

Talking to teens in Sisters about cancer

By Katy Yoder
Correspondent

I got a call from a Sisters High School student asking if I would talk to a school assembly about my cancer experience. It was cancer-awareness week and the students were creating a presentation covering several of the main types of cancer, including childhood cancers.

The young lady who called me said she'd read some of my columns and wondered if I'd be willing to do a 10-minute talk on my cancer story. At first I panicked. How could I distill my experience down to just 10 minutes; not to mention whether I could handle talking to hundreds of high school students? I wasn't sure how I'd connect with them or if I could get my message across in a meaningful way. After all, I'm a 53-year-old mother of a college student ... light-years away from their frame of reference.

I spent some time typing up notes I could refer to during my talk and took them with me to work. Then right before I left for the high

school, I scribbled down a few gems that popped into my head. About half-way there, I realized I'd left my notes on my desk. There was no time to go back and pick them up. I half-laughed, half-cried at the absurdity of it all and then had a quick chat with God. I concluded there must be a reason I wasn't supposed to rely on my notes. I'd just have to keep it spontaneous, because there wasn't really anything else I could do.

I'd come up with an analogy that I hoped would help the students understand the feelings I had when I was diagnosed and how it felt during treatment. I asked them to imagine driving on the Santiam Pass, enjoying the view as you go. Your car has been feeling a little off, but you ignore it and keep going, thinking it's probably nothing. Once at the top of the pass you head down the other side. The car is picking up speed, but when you hit the brakes they go to the floor.

You're going faster, barely making turns and sliding toward the edge. There's an instant feeling of

shock, followed by panic, and then the realization that something has to be done or you're going to die. All of a sudden you have all kinds of motivation to do whatever you can to survive.

The difference between this and really losing your brakes on the Santiam is that it will last for over a year, and even today there are times when I'm still thinking about how to keep the car on the road.

I don't remember everything I said — one of the downsides of speaking on the fly. In my notes I wanted to tell them that cancer treatments and the disease itself are a lesson in overcoming physical, mental, and spiritual challenges with the main antidote being faith that in the end all will be well.

I briefly covered the three main treatments in Western medicine's arsenal for curing cancer: Surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. I told them that chemo kills your fast-growing cells in an effort to take out the cancer, and in doing so devastates your hair follicles and nails. I lifted my hat up quickly and gave them

a quick flash of my head for effect.

I ended with telling them to really think about what they were putting in their bodies. That what we do in high school and beyond accumulates over time. I confessed that I smoked pot in high school and that I wondered if that or anything else I'd done over the years had tipped the scales for me to get cancer. Since my cancer was not genetic, something in my environment caused those cells to gain control. I may never know why I got cancer. All I can do is educate myself on ways to make sure it doesn't gain a foothold again.

I'm seeing my oncologist regularly, as well as a naturopath oncologist who keeps me up to date on the many cancer treatments that are not approved by the FDA in this country but have been through clinical trials in Europe and Canada. Through her, I am taking supplements and treatments that help keep cancer at bay.

I can't change yesterday, but today is still mine to do with as I choose.

Women's health center opening

St. Charles Health System is opening a Center for Women's Health in Bend that will offer a full spectrum of obstetric and gynecological services.

The new clinic, which opens May 1, will provide coordinated care for women based on the perinatal home concept. Patients seen at the clinic will have access to obstetric, gynecological and behavioral healthcare, as well as health education.

The new clinic will be staffed by four doctors, including Dr. John Murphy, a long-time Bend OB-GYN who was previously in private practice for 15 years.

Murphy and the other OB-GYNs, who are relocating to Bend and will start practicing later this summer, will also be joined by a nurse-practitioner and two nurse-midwives.

The St. Charles Center for Women's Health, which will be temporarily located at 2600 N.E. Neff Rd., will begin scheduling appointments in April.



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an annual grief camp for children.

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