

Glory Hom

A letter I wish I had received when I was diagnosed with cancer.

Dear Glory,

I just wanted to write to you to tell you that I know what you're going through. Pain can't even start to describe the effects of chemotherapy. I can still remember each session clearly by the different agony and suffering it caused me. Every infusion would put my weak body at the mercy of the toxins. They ran through my veins and gnawed at my senses. Even the gentlest caress from my dad's hand felt bruising. Fatigue would take control over my body, and I would sleep the week away. As I recovered from the first wave of nausea and vomiting, the second wave of side effects, open sores in my mouth and throat, would surface. Even drinking was a painful task.

The side effects of the drugs not only caused physical ordeal, but also prevented me from doing the things that I enjoy. A trip to Europe over the summer for short-term missions was cancelled, along with plans for me to teach Vacation Bible School at church again. I found myself getting frustrated when I could not read ten pages without getting a headache, or when I couldn't walk more than two blocks without stopping for a break. Even swimming was forbidden which had been my favorite way of relaxing and relieving stress. Thinking that there was nothing left that I could do besides rest, I spent most of the summer watching Chinese drama tapes. Such unproductive use of time made me feel pathetic and useless.

I've heard of patients who gave up halfway through their treatments because they couldn't deal with the pain only to find the cancer return with a greater potency. Most people would see this as a rash decision. I, too, didn't understand their choices until I had thoughts about giving up myself. There were days when I felt emotionally and physically exhausted. On several occasions I vomited in the car on the way to my next treatment. It was my body desperately trying to persuade me to give up.

Yet, deep inside I knew I couldn't give up without a fight. The more pain I felt, the more I fought back. I became determined and declared to myself that cancer was not going to win this battle over my life.

Surprisingly, support for my cause came from the people I met at the Pediatric Day Hospital. Oblivious to their state of health, the children happily painted yo-yos and decorated picture frames in the playroom. Their energy was so contagious that I soon joined them in their games like Trouble and Twister. Their laughter disguised any signs of illness. At the hospital's "Teen Group" I made friends with patients my age. We shared with each other tips on how to avoid pain from the Neupogen shots, which can sting a lot if it isn't done properly (inject needle fast, inject fluid very slowly). There, I realized that people afflicted with cancer weren't helpless. My nurse practitioner had asked me to speak to a younger Chinese boy who was nervous with his first treatment. The Teen Group also made plans for us to write articles that would help answer questions about cancer treatments and encourage newer patients in the newsletter.

With this new sense of purpose, I began encouraging others to have a positive - attitude towards life. I saw that when we dwell on our sufferings, we lose sight of the goal. Instead, if we use that pain as a form of motivation, our attention is no longer on the agony, but on the imminent joy and victory. Don't lose hope.

Sincerely,

Glory Hom