



Quilt
Hangs as
Symbol
of Hope
for
Cancer Patients

This is a portion of the letter Shelly wrote when she donated the quilt in July 2007. The letter hangs next to the quilt in the Cancer Care Center.

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atients and visitors in Community Memorial Hospital's Cancer Care Center appreciate the beauty of the Pink Ribbon quilt hanging in the hallway. Made from 3,000 pieces of brightly colored fabric, it catches the eye of all who pass.

For those who know the story behind the quilt, that appreciation is mixed with inspiration.

Shelly Zodrow was diagnosed with stage I breast cancer in April 2007. Since there was no history of breast cancer in her family, the diagnosis naturally shocked her.

"The first month was the hardest — I was scared, crying," she said. "But once the plan was laid out, and I had more control over what was going to happen, I knew I just had to do it."

Shelly's treatment consisted of two lumpectomies (surgical removal of a tumor from the breast), followed by chemotherapy and radiation treatment. An infection between the surgeries, however, delayed treatment and left Shelly with time to fill. So she turned to quilting — an activity that brings her peace and calm.

"I'm a serious quilter," she said with a smile. "I've always sewed. When my neighbor asked me to take a quilting class about 15 years ago, I fell in love with another hobby."

That hobby helped Shelly during a difficult time in her life. "I was in the middle of being diagnosed at that time," she explained. "I had just had surgery. I had an infection that I had to clear up before my next surgery. I had all this going on, and I had to deal with my stress and anxiety. Quilting was my therapy."

Once she was able to resume treatment, Shelly faced chemotherapy with strength and courage that inspired her family and friends. "Her take on it was phenomenal," said Angie Kunde, a former co-worker of Shelly's who — as a breast cancer survivor herself — took on the role of friend and mentor. "She had moments when she was down, but never down and out. She was always upbeat and positive."

"I never had a pity party," said Shelly. "I kept on working through it, scheduling the chemo so I would have a long weekend after it to recover. It was doable." Shelly even turned treatment days into "party days," dressing up and having lunch with friends or family before receiving treatment.

Angie would stop in and visit with Shelly when she was in the hospital for treatment and marvel at her attitude. "Anyone who has met her is inspired," said Angie. "She's one of those people who you are so blessed to have in your life."

The Breast Care Center provides care to women with suspected or diagnosed breast cancer. Experienced professionals work together as a team to diagnose, treat, guide and support women facing breast cancer or other breast disease. For referral to a specialist who is affiliated with The Breast Care Center, call Careconnection, Community Memorial's free physician referral and health information service, at 262-251-1001 or 800-246-8332.

Shelly finished treatment in early December 2007. "Once treatment was over, I decided 'I'm done. I'm moving on.' And I did." Since then, Shelly has gotten a clean bill of health at each checkup.

Throughout the entire experience, Shelly was reminded of the importance of being your own health advocate. "You need to pick your doctors wisely," she said. "You need to trust them, but you can't take a passive role in your health care. You need to ask questions and get involved."

Ever since I first saw my breast tumor glaring back at me on an ultrasound April 18, I realized life as I knew it would not be "normal" for a very long time. To constructively pass the many hours, days and weekends since my diagnosis waiting for my next appointment, test, path report, biopsy or surgery, I turned to the one thing that has always helped me de-stress, and that would be my sewing. The more anxious I was, the faster I stitched, hence a 3,000 piece wall hanging completed before I barely started any of my treatments. Sewing is a coping mechanism, and for me it beats any drug, pill, cocktail or Yoga position that I know of.

I am donating the "Pink Bargello Ribbon" wall hanging to the Cancer Care Center ... The benefit to me personally in making this quilt has been therapeutic in ways few people understand. Honestly, I have created this beauty for purely selfish reasons because, while I had tons of fun making it and expending some creative energy in the process, I have kept my life as "anxiety free" as possible. I have donated many quilts in the past to various organizations, but never quite with the emotion and personal meaning attached to this one.