

The Visitor

“I can’t die. I’m only 42 years old.”

Evening had just set in. As I peered outside my window, the city lights lit up the evening sky with the silhouette of the Rocky Mountains faintly visible in the far distance. The sky was clear. How long will it be? Were they able to reach him? Did he know how serious this was? Time seemed to stand still as my gaze shifted from the window to the door.

I was startled by a faint knock at the door. The time was 10:30 p.m., my heart began to beat faster. I sat up quickly in my bed and said, “Come in.”

“Lucille?” he asked.

I knew who it was. “Yes, Father, please come in.”

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Entering my room, he closed the door behind him. He walked over to the side of my hospital bed and extended his hand to me. “Hello, Lucille, I’m Father John.”

“Thank you for coming, Father.”

“I apologize for coming so late; I was helping a family with funeral arrangements.”

“No need to apologize; thank you for coming.”

He softly asked, “How may I help you, Lucille?”

Trying to hold in my emotion, I replied, “Well, Father, I was just diagnosed with ovarian cancer and I am scheduled for surgery tomorrow morning. I would like to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Communion and the Anointing of the Sick.”

He pulled a chair from the desk and came to sit at the side of my bed. “I would be happy to.”

*This was going to
be the fight of my
life, for my life.*

Taking out his prayer book he began to pray over me. After confession, he performed the blessing over the host and offered me Communion. Father John then proceeded with the anointing. He placed oil in my palms and continued to pray over me. Blessing me he then made the sign of the cross over my head and placed his hand on my head. Just before he left the room, he said, “God Bless you.” I felt comfort and calmness at that Moment and a sense of peace within.

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I remember sitting there in bed saying in my mind, “It’s going to be okay.”

There were so many random thoughts that ran through my mind that night as I had an ongoing conversation with myself.

“You are strong Lucille and you will make it through this.”

“I can’t die; I’m only 42 years old.”

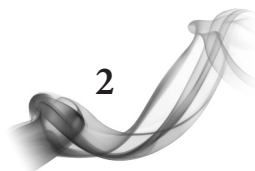
“I have only been married to Todd for two years. Our life together has just begun.”

“There was no way that my mother was going to bury her daughter.”

This was going to be the fight of my life for my life. I finally felt ready and up to the challenge. Feeling the sense of peace that enveloped me when Father John had left the room, I found myself becoming sleepy. I reached over and turned off the lights.

Mom’s Take

When this was happening, it was like a nightmare, always worrying something more would be found.



The Symptoms

*The nurse told me that the doctor didn't have
the answer for "This."*

On July 6, 2010, I noticed my right rib had what seemed to be a bump or bulge. I was sure this was not something that had always been there. In fact, every ounce of my being told me that it didn't belong on my body! That bumpy bulge rudely interrupted my sleep one night. Since I can remember, I've been a stomach sleeper and my right rib began to bother me when I would lie on it. My first thought was that I might have done something during one of my yoga practices, so I didn't get alarmed; I thought I would just keep an eye on it.

Todd and I both work long weeks and love our weekends. We enjoy our Saturdays, spending time together in bed relishing our amazing fortune in finding each other.

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What started out to be a normal weekend morning for Todd and I turned out quite differently. This was the first sign that something was wrong. During our love making, I had such an unbearable pain within my pelvic region, we were forced to stop. The sensation of pain was nothing I had ever felt before. The date was July 31, 2010.

On Monday morning, I called my gynecologist for an appointment. I was able to get an appointment the same day. I informed him of my symptoms of severe pain during intercourse, being bloated in the stomach and also told him about this “bump” on my rib. Performing a pelvic exam, he recommended I come back for a trans-vaginal ultrasound the next day.

On Tuesday, August 3, 2010, I had a trans-vaginal ultrasound. The procedure was uneventful and only took 15 minutes. I remember the tech telling me that my ovaries looked normal and added that my doctor would read the report and would get back to me.

On Friday, I received a call from my doctor’s nurse with the findings. She told me there seemed to be the remains of a hemorrhagic cyst on the right ovary and fluid in the abdominal region. The doctor had recommended a course of treatment using birth control pills for 30 days. The birth control pills were being prescribed to see if this would get rid of the cyst. Picking up my prescription, I began my 30 day regimen on Sunday.

Thinking I was dealing with a cyst, I again turned my attention to the bumpy bulge on my rib which had

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remained unchanged. On Monday, August 16, I called my primary physician and learned he was out of town. His office scheduled me with the physician's assistant on staff who evaluated the area and recommended I take Ibuprofen three to four times a day for the discomfort. Ibuprofen did nothing—the discomfort persisted. Three days later I called back and set up an appointment with my primary care physician for the end of the month, August 30.

Todd and I had planned a long weekend getaway to San Diego the last week of August. During our mini vacation, we again attempted intercourse, being the first time since the episode at the end of July. Horrific pain screamed through my body. We could not finish what we started. My mind searched for a reason for the pain. My first thought was fibroids, since I had had one five years previously and had to have surgery to remove it from the uterine wall.

Todd was getting concerned and came with me to my scheduled appointment with my primary care physician. While he evaluated my rib area, I told him that I was seeing my gynecologist for some female issues. He said, "These two things are totally unrelated." In his opinion, I had somehow damaged the cartilage on my ribcage. A topical pain cream was prescribed that he wanted me to use for two weeks to see if there would be any improvement. A day or two passed and I began to wonder why he hadn't taken an x-ray of my rib. I called back to his office

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and asked to be scheduled for one. His medical assistant said an x-ray would most likely not show anything and the doctor wanted to wait on the findings from my gynecologist. I reluctantly agreed to wait.

I pleaded with her and told her. "I know my body and there is something wrong."

On September 9, I returned to my gynecologist for a repeat transvaginal ultrasound. The results were similar to the first one, done the previous month. "Nothing out of the ordinary," was relayed to me. The following week, my gynecologist's nurse called and told me the cyst appeared to be gone, but there was still fluid in my abdominal region. Fibroids were present, measuring in millimeters.

"Why is there still fluid in the abdominal region?" I asked. She told me the doctor did not have an answer for this. His recommendation was to have a hysterectomy.

"A WHAT????? I'm 42 years old and this seems quite extreme for a few fibroids that don't seem to be causing the issue." I finished the call, telling her that I would need to think about this and that this recommendation seemed very radical.

I began to inquire about pre-menopausal symptoms and treatments. After all, I was 42—maybe I was starting menopause. The symptoms that I had been experiencing had remained unchanged with one exception. During September I began to notice during my yoga practice, whenever I went into an inverted pose like Down Dog,

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I began to cough. It was as though I couldn't take in deep breaths without wanting to cough and had a feeling of heaviness in my upper back. Is this what happens at 42 ... everything falls apart?

As many of us know too well ... the Internet is an awesome tool for searching out different things, but it too can provide too many possible answers to problems. As a result, my searches made me a wreck. I began to think I had every disease that was out there.

Todd has chided me many times in the past, because I tend to obsess over things and can over-react. One condition which surfaced during my many searches was Congestive Heart Failure. Since I have Mitral Valve Prolapse (MVP) with severe regurgitation, I thought perhaps I was beginning to develop fluid retention in my lungs due to the MVP. I have been under the care of a cardiologist for many years and I was well aware I would more than likely need to have a valve repair surgery sometime in the future.

On Monday, October 4, 2010, I placed another call to my primary care physician and asked to leave a message for him—that I would like to have a CT or MRI done. Shortly after leaving the message, I received a call from the doctor's triage nurse. She told me I would need to come in to see the doctor before my procedure could be scheduled. I told her I had been in twice and no one would take an x-ray. I repeated my symptoms of bloating, coughing, and the pressure in my upper back. I became emotional and began crying. I pleaded with her and told

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her, “I know my body and there is something wrong, but I don’t know what it is. I guess I’ll end up in the ER if it gets bad enough.” She told me she would discuss this with the doctor and call me back. She did call back and scheduled me for a visit with another doctor—this time with a GI specialist.

Wednesday, October 6, found me at the GI specialist. I explained my symptoms to the nurse practitioner and also told her about my “bump.” She commented that their focus is on the GI tract and not on the rib. After this consultation, her recommendation was to have an Endoscopy. Additionally, she recommended I have a special panel of blood work drawn to rule out H-pylori, a bacteria found in the stomach. This could cause additional problems, even cancer if not treated. I was brought to the scheduling coordinator and scheduled for an Endoscopy a month later—November 15.

The next day was Thursday, October 7. I headed to Utah to see my family. My mother, my Aunt Lucy (my mother’s sister), my two brothers, their wives, and my niece Brooklyn and nephew Braxton all live in Utah. Having no children of my own, Brooklyn and Braxton are the next best thing. I think of them as my own and I just love visiting them. Getting to Utah three to four times a year was a priority for me. Although flight time was less than an hour away.

During this visit, the pain across my upper back and into my upper chest became more pronounced. It had

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become difficult to sleep comfortably at night. My younger brother Jerry is married to Christie, a nurse. I showed her my rib. She said flat out, “This is not normal, you need to get that looked at.”

At the same time, I confided to my Mom what had been going on with my health.

Following Christie’s advice and my mother’s concern, I tried to get an appointment with my mother’s doctor for an x-ray. None were available. I didn’t think it was urgent enough to go to the ER in Utah, since I would be back home in Colorado in a few days.

Todd's Take

I'm one who refuses to see an M.D., unless the bleeding continues after duct tape has been applied. So when Luci was scheduling appointments with the various doctors, I made the assumption that they were in complete control. How sadly mistaken I was. Through the various visits, I tended to side with them and considered Luci's observations of her own body an obsession. Every time she mentioned a new pain or discomfort I told her, "Wait and see; these were qualified doctors after all."

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I had accompanied her to our primary care physician and his initial diagnosis made sense. Luci could have damaged some connective tissue during her Yoga practice. With each continuing diagnosis, she kept me informed. Everything seemed to coincide with typical “female problems.” I thought she might be approaching menopause.

I had no idea what was to come. I later came to regret my “wait and see” attitude.