

CONTENTS

Web Exclusive: With Humor and Openness

BY CHARLCIE STEUBLE

“I know what you are going to say,” my 15-year-old daughter said when I sat our three kids down in the living room to tell them I had been diagnosed with papillary carcinoma, a type of thyroid cancer.

“You do?” I asked rather surprised. Apparently she and her brother had heard a message from a physician’s office on our answering machine mentioning results from an ultrasound. To them, ultrasound meant baby. Two of our three kids thought they would have a new sibling soon.

Not only did I have to squash their excitement over a new sibling, but I had to deliver the news that I had cancer.

“No, we’re not having a baby. I have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer.”

Nobody knew what to expect moving forward with my diagnosis with cancer, including our 11-year-old daughter and two 15-year-olds. My husband and I, at least, were able to calm certain fears—papillary carcinoma has a very high cure rate. What I didn’t know at the time was I had a challenging road ahead of me with unexpected complications and a recurrence six months later.

Humor and openness were the basis for our children dealing with this diagnosis. The day after we told the kids of my diagnosis, our daughters asked if this was something we could joke about. At that point, I knew I had a choice to make. They were asking if they could use humor to deal with it.

“Sure,” I said. “We laugh at most everything—why not this?” From then on, when appropriate, we all made light of it. One night our youngest said, “Don’t make Mommy do the dishes! She has cancer!” It helped—it really did.

We were also very honest with our kids, family, and friends about what was happening. I e-mailed my kids’ coaches, friends, counselors, and teachers—not to drum up any sort of excuse or sympathy, but to help them understand what was going on with our family.

Not long after my recurrence, I received a phone call from my oldest daughter’s school counselor. She wanted to share that she had appreciated how open we had been about my diagnosis. As a result, she had asked my daughter to assist her with another student whose parent had been diagnosed with cancer. The student was struggling a bit with the diagnosis and lack of communication within her family, and the counselor thought my daughter could help. It was a proud moment for me.

Telling our kids that I had cancer was one of the hardest parenting moments to date, but a year later, I know now that we all grew as a result of it. Good things can come from tough situations.

Charlcie Steuble is a 41-year-old mom of three living in Northern Virginia and a thyroid cancer survivor. You can learn more about Charlcie at www.charlcie.blogspot.com.