



Faith renewed through our new journey

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THIS is the story of a cancer journey and of God's faithfulness. In October 2006, my husband Ewe Jin discovered a lump on the right side of his neck. He had been treated for nasopharyngeal carcinoma (nose cancer) seven years ago, so any lump requires thorough investigation.

His oncologist ordered an MRI scan immediately. The MRI and ultrasound revealed a firm mass 2cm by 2cm. The doctor said the lump is a 50-50 indication of cancer because of his prior history.

He also underwent a bone scan, a CT scan for the lungs, liver and kidneys. The oncologist, after analysing all the results, declared that "this is the best possible news" as there were no signs of cancer activity in any part of the body. But the lump still had to be taken care of.

An operation was scheduled and the lump was removed by two surgeons on Nov 15. The plan was to open up the neck, make a quick cut and send the tissue to a pathologist for immediate examination. If it was benign, the operation would be simple and they would just remove the mass. However, if there were cancer cells, they would remove much more adjoining tissue.

Since the earlier scans had been clear, we were expecting a clear biopsy, too. But it was not to be. The lump was malignant, and what was to have been a three-hour operation stretched to seven hours. Further biopsy on the tissue showed that 10 out of 25 lymph nodes that were removed had cancer cells. All other surrounding tissues were clear.

When we consulted the oncologist on Nov 29, he asked us to decide on

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whether Ewe Jin would undergo adjuvant chemotherapy. This treatment is basically preventive, and is aimed at getting rid of any cancer cells that may be lurking elsewhere in the body. It is an optional treatment, since there is no way to tell for certain whether there is a real need for it.

We were caught off guard when the choice was put before us, as we had thought that Ewe Jin's ENT and oncology doctors had already arrived at a consensus of no further treatment. However, after consultation with good friends (including doctors) and after much prayer, Ewe Jin elected to go for the chemotherapy.

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Ewe Jin reminded me that whatever mountain we are required to climb, we have our Good Shepherd to climb alongside us. He was very positive and said that this would complete his cancer experience (since the last time he only underwent radiotherapy but not chemotherapy) and will make him quite the “comprehensive guide” when he counsels and encourages other patients. Indeed, God proved faithful to us throughout the journey and walked with us step by step through the storm.

The whole course comprised six cycles, administered once every three weeks. It began on Dec 14, 2006 and took us up to April 6, 2007.

The chemotherapy room is a window to a whole new world. Whatever anguish I felt as I watch from the sidelines, I will never fully know the emotions of the patient who waits five hours for a half-litre of poison to drain into his bloodstream, knowing the havoc it will wreak on his body. The pattern of the chemo cycles soon became familiar – fatigue in the first week, low immunity in the



second, recovery in the third, and then on to the next round.

Compared to radiotherapy, where the treatment was administered in quick succession over seven weeks, chemotherapy is quite a marathon. Sometimes it was excruciating, with things moving in slow-motion like in a John Woo movie. And just like in long distance races, there were many lonely stretches along the road.

It was a reminder that so many of life's critical journeys are marathons, and the important thing is to stay the course and complete the race. What an assurance it was to know that God, who is our most faithful Friend, would see us through to the finish.

April 6 was the last time Ewe Jin went on the Taxol drip. In the final cycle, I also succumbed to illness and was floored by vertigo. But time heals and we are now both back on our feet. Ewe Jin returned to work in May, and is scheduled for more scans three months after the last cycle. As I take stock of this cancer journey, I realised that we have learnt so much in the six months.

Perfect timing. The significance of the malignant lump hit me days after the operation. It indicated how close Ewe Jin and I came to a bigger battle. It meant that there were already cancer cells just waiting to spread, but I believe a Divine Hand contained the cancer and kept it from getting to the bones, lungs, liver and elsewhere. Our gracious Heavenly Father has spared Ewe Jin and me a much harder journey and we are ever grateful.

Unfounded fears. At the start of the chemotherapy, two things brought me to tears. One, I dreaded a rerun of the emotional roller-coaster that we had been on during Ewe Jin's radiotherapy years ago. And two, I was daunted by the thought of feeding Ewe Jin through months of nausea. As it turned out, both these fears were totally unfounded. Ewe Jin was the most cheerful of patients. The mood

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swings did not materialise. Neither did the nausea – he had such a hearty appetite that he put on more than 10 pounds in six cycles. For the record, there were also no other side effects (numbness, mouth ulcers, etc) besides fatigue and baldness.

A faithful God. Throughout this journey, we have received blessing upon blessing. God's faithfulness simply overwhelmed us. Every financial need was taken care of. Right through to the end of the journey, we received occasional gifts, often at just the times payments had to be made. We were also blessed with strong support from family and friends, including many brothers and sisters from EMC. There were always hands to help with chores, prepare meals and run errands. Right up to the finish, Ewe Jin continued to receive freshly boiled chicken essence at least twice a week. And the 'meals on wheels' that were cooked by dear friends and delivered regularly to our doorstep are, to me, the greatest idea ever.

Strength and peace. As I look back, I realise that the journeys through the storms were the times that I truly learnt and grew. Seven years back during Ewe Jin's radiotherapy treatment, I discovered hidden strength I could not have possessed apart from God. God's strength was made perfect in my weakness. This time round, it was God's peace – so inexplicable and unshakable – that kept me steady and secure. It was a peace that defied logic – incongruous in such turbulent times, and so sturdy that it withstood the fury of the storm. It was a peace that assured me that my God was beside me every step of the way.

This journey has been a clear message from God that He is sovereign and in control of every situation. His protection and providence have assured me that He loves us beyond measure. I believe that all things have worked for good, just as God has promised. Ewe Jin and I will continue to wait upon the Lord as He reveals His purposes in our lives after this journey. We want to give all thanks and praise, and all glory to God, who is our Shepherd and our Rock.