

“To go through something like that, you really need support. My husband has been there 100 percent, above and beyond. And of course my family, friends, and people I didn’t even know would call...”

~ Jean Koupal

Enduring the chemo and radiation was no piece of cake, as anyone will tell you — and don’t mention cake. Jean said that every three weeks she had chemo and for three days after she was unbelievably sick — so sick that the smell of food only made it worse.

“I would lay on the couch and couldn’t move. If I needed something I would raise my finger a little.”

She couldn’t eat those three days, but her husband (Rick) would have to.

“He’d grab a cold bowl of soup and sit on the other side of the room — the smell of anything was sickening. Cheerios... for three years after I couldn’t even look at a Cheerio.”

“He was right there for me every minute.”

Jean also gives a lot of credit to the doctors and staff that we have in Yankton.

“Dr. Milroy, she is awesome for Yankton. And Dr. Farver and Dr. Peterson (at the Cancer Center)... I can’t say enough. They have been there. They are patient and kind, and sit with you and hold your hand, and we need that,” she adds.

Yankton is very fortunate to have the facilities we have she said, as well as the professionalism of the doctors and nurses.

“When you are there it’s like they are there for you, you’re like family to them. They are truly concerned and show it.”

The cancer was really an eye-opener for Jean, who says she used to just live life.

“There is not a minute of my day that I don’t praise the Lord. I always think ‘what if?’ it had gone the other way — I wouldn’t have seen my grandkids.”

Jean and Rick have one grandchild that is 14, one that is 3 and one that was born this past April. “I think of these things.”

Since completing her treatment, Jean has been trying to find a way to help others and raise awareness. Whenever she can Jean tells women that if they ever need to talk she is there for them.

“Raising awareness is my absolute goal in life. If I could just, in anyway, help one person....”

“I don’t want my granddaughters to go through this, or my daughter or anyone else I love to go through this. I know its getting closer to some type of cure for this, the only thing is you always have to be aware. You have to find that lump early. I’m sure there will be many new ways fighting it, something not quite so harsh.”

To help in her goal of raising awareness, Jean has been making necklaces. The proceeds from the sale of the necklaces goes completely to cancer research.

October will make it a year since Jean started making the crocheted necklaces — thinking at first they would just be Christmas gifts for people. She got the idea after purchasing a similar necklace from a lady who makes them for another cause.

“After I wore it a couple of times it was like a light bulb went off — this was exactly what I had in mind. I thought, I could do this.”

So she examined the structure of the necklace, which is crocheted and figured she can do something like this.

Hundreds of necklaces later, and several thousands of dollars having been donated, Jean’s necklaces can now be found in 25 states and several foreign countries.

“I just never thought it would go this far.”

The necklaces have definitely fulfilled a goal that Jean wanted to achieve.

“It has been very rewarding. I have had a lot of women call me or write to me, and say ‘I have one of your necklaces and every time I put it on it reminds me do a self-exam or get a mammogram.’ It is a reminder.”

■ by Heidi Henson

Breast Cancer Facts

- Breast cancer knows no boundaries. It doesn’t discriminate between age, race, religion or status.
- Breast cancer affects more than just the person diagnosed. Family, friends and co-workers are also effected.
- One in eight women in the United States will be diagnosed
- Breast cancer is the second most deadly cancer among women in the US
- There are approximately 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States.
- In the United States — a woman is diagnosed every three minutes, and a woman dies of breast cancer every 13 minutes.
- Breast cancer can also be diagnosed in men.
- Recent studies report that many women are not following recommended guidelines for mammography screenings by having their first screening later than recommended, not having one at recommended intervals or not receiving follow-up of positive screening results.

Information courtesy of the American Cancer Society and Susan G. Komen for the Cure®

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