

From Day One to Perfect Trust

I thoroughly enjoy speaking to groups of people about my amazing journey. (Please contact me if you have a group or organization you'd like me to speak to – I would love the opportunity!) I rarely speak to folks without sharing with them the chronological unfolding of my cancer discovery. It includes too many "coincidences" not to take note...and not to confidently know that God's hand guided (and still guides!) every step of it.

What we refer to in my family as "the day" – meaning, the day the cancer journey began...the day my life changed forever – is March 9, 2003. However, the story itself actually begins one week earlier.

On Sunday morning, March 2, 2003, I was getting dressed and ready to go to church. The last thing I did before leaving the house was brush my teeth. (Isn't that what our moms taught us to do?) As I leaned over the sink in the bathroom to begin the brushing process, I felt a pain in my lower back. I didn't think anything of it at the time – just thought perhaps I had pulled or strained a muscle. As the day progressed, the pain continued – not a severe pain at all, but rather a dull, nagging one that just wouldn't go away. It was at this point that I officially swore off brushing my teeth forever! (This declaration lasted only a few hours, but it was fun to feel powerful – if only for a while!)

The dull pain continued all week. Again, it was not bad by any means, just annoying. But, I had to put it behind me, because I was scheduled to go to a conference for work in New Orleans the following Sunday, March 9.

Well, March 9 rolled around, and my husband and I hit the road, headed to my meeting. Like any self-respecting female does on occasion (as infrequently as possible!), I decided to use the few hours of drive time productively and clean out my purse. I discovered treasure after treasure in the bottomless pit I called a purse...including a disposable 35mm camera. When I pulled the camera out, my husband immediately grabbed it and – without looking in my direction – took a picture of me. This seems insignificant at this point, but remember it...the picture becomes very important later in the story!

We continued our drive to New Orleans and arrived at our hotel a few hours before my conference was to begin. Our room wasn't ready, so we went to the room of a co-worker of mine. She and her family were already settled in and enjoying a sunny Sunday afternoon. The time came for my conference to begin, and just as I was walking out the door to go, I began to have some strange symptoms in my body.

One of my husband's two sisters is nurse practitioner (and a GREAT one at that). She is the person we call for all of our medical issues and emergencies, and this was no exception. Here's where the "coincidences" begin...where God begins to reveal Himself moment by moment. My sister-in-law, who lived hours away, happened to be in New Orleans at the same time that we were, and had actually planned to spend the afternoon with my husband while I attended my conference that day. When my odd symptoms showed up, we immediately called her. She was pulling into the parking garage at our hotel when we called, and met us in the lobby. I described to her what was going on, and she thought it was probably something fairly common – and harmless. The symptoms resembled those of a kidney infection, or perhaps a kidney stone...again, something very treatable and common.

As she told me this, my co-worker (who had skipped out on the conference to make sure I was alright!) turned to me and told me that one of her daughters only had one kidney. She said that they battle kidney infections frequently with her, and reassured me that every thing would be fine.

My sister-in-law was on staff in the emergency room department of a hospital in Jackson, Mississippi at this time. Just to be safe, she wanted me to go there and get checked out by people she knew and trusted. She called ahead and let her co-workers know we were coming and caught them up on the details of my symptoms. My husband and I got back on the road – retracing our path from earlier that day.

As we traveled, my symptoms began to improve, and by the time we reached the hospital in Jackson, they had completely disappeared. (We were greeted in the emergency room by my husband's other sister and several more members of his family – a welcomed sight on a confusing and long day!) The hospital staff ran a few tests on me and didn't find anything wrong. They assumed I'd had a kidney stone and had passed it – and that the ordeal was over. They sent me home with a clean bill of health.

My husband and I spent the night at his parents' house – a short drive from the hospital. We went to bed a bit confused, but relieved that all seemed to be resolved.

My sister-in-law was scheduled to be in New Orleans for several more days – or so we thought – but we woke up to the sound of her voice early the next morning. She told us she hadn't been able to sleep – that she couldn't get a peace in her heart about my situation the previous night. She felt God not just nudging her, but shaking her – until she got up and took action. So, in the middle of the night, she drove from New Orleans to Jackson. Now she was standing at the foot of my bed telling me to get up and get dressed – that we were going to the hospital to run more tests.

We did just that. We spent the day in the emergency room, having test after test run, until finally she found it. I'll never forget her words. She came into my room and said, "There's a tumor in your left kidney. Is it cancer? Probably. But we're going to take care of it." I remember responding with a quiet, "Okay."

She left the room – a job well done. She had found it...just as God had planned. He guided her – used her – to make this discovery. He led us all to New Orleans – where we'd be together, and He jostled her until she came home to follow up on me. He knew she would listen to Him and obey – she always does. And he used her to find a tumor in my body, that no one else had found. And what a tumor it turned out to be.

Within days, I had surgery to remove my kidney and the tumor – finally making sense of my co-worker's statement from days earlier...about her daughter's life with one kidney. Funny how God makes sure we're with the right people at the right time. Just another "coincidence," huh? Shortly after my surgery I began my first chemo treatments. The adventure had begun.

Remember the picture my husband took of me on March 9? The disposable camera got buried deep in a suitcase during this time, and the film didn't get developed until weeks later. By then, I had actually forgotten about the picture in the car on March 9...until I saw it. It stopped me cold – and completely took my breath away. It's the only picture we have from "the day," but that's only the beginning.

You have to remember that my husband took the picture without looking – his eyes were on the road. He just grabbed the camera and snapped a shot in my general direction. The majority of the picture is completely out of focus. I am a giant fuzzy blob – as is the windshield and the road ahead of us. The ONLY thing in the picture that's in focus is the passenger-side rearview mirror. The road behind us shows up as clear as can be in the mirror. Nothing else – just what's behind us...a snapshot of where we've been.

I sat staring at the picture – with tears in my eyes. I kept thinking that we had no idea what we were driving into that day. We thought we knew where we

were going and what was about to happen, but God had something else in mind – something entirely different. I was headed to a conference and ended up meeting cancer face-to-face instead.

To this day, I can't help but think how much that picture sums up life. We don't know where we're going. We may think we do – that we have it all planned out, but really the road ahead is just a big blur. All we're really sure of is where we've been – what's behind us. How comforting to know, though, that God knows EXACTLY where each of us is headed – and what we'll encounter along the way. All we have to do is trust Him. He will guide us – every step of the way.

My favorite passage in the Bible says it all: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6) All that's required of us is perfect trust. He's guiding my amazing journey...won't you let Him guide yours, too?



 **one amazing journey**

one amazing journey
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