

## Finding out about True Friendship through Cancer Diagnosis

By: Jessica Lawlor

Through her cancer diagnosis, Wendy Miller is finding out about true friendship, and what's really important in life. That's what happens when you are diagnosed with Stage III colon cancer.

Wendy says she's like any other nurse. If she's not feeling well, she diagnoses herself, then skips the doctor's appointment and moves on. That's exactly what happened when she started have some unusual digestive symptoms. She convinced her doctor it was colitis. She was scheduled for a colonoscopy, but decided to cancel it. It ended up being a different cancer that would lead her to a much more dangerous diagnosis.

During some tests after Wendy got sick with what she thought was colitis, doctors noticed a spot on her kidney. It turned out to be a tumor. Due to the other strange symptoms she was having, Wendy's surgeon in Massachusetts refused to operate until she underwent a colonoscopy. Her doctors then spotted a suspicious area on her colon. That was in December, 2010.

The diagnosis of Stage III colon cancer came in January, 2011 when Wendy underwent surgery to have the tumor removed. She now feels lucky to have had kidney cancer, because it was a relatively benign tumor, and pretty easy to overcome. She says it was lucky, because it helped her doctors find the cancer in her colon that is more aggressive, and threatening her life.

Almost immediately after surgery, Wendy started chemotherapy. The treatments left her feeling extremely sick and rundown. She developed progressive numbness in hands and feet, with a myriad of symptoms. She brought this to the attention of her physicians, thinking something must be wrong. Instead, her doctor used the phrase, over and over again "Most People don't experience this."

"They were making me feel like a hypochondriac," said Wendy. "The treatments were making me sick, but it was almost like they didn't want to hear it. They didn't offer me any nutritional support, any supplement support." As Wendy was feeling let down by her medical oncologist in Massachusetts, there was finally a moment where she decided not to take it anymore. When Wendy continued to tell him about how sick she was feeling from the treatments, and he said he had another patient on the same treatment protocol and was older and he wasn't complaining of any of these symptoms, she knew that was it. It was time to move on.

Wendy had seen commercials for Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA) on television. After the problems with her medical oncologist, she went online to check it out, and started chatting with an oncology information specialist. The whole person approach to cancer care really interested Wendy, so she decided to take the trip to Philadelphia.

From the moment she was diagnosed, Wendy said she really started to realize who her true friends in life are. One of those people is Joanne, her caregiver. Joanne has made every trip to Philadelphia with Wendy, taking notes during the appointments, keeping travel and scheduling information and just being there for Wendy when she's feeling sick. Wendy says Joanne is the organized one. That's in spite of the fact that on their first trip to Philadelphia, they both forgot which flight they were on, and had the driver Herman searching for their luggage, even with it just a carousel over. Even after only being friends for two years, Wendy has found someone she can really count on to be with her every step of the way.

Wendy spent years as the clinical manager of a wound care center and last year was hired to open a brand new center which has become a complete success. Being a nurse is a calling for her and something she truly loves. But after 20 weeks of being out of work for treatment, she was recently let go from her job. "I was sobbing my eyes out over being let go. I was devastated. Then I took a step back and realized I cried more over a job than the fact I have colon cancer," said Wendy. "That snapped me out of it quickly. It helped me really focus on what's important in life." Some day Wendy would like to get back in to nursing, especially somewhere like CTCA. She says if CTCA opens a hospital in Massachusetts or New Hampshire, she'd be the first one in line applying for a job.

Wendy has a son who lives in Texas and a daughter living with her in Massachusetts. Both are a big part of her support network, and encourage her every step of the way. They are just two more reasons why she is fighting cancer so strongly.

Right now, Wendy is traveling to Philadelphia every two weeks while she finishes up her chemo. While she's still feeling some negative side effects from the treatments, it's important to Wendy that she's in a place that cares and is making an effort to make things better. She found that place at CTCA in Philadelphia.