerator, a frig that eight-year-old daughter Anna and six-year-old son Nathan rush to after arriving home from school the afternoon of Wednesday, Nov. 15, while 20-month-old Elizabeth is content in her mother's arms.

Ceramic angels abound in their living room; some with prayers attached and candles lit.

Candles are also lit half a world away in Italy for this family.

All the support this family of five has received since Sharon's cancer diagnosis in September has been uplifting to them—and humbling.

"We have been blown away with all the support," said Sharon looking at Brian, her husband of nine years.

"Friends I haven't talked to in seven years have called," said Brian, with Sharon adding, "People who have come back into our lives."

How is all began

Sharon explained she had been doctoring since June with a vocal problem that left her voiceless at times. This lady, who had lost 50 pounds through Weight Watchers since January, was diagnosed with vocal fold paralysis on the right vocal chord.

She firmly believes that God intervened, "zapping her" with a series of five dizzy spells—later thought to be seizures—and numbness in her body that eventually led to a different diagnosis, after ruling out a stroke.

The first week in September she had a CAT scan followed by an MRI. She and Brian knew it wasn't good news when the nurse of their family physician, Dr. Kurt Schwieters, called that afternoon and asked them to meet with him before 6 p.m. They were given the heart wrenching news that the MRI showed Sharon had two tumors in her brain, one the size of a golf ball on her right side, the other marble size on her left side. Usually with brain tumors the primary source of cancer is located elsewhere. The CAT scan indicated she had enlarged lymph nodes in her chest and lung areas, but no large mass was found in the lung area or elsewhere, which they were thankful for.

"In shock, numb, and you just wanna run," is how Sharon and Brian describe their first feelings and thoughts.

"At first you deny it. There's still a small part of me that wants to deny it," Sharon admits.

Telling their children and other family members, like her parents, Mel and Ann Roehrl, was not easy.

"I remember just falling into dad's arms," said Sharon.

She found out how much her ordeal affected the community when she told her staff at the Central Minnesota Federal Credit Union in Melrose where she has worked for six years.

"Some came out of the room, after I told them, crying. It's not an easy thing to say or to hear," she said.

With the size and location of the tumors Brian said her doctors were "mystified" that she was still as active as she was.

"My doctor said 'You don't look sick,'" said Sharon.

Thinking back, she wonders how she continued to do things, like driving their children to daycare, knowing now that a seizure could have happened at any time.

Determined to beat this, they went ahead with the surgery to remove the large tumor on Sept. 19 at the St. Cloud Hospital. The smaller tumor could not be removed because of the delicate location in the brain. Surgery was followed by 15 rounds of full brain radiation and what will be four rounds of chemotherapy, completed in January. Her sister Deb, mom Ann and other "folks" took her to treatments.

One day at a time

Today, Sharon is thankful each day she wakes up and is able to spend time with the people she loves.

Staying hydrated and getting enough rest is a must. Loss of hair and slight nausea have been treatment side affects.

She tries to work at the credit union about 10 hours a week.

On this afternoon, Brian took a vacation day from his job at the *St. Cloud Times* so he could do odd jobs like making sure their outside Christmas decorations work.

"At first we weren't going to put up these decorations, but doing this keeps my mind occupied," he admits.

Daughter Anna is a big help, especially with her younger sister.

"Nathan just asks 'when are you going to get your voice back,'" said Sharon.

She said their son teases her about the scarves she wears to cover up her hairless head.

"He giggled at my wig," said Sharon, of the hairpiece she got on Nov. 14.

Brian said Nathan "brings laughter with his brutal honesty."

"That's his function in our family," said Brian.

Grateful for support

The Neumans continue to be overwhelmed with the support from family, friends and the community.

Medical costs are high. For this reason Melrose Area Women of Today and friends are planning a benefit in January.

They've received grocery and meat market gift certificates, groceries delivered to the house, gift cards and even an anonymous donation to help pay for their children's tuition at St. Mary's School in Melrose.

"People have taken our kids to the movie for a day and even for overnight stays," said Sharon.

And then there are the prayers and prayer chains.

"We know Jim and Ivanna Meyer went to Italy and lit candles that are burning there," she said.

Sharon admits there are days when she "gets into a puddle."

But then her strong faith in God comes through.

"I start reading my cards and realize all the people who care with their prayers and Masses," she said.

And, with tears welling up in her eyes, she thinks of her family.

"A year and a half ago, when I had a baby, that was a surprise and our little miracle. I don't believe my time is coming to an end," she said, optimistic for another miracle.

To them, "hope and the power of prayer is huge."

"We are more than grateful for everything," she said.

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