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Lindsay’s story: Facing cancer as an oncology nurse and a mom

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[Lindsay] It's something that you walk by every single time you're here.

If you just think about all the people who have touched this rope and all how much hope they had.

I was like, "Well, I'm going to ring the crap out of that bell someday."

[solemn music]

So, we're headed to my work. It's where I go every day to work as an oncology nurse.

Something about today is I'm also going to get my chemo treatment, and it's actually my last chemo treatment.

[light music]

I told my family that I was going to be a nurse when I was five years old, and I never changed my mind.

I don't know if it was so much of a choice as it was just me, and I recognized it early on.

[light music]

It is hard because the people that I work with are the ones that are treating me too.

[Lindsay] Hi. Is this arm okay?

[Patient] Absolutely.

[Lindsay] Something I used to tell my patients is, like, oh, this is just gonna to be a phase in your life, and I would try to use that to be encouraging.

Now I worry that that was just trivializing it all.

It's way more than a phase. It's kind of like a part of you now.

You've been stamped with a "C" stamp or something.

Your mind immediately goes to your children after being diagnosed with cancer.

You wonder, "Am I going to be able to lift my daughter up after surgery? Am I going to be able to cook them dinner, and get them up in the morning?"

So you just kind of, you know, make it a positive experience.

I think birthdays are a lot more special now. It means I'm not the age I was diagnosed at anymore.

It's on to the next year. You just have, you know, so much hope.

I had my second child in April and was following up on some symptoms after pregnancy.

She was about five months old when I was diagnosed. So, rectal cancer. It's definitely an eye opener from the start.

[Lindsay's Husband] One of the first things she said to me after we learned of her diagnosis was, "You didn't sign up for this," and that ripped my heart out.

[solemn music]

[Lindsay] This is the big chair where I get my special medicine.

[Lindsay's Son] I don't see your special medicine.

[Lindsay] They're going to bring it in.

[Husband] It's her very last one.

[Son] Yay!

[Lindsay] I would be lying if I said I wasn't nervous. But regardless, today is going to be a celebration.

[light music]

[Husband] Mom needs to sit there for about a half hour.

[Son] Is it your last medicine?

[Lindsay] It is my last medicine. Hey, what do I get to do since it's my last medicine? Ring the bell? Yes.

[Son] Are they going to get the bell?

[Lindsay] Well, the bell's out front. I'll show it to you in a minute.

[Nurse] You see this little blue button right here?

[Son] Yeah.

[Nurse] Okay, we're going to hit that, okay? Can you reach it?

[Son] Yeah.

[Nurse] Okay, and go.

[Lindsay] No matter what my future holds, this signifies accomplishing this first battle, and hopefully it only takes one battle to win the war. [light music] Yay!

[Husband] Mama chemo over.

[Lindsay] Oh, yay! Can you say thank you, everybody?

[Son] Thank you.

[Lindsay] Thank you, everybody, for coming.

Let's ring the bell, you and I.

Ready? One, two, three.

[bell ringing] [cheering]

I mean, I feel like I'm on a really good path now.

I see the light at the end of the tunnel, and I do feel like I'm miles away from when I was first diagnosed.

But I don't know if I'll ever feel like I've conquered it. I want the end of my story to be a good one.

[light music]

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LINDSAY N.
LIVING WITH CANCER SINCE 2016

It takes a special person to care for others with cancer, whether it's providing treatment or simply being there to listen. That special person is Lindsay. As an oncology nurse, she never imagined she'd be on the other side of the conversation when she received a stage III colorectal cancer diagnosis at age 33, just five months after she gave birth to her daughter. It was a surreal moment for Lindsay, who remembers thinking, ‘Oh, so this is what my patients feel like.'

> I've been in those conversations so many times. I've shared a plan of care so many times. I've explained this stuff so many times.

Lindsay knew she wanted to be a nurse from the tender age of five and, as her family can vouch all these years later, she never changed her mind. Now as a passionate oncology nurse battling her own cancer diagnosis, she's gained a new perspective. "It made me so much more aware of how much my patients hang on to every word I say. And how important it is to let them get everything out."

> I've always taken pride in my job and taking care of my patients. I have always tried to put others before myself.

Article slides



Lindsay, her husband, Camden, and their two children.



Lindsay's son, Harrison, blows out the candles at her 34th birthday celebration.



Lindsay and her family at her 34th birthday.



Lindsay, Camden, and their daughter, Evelyn, in their favorite park.



Lindsay plays Superman with Harrison at his T-ball game.



Lindsay and her family on the bridge at Mill Creek Streamway Park.



Lindsay at The University of Kansas Cancer Center, where she's an oncology nurse.



Harrison pushes the button to start Lindsay's chemotherapy treatment.



Lindsay at her chemotherapy appointment.



Lindsay and Harrison ring the bell.



Lindsay with her family.

On weekdays, you can find Lindsay at the cancer center where she works, tending to her patients while juggling her own treatment in between. "I do have a bit of Superwoman syndrome…figured I have to come every day for treatment anyway, so I might as well work!"

Along with caring for her patients, Lindsay's selflessness carries through to her role as a mother of two young children. On the good days, Lindsay can go without taking a nap and is able to make dinner and enjoy bath time. On the bad days, her husband takes charge. Over the past few months she's learned to accept these days are an inevitable part of her new life with cancer.

> I think your mind immediately goes to your children after being diagnosed with cancer. You wonder…am I going to be able to lift my daughter up after surgery? Am I going to be able to cook them dinner and get them up in the morning?

Lindsay can vividly recall the day she told her 3-year-old son that she had what she coined a "cancer owie." Like any child who was just told their mother is sick, he had a lot of questions and valid fears. What Lindsay wasn't expecting was the connection it created between them. "Mom, after your cancer owies are all gone and you're done taking your special medicine, you can have a sleepover in my *boys-only* fort." How sweet, she thought.

As a dedicated mother and loving wife, Lindsay's priority is giving her kids as normal a childhood as possible, which she hopes doesn't have to stop because their mom has cancer.

> I want to make it a positive experience. And hopefully when my son is an adult he'll look back and be proud of the way his mom handled it.

For now, Lindsay is living for the moment and celebrating major milestones, including her birthday, which now has a whole new meaning for her. It's not about the extra candle on her cake. Instead, it means she's not the age she was when she was diagnosed. "There's so much hope that you're at a new phase in your life, even if it's just the next year."

When living with cancer, time is always a question that is left unanswered, but what gets Lindsay through—aside from her husband and children—is not thinking too far ahead.

> Some days you have to do one hour at a time. Some days it's one minute at a time, but the time passes and then before you know it you've reached certain milestones that you were hoping for.

The best piece of advice Lindsay has received: "You're doing everything you can today, and then you're going to do everything you can tomorrow."