

IN EVERY ISSUE

When the Ordinary Becomes the Ideal

BY LINN KURKJIAN

Welcoming back the humdrum days of routine.

My husband was diagnosed with colon cancer in late 2005, a surprising and troubling diagnosis that caught us both off guard. As a professional couple with 10 years of marriage behind us, Glenn and I had settled into a fairly mundane and predictable life that sometimes elicited a yawn or two, but was also gratifying in its sameness.

So, when my husband's doctor detected something out of the ordinary during his routine physical exam, we didn't panic. We just followed his advice and scheduled a colonoscopy.

His appointment was for the Monday after Thanksgiving, and I remember the jokes around the holiday dinner table from friends and family—when the conversation turns to colonoscopies, women giggle and men grimace. We laughed without a single thought that it could be anything serious. Four days later, I would be calling these same people in tears to give them the bad news.

I wish I could provide inspirational details on what happened next. I wish I could say that when we got the diagnosis I turned to my husband and said something heartfelt and profound as I held him in my arms. But most of it is a blur.

I remember the doctor sitting us down and telling us the diagnosis. I remember looking at him and starting to cry. I remember the doctor leaving the room and me turning to my husband to ask what just happened. He was still groggy from the anesthesia. I think he thought he was just dreaming, but we were in a nightmare.

The nurse came in and I remember her asking if we had a family surgeon. Do people actually have family surgeons? Should I feel embarrassed that we didn't have one? Then she handed me a T-shirt with the gastroenterologist services logo on it and I turned to Glenn to say, "My husband has cancer, and all I got was this lousy T-shirt." We laughed until we cried.

They say the mind blocks traumatic events, and most of the next couple of months are a blur. There were operations and long hospital stays and specialists and treatments. I was trying to work a full-time job while boosting his spirits, scheduling appointments, juggling medications, and easing the overall burden.

Glenn was spending long, boring days in a hospital watching bad television, worrying about the "what ifs," and waiting for me to come visit. He would call me at 3:30 in the morning because he was freaking out. I would be at home—wide

awake—freaking out on my own. Every day seemed to bring something unexpected and ominous, and during that time we were mostly afraid, tired, and anxious.

He was responding well to treatment with limited side effects. Slowly the fog began to lift and things started to get better.

We dared to migrate our conversations away from his illness, and we started to talk about the ordinary again. We celebrated his birthday, my birthday, and our anniversary. He went back to work, and I went back to nagging him.

A few months ago we got the “all clear” from his doctors. (For the record, we now have a family surgeon—as well as a family oncologist and gastroenterologist.) In a few short weeks we will begin to celebrate another round of birthdays and anniversaries. We have someone scheduled to pave the driveway, paint the deck, and fix a hole in the kitchen. The dog needs to go out and the litter box needs to be cleaned. His underwear is scattered across the bedroom floor and we are fighting over whose turn it is to empty the dishwasher.

So, here we are full circle—cancer-free and back to our normal routine—and our previously mundane life now seems charmed.

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