

Chapel Talk
Carol Johnson Simendinger
December 8, 2004

Good day... I have so much I would like to tell you – about living. I know in my heart each day is a new beginning – it is a gift from God. Since you have been on campus have you not witnessed the early morning sun shining through the trees as though God himself is extending his arms? Or been hypnotized by the glistening reflections on the Pond? Have you taken the time to watch God’s little creatures scurry back and forth across the lawn and up a tree? Or listened to the silence of growing things?

The path of life is much like the school driveway to Founders Hall: all makes, models, and colors of vehicles come through the entrance. It doesn’t matter how big or small they are...it doesn’t matter how fast or slow they go...each will eventually have to face the challenge of crossing the “bumps.” Each person hopes to choose the best technique which will enable him or her to continue on the right path and reach their final destination successfully without experiencing extreme difficulties along the way.

To stay on the right path one must strive to manage his or her life with a constructive and positive approach. Learn to embrace change, and you’ll begin to recognize that life is in constant motion, and every change happens for a reason. One cannot change the past: deal with each day and focus on the issue at hand – and the tomorrows will take care of themselves.

Our lives are not determined by what happens to us, but how we react to what happens; not by what life brings to us, but by the positive attitude we bring to life. Why do we need these bumps along our path? Are they put there just to slow us down? Perhaps...but the experience one gains while learning to tackle these obstacles, strengthens our relationships and builds life skills. And yes, on occasion one tries to avoid the “bump” by going around, and oh my, what a mess that can create – and ultimately, to get back on course, one needs support from others to find the way. Every person is the creator of their own character. Day by day, what you choose, what you think, and what you do, is who you become.

How does one find the strength to endure bump after bump? There is no formula or mathematical equation to master for this problem. The lesson learned is – trust in God and one will never be alone.

In January of 2003 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. What an over-whelming and emotional time to experience, in choosing doctors, surgery, chemo and radiation treatments – choices that could mean the difference between life or death. Should I have asked, “Why me?” I remember thinking, “Why not me?” Aren’t I just as special as the next person – God has no favorites; we are all equal in his eyes. Therefore – why not? One of my favorite characters from the comics section, *Mutts*, says it best:

“He prayeth best Who loveth best
All things both Great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth ALL”

God blesses us in a way that only He can and sees us through our bumps in life. **The Lord your God is with you wherever you go. JOSHUA 1:9 (chapter 1: verse 9).**

We, as a community, can offer support in so many ways to ease the burden of others: It can be a silent prayer anywhere and anytime one chooses – or a prayer chain which encompasses many people. Support can be as simple as a loving hug or a gentle squeeze of the hand.

My family – and I speak not only of my immediate family, but also my SAS family – supported me every step of the way during my months of treatment and recovery. When you begin the journey of extensive chemotherapy and radiation treatments needed to stop this disease from taking control of your mind and body – and see your family members and friends stay by your side through all of this – you can’t give up.

An essential part of support and encouragement comes from the team of doctors, nurses, therapists, counselors, and volunteers, who work at the Cancer Centers and hospitals. They offer guidance to the caretaker as well as the patient. Each day these special people work in this environment with the hope that a cure will be found. But for now – the treatment area is filled with Lazy Boy chairs and IV poles, row after row. Warm, soft

blankets in a rainbow of colors, some made by the patients themselves, lie on each chair waiting to comfort the next person, and the next person, and the next person.

After completing eight months of treatment, I glanced in the mirror one day and realized the image I saw – pale and puffy, no hair, no eyebrows and no eyelashes – was me – this is my life now! But I reminded myself I was not alone and this too shall pass – so I told myself, “Self, put your “hat” on (that is what I called my wig), and as Dorey suggests in *Finding Nemo*, ‘Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming.’” I recall a special moment last year when one of my colleagues greeted me in the hallway and said, “Good morning, beautiful.” And it made me smile...for I felt it was his way of showing support and respect for what I was going through – because at that moment I certainly did not feel beautiful.

Living life to the fullest can be quite a challenge and then how does one know when one has reached his or her fullest life? One should strive to love much; laugh often; and always look for the best in others and give the best of oneself. Life becomes a journey of change that always finds its way. Your journey may be filled with many winding roads, but you will discover it is less about the destination and more about the manner in which you traveled. I believe my life will be fullest when God reaches down and takes me to his Kingdom for ever and ever. For I know in my heart, this good day – is a gift from God.