

Nancy's Story

It had all started so simple. Nancy slipped and fell in the bathroom... She had been down south in Los Angeles the previous week and had returned home that day.

We live in a little town called June Lake at 7700 feet, a vacation home that turned into our semi-retired home. June Lake is five hours north of Los Angeles and three hours south of Reno, Nevada.

In October 2008, Nancy had gone down to attend a conference for her job and taken the opportunity to visit her mom, Maggie. She also decided to fly over to Phoenix for the day to visit our new grandson on his first birthday – she had been there at his birth – finally returning home on a Sunday, just before I had to leave. I work part time at a local restaurant and was covering a Sunday night shift that turned into a late night.

When I got home, Nancy said she had slipped in the bathroom, getting tangled up in her sandals. She was in some discomfort and obviously in some pain. We both decided it best to go to the ER in Mammoth to make sure nothing was broken. The fall was a sort of split and she had hit hard on the inside of her groin. Had I fell that way, or any other man we would have “cracked a nut” and screamed bloody murder, but she had just hit hard on that bone.

Nothing unusual showed up on the x-ray and after a few hours of observation, she was released, with some pain meds and sent home. She took a few days off work hoping the pain would get better, but when it didn't, she went back to work hobbling along as best she could.

Nancy had been instructed to follow up with her doctor in a week, but her regular doctor was on leave, so she had to see an alternate. Even though she could barely walk and was in obvious pain that doctor prescribed aspirin and sent her on her way. Unfortunately she had to see this same doctor once again, who then prescribed physical therapy without ever taking the time or effort to find out what was actually wrong.

Fortunately her regular doctor returned and she was able to see her during the Thanksgiving weekend, who immediately suggested they run some tests to get to the bottom of this, one of which was to see a sports medicine doctor to review the potential injury. Since we live in a resort

town, sports related injuries are very common. This doctor ordered an MRI as soon as he saw her walk in.

Within a couple of hours, we had a Disc in our hands with instructions to go to a large regional hospital that could do a further review and confirm the preliminary diagnosis. We went home, packed a few things and hit the highway headed to Los Angeles, which very soon, I would come to learn was 331 miles door to door...

We checked into the UCLA ER and explained the situation, as well as handing over the Disc we brought with her MRI. A long night in the ER confirmed the suspicions, but further tests were ordered, including a biopsy.

After a few days, Nancy was released and spent a couple of days at her best friend's house, staying in the LA area, while I went back home to work and such. On a follow up trip back down to LA, I took her to her Mom's house to rest, again so she could stay local, and again after a few days I went back home to June Lake.

Nancy called me to tell me some lady from a lab called and said: "... yeah, you have Sarcoma" and hung up. What a way to find out you have cancer! Although we had been told the possibilities and were expecting as much, it still was a pretty cold way to be confirmed. I looked it up on line and found out it is a very rare form of cancer. At this time we didn't know the particular type yet.

We made an appointment with the oncologists to discuss her options. His plan was to administer two treatments of chemo 24 hours a day for eight days with a three-week break ...

~~~~~

Nancy's story is told in a series of dispatches (emails) that I would send from Nancy's email account to friends and family updating them on Nancy's journey through all this. They are also filled with "Nancyisms" showing how she kept her wit and poise during this ordeal. In the middle are a few dispatches from Nancy herself when she was home - home in June Lake - and followed up herself. Nancy requested I keep the updates short and to the point, but what fun would that have been? These dispatches show how we dealt with the situation and reported it back to

friends and family. The list of recipients grew as time passed and I was told that several of those recipients passed the dispatch on to others. Nancy had a huge “fan base” and understandably so. Lastly, they are presented here as they went out, often times with a typo or two.

Sent: Sunday, December 21, 2008 11:16 PM

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don...

Turns out the fall was fruitituous. Biopsy came back last week and diagnosis is Sarcoma. Met with the sarcoma specialist on Friday at UCLA. Since Nancy had no symptoms from the cancer, they don't know if it has been there a while or just recent, so they are going to attack it aggressively. Scheduled to go in the hospital December 24 for 8 days of chemo, then home (Maggie's, because they need her close by) for two weeks, then back again for 8 more days for chemo, then home (Maggie's) for two weeks. Of course there is a team of doctors that will be monitoring her throughout the process. Sorry to upset with this bad news, but we all have a strong positive attitude. Nancy needs your prayers and has always cherished your friendships.

Sent: Monday, December 29, 2008 6:59 PM

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don...

Hi all,

I hope you forgive this mass email, but I thought it would be easier to do a blanket post on the latest.

Nancy checked into the hospital on Friday, December 26, (we thought that would be better than 5:00p on Christmas Eve!). She spent most of Friday going through test and prep, including another MRI.

Funny story about the MRI, a Nancy story... They told her it would last an hour and a half to do this one (neck to pelvis), so they gave her the vicodan, for the pain and the nurse decided to give her some anti anxiety med to relax her. Well when she got there they gave her a head set tuned in to a radio station and in Nancy's rather "relaxed" condition she thought she was at a party with friends and started "rockin' out", so she kept hearing this solemn voice saying: "Ms. Bennett you moved again!" Needless to say the MRI took about two hours to complete, while I sat in her room wondering where the hell she was! Oh well typical Nancy.

So, by Saturday morning, she was finished with the testing and consultation. The good news is they decided surgery wouldn't be necessary at this time, but they were going to start a radiation treatment on the spot (nerve pressure) that is giving her the pain in her legs and causing the constipation. They are still treating both the fall and the cancer, with the emphasis on the lingering pain created by the fall.

By Saturday afternoon they started the drug regimen to combat the chemo effects and by mid afternoon they started the chemo drip, so she is under way. I spoke with her tonight and she had just returned from the radiation treatment and was quite done in, so we only spoke briefly. She said she was good, but exhausted and would talk later (probably tomorrow).

The schedule is to do the chemo continuous for eight days, two weeks home (Maggie's) then back for eight days, two weeks recovery...

She is at the UCLA Medical Center in Santa Monica. I don't know the address other than 16th and Wilshire and she will probably be there through Saturday or Sunday. I am back in June Lake for the week and will be heading back down on Saturday, to bring her back home (Maggie's, they want her to stay local).

She said to thank everyone for their thoughts, good wishes and prayers.

That's it for now. I will give you the next update once we know more. The "command center" is still my cell.

Thanks,

Don

Sent: Tuesday, January 06, 2009 7:55 PM

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don...

Hi all,

I got home (June Lake) today after spending the last four days at the hospital with the cutie!

Here is the latest.

Nancy finished her eighth day of chemo at midnight on Saturday. However that radiation treatment we were told about was actually five treatments, so Nancy had her final radiation treatment on Monday (New Years Day was a holiday and weekends...) Anyway the combination of chemo and radiation really kicked her butt! Nausea hit on Thursday and by Friday when I got there she had a bucket parked under her mouth. Between the lvs – she has three lines in her with one “splitter” so that they can run four drips at once and the injections through the lines, then the medications, including one pill that is the size of a small Buick, she is done in to say the least. Quite frankly I don’t think I could have gone through that, no seriously. I would not wish that on friend or foe.

So we have a Nancy pill story. Because of the quantity (and size) of the pills the nurses have been crushing them and serving them to her with sweetened applesauce (that is adding sugar – the hospital applesauce is sour – go figure) they are able to get three spoons full into her (it takes three to get all those pills in). Anyway on Friday night, the nurse on duty wasn’t real happy about having to help her, so after a great sigh she crushed the pills and put a dab of applesauce in the pill cup and said “here.” Unfortunately at this point in time Nancy was heaving on a regular basis that is between breaths. This nurse actually attempted to stuff the spoon full into her mouth between heaves! I asked, perhaps a tad sarcastic if any of the medication would stick since she was throwing up every breath. Between heaves, Nancy tried to raise her hand to stop the spoon coming at her to which the nurse responded, “So you are refusing your medication?” By this time I started to raise up from the chair I was sitting in, but Nancy raised the feeble shaking IV laden hand and said in her loudest possible whisper, “ why don’t you put the cup on the tray and if I ever stop throwing up I can try to take the medication then.” The nurse huffed and set the cup down, but before she left and after another

heave Nancy said very succinctly “You know I only get nauseous when you are around, I wonder why that is?” The nurse looked at her then at me and quietly left the room. I swear I saw a smile on Nancy’s face before the next heave! That’s my honey.

Anyway on Monday morning one of the doctors came by and recommended that because of Nancy’s significantly weekend condition that she would be better going to a SNF (Skilled Nursing Facility – I think) that would provide PT, Rehab and recovery, that going home (anybody’s) wouldn’t be so good right now, like impossible. I think we all breathed a sigh of relief, as I had asked on Friday (and Saturday and Sunday) are you sure she can go home? The OT (Occupational Therapist came by and concurred that she should go to a facility, especially when I told her we live 350 miles away and in a two story condo. We all had a good laugh at that one. Then the PT Physical Therapist came by examined her and suggested the same thing, but if she didn’t go they would start therapy in the hospital. Also a “skin” therapist came by to check for non-activity problems but she passed that one. I can’t remember half the doctors and whatever that came by in those four days... Her diet consists of one vanilla flavored ensure which takes all day to finish.

However by the time she came back from her radiation treatment on Monday the latest results of her blood and urine (taken every 1-3 hours) came back and her white blood cell count was virtually non-existent (typical for chemo), which means no immune system working, so the decision was made to keep her in the hospital indefinitely until they get the count back up 3 – 5 days was one estimate. Once she is ready they will transport her to the facility (as they had planned to do). Also that means nothing fresh, no fruit, no vegetables (Nancy’s livelihood) no flowers, no plants and no visitors, including me! I got to stay on Monday since I was already there. So I headed back home today and per Nancy’s wishes will probably not go down this weekend. However, I will be down the following weekend, her birthday, no matter what, even if I can only look in a window! So she will not be going to Maggie’s anytime soon, if at all. It sounds like they will put her back in the facility after the next go around, as well.

Any cards sent to Maggie’s are being opened by Maggie and read to her, so she wanted me to send her thanks and appreciation. I don’t know what to say about cards now?

Okay, I’m forced to tell this next story, because, well Nancy said I had to!



On Saturday morning, I was trying to help her freshen up a bit, brush her teeth, damp cloth and all that. Well the IV station (which resembled a bad IT computer hookup, cables everywhere) was on the side by the sink. The first time I only caught one of the cables and pulled it gently, but... Well on another pass of damp washcloth I must have caught the cable solid and managed to pull one of the Ivs out of her arm, which caused the blood to backflow and soak her bed. We immediately got the nurse (actually all three came rushing in) and had to insert a new cable, reattached it to the pump, clean the line from blood and reattach the line back to her. Of course she had to get up and sit while they changed her bedding. I stood sheepishly in the corner not moving until everything was done. Once the door closed, my lovely wife looked up through half open eyes and told me to sit on the other side, I was no longer allowed on the IV side, at least for a couple of days. I said quietly, well I am here to provide entertainment and excitement. I'm pretty sure I got another smile from her! I'm also pretty sure she said under her breath that "don't we make the perfect couple?"

I gotta tell you that those few smiles she has been able to muster has made all the difference. Seeing her in a somewhat subdued (alright medicated to the max), coupled with looks of discomfort makes the day pretty long. But, one of those smiles, as you all know just light up her face, is worth the wait, is definitely the highlight of every day. I got a few more smiles on Monday as that was the second day of no chemo. As I left Monday night they had just injected her with round two of the anti nausea stuff, which pretty much knocks her out, but before I closed the door I got one of those smiles...

Don

Sent: Monday, January 19, 2009 8:11 PM

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don...

On Saturday, January 10, the hospital oncologist doctor gave Nancy the approval to go to a skilled nursing facility, because her white blood cell count was above average. Nancy asked what average was and he said an 8 is normal and that she was a 9. Nancy corrected him and told him "that this guy I know always tells me I'm a ten."

On Monday 1/12/09 she was transported to the skilled nursing facility, which she thought she was being dropped off at the hotel from the shinning, (pretty scary) and stuck in a middle bed with equipment from the other beds surrounding her. On one side was the elephant lady (that needs to be hoisted out of bed), but the other side was a dear lady who immediately befriended her. However a couple of days later she was able to switch rooms and get a bed by the wall, with her own space. A much brighter quieter environment. One of Nancy's new roommates has Alzheimer's and is very quiet and waves to her. But the staff was concerned because the other lady, who is 91 and for the most part coherent, but has dementia and sundowners tendencies and has had trouble with other younger roomies. However they hit it off great, because Nancy understands the disease because of her father.

Saw the doctor on Friday and everything is going great. The plan is to go back into the hospital starting January 26 for the second round of chemo, 24 hours a day, eight days a week (smile) than probably back to the facility. Two weeks after the next round of chemo is finished she will be tested again to see what progress has been made.

On Friday, we also had to go back to UCLA Westwood to get a follow up x-ray and since we were right there, we stopped in at Reflections and sized up some wigs, none of which Nancy liked. However she did get a great scarf, a roaring twenties style, so she is styling. But, before we left I had her try one more wig that made her look like she had just a radical cut, that she liked. Well.... as part of the fitting the lady suggested she remove the rest... well you know... Anyway she got a buzz cut. The lady asked how she was doing, while she was cutting the hair and Nancy said, "probably at the same time, there were military personnel getting buzzed cuts and soon to be deployed to Iraq/Afghanistan and at least she knew what danger (cancer) she was facing and also that young children are

having to endure this as well.” Nancy also said that she has had many hairstyles over the years from the straight long look of the seventies, the big hair of the eighties, the covering of the gray of the nineties.

Since some of you have asked where to send cards, we have decided that cards should be sent to the house because she is moving around so much and I will bring them to her.

She asked me to thank everyone again for your thoughts and prayers.

PS The food is great and she said she is probably going to gain twenty pounds, but if Nancy gets eggs one more time she is going to reenact the scene from American Beauty where Kevin Spacey throws his plate against the wall! Her 91-year-old roomie and her have decided that they are going to strike unless they get bagels and smears for breakfast.

Sent: Wednesday, January 21, 2009 7:19 PM

Subject: Update on Nancy – a “bump” in the road...

From Don...

Well, you may remember that we had to go to UCLA Westwood for an x-ray. Anyway the pictures showed a fracture of her hip right where the femur sits. The doctor (oncologist) was concerned that her legs didn't match and he suspected nerve damage or a constricting of the muscles from the radiation, so actually they (the doctors) were relieved that it is only a fracture! I guess that is a good thing.

So on Tuesday she was moved back to UCLA Santa Monica to the fourth floor this time, the orthopedic floor, for evaluation and determination, which means she will have surgery on Friday to repair the fracture. Of course this will postpone the next round of chemo – they told her at least three weeks from the surgery.

Tuesday turned out to be a comedy of errors. I got a call early that morning that I needed to pick her up from the facility and take her to emergency to be admitted. However I had returned home 331 miles away, so when I explained that I got an “oh, let me get back to you.” About a half hour later I got another call telling me they would transport her and that the orthopedist and oncologist were co-coordinating the next steps... Meanwhile Nancy finally got a call from the oncologist's office telling her to “pack up, she was being picked up in 30 minutes!” Of course I had just brought her more clothes and she had gone shopping – on her birthday outing – for various sundry items, so she now had a bit “more stuff” that she would need help packing. At this point she cannot walk at all, but she had learned to hop with the walker. Anyway, the “boys” showed up to transport her and immediately told her she can't take any of her stuff, because she is going in through emergency, to which Nancy called me (again I am 331 miles away) to make some calls. I was able to reach the – oh hell one of – the offices and they said they never heard of such a thing! As I was calling Nancy back, she was calling me to say that the other paramedic, checked and found out that she was being admitted so she could take her stuff. Remember Nancy only had about a half hour to react to all of this!!! I thought we were in a bad three stooges or Abbott & Costello (pick one, or both) movie.

Okay, all got settled and Nancy was “hooked up” again and going through a battery of tests and now that she is bedridden they have to take the

whole bed each time she needs pictures or anything out of the room. No more prancing around for her. Damn, just when she was starting to gain some freedom and movement. Oh well, as she says, "one more step."

I'll update when I get back.

Sent: Wednesday, January 28, 2009 7:50 PM

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don ...

As you may remember Nancy had hip replacement surgery on Friday (actually a half of hip – just the femur part). The surgery went very well. It was performed by a cancer orthopedist (or orthopedic cancer doctor – It is a whole different ballgame when you have to do surgery on a cancer patient!) I actually saw the before and after pictures on Saturday morning. She is still in the hospital (UCLA Santa Monica) but should be getting out tomorrow or Friday and then transferred back to the SKF (skilled nursing facility) for continued PT to strengthen her legs. Actually she stood up on both legs on Saturday morning and has taken a couple of “walks” already. The doctor is confident that eliminating this problem will greatly help her in continuing the treatment, so that is encouraging. The next chemo round will have to wait at least three weeks from the surgery (possibly longer), but again being “physically healthy” will help greatly.

Some of you have asked why didn't they detect the fracture sooner, well the simple answer is they weren't looking for it and it may have been further advanced by her trying to use that leg and... Well when I asked that doctor about that and a couple of other questions he said simply: “What came before is really moot and irrelevant at this point, because it only matters what we do going forward.” That is basically where we left it, so you know what I (we) know.

Okay I will finish on another Don story. So, Monday just before I left, Nancy and I went through all her “stuff” and determined that I should bring some of the items back home for now. Well, I had her toiletries and a few other personal items that she wanted to keep, which I packed into a bag and put in the suitcase. However her hairbrush was on the table and I asked her... yes I did, if she wanted to keep it? Of course she just looked at me and said simply: “Well, I don't think I'll need it!” I tried desperately to make that brush disappear from my hand, but instead sheepishly placed it in the box I was taking home. Hey, you know...

Nancy said to thank everyone for their thoughts and prayers. I print out the email and the all the responses, which I bring to her to read. She sends her thanks to everyone. Really guys and gals, thank you.

One last thing, we decided it would be best to send cards here to me, which I open and read to her. I then bring the cards down for her to look at as well.

Much love,

Don

Sent: Monday, February 16, 2009 11:17 AM

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don ...

Hi all,

I know it's been a while, but we really didn't know any more.

Nancy was sprung from the SNF on Saturday February 7 and I took her to Maggie's (Mom) house. We had a (hip) doctor's appointment on Thursday the 12th, so I cam back to June for a couple of days. She was released from surgery on Thursday, which means she was available to start the next chemo go around. We spoke to the oncologist and his PA and we all decided to give Nancy a few more days to get stronger for the next beating, so she is scheduled to enter the hospital on Friday, February 20 to start the next eight day treatment.

I can tell you she is doing good, walking, standing, getting in and out of bed, the car, so I really think these extra days will greatly help her gain back her strength, no to mention her psyche.

As always, she reminds me to tell everyone thanks for their thoughts, prayers and cards.

Don



Sent: Sunday, February 22, 2009 4:06 PM

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don...

We saw the oncologist on Friday Morning and he said he was impressed with her progress and that the piece of bone they took from her femur, you know the hip thing, confirmed what he thought and that it also confirmed that he is pursuing the right course of treatment.

Leave it to Nancy to be unique! Not only dose she have a rare form of cancer, she also has a rare form of that type of cancer!!

So after the doctor visit we went straight to the hospital and checked her in for the next 8 day regimen of chemo. However she should be able to leave the hospital when that is done (probably Sunday or Monday, March 1 or 2) and go back to Maggie's for the two week recovery and waiting period. After the two week period she will undergo a new set of "pictures" and tests to evaluate her progress.

One thing that did come up at the doctor's office (and we had had some inkling to) is that because the chemo treatment was interrupted, you know that hip thing, she may have another eight day treatment in her future. The type of cancer she has is best treated with chemo because it is in the body as opposed to being an organ or specific type. However there may still be a need for radiation, but that is to be determined.

The good news is Nancy is doing great, especially being able to walk again. This time in she won't have the apprehension and stress, besides I taught her to "hit that button" if she doesn't like the person taking care of her. She already spoke up and had them change a nurse, so I have no fear that she will hold her own. It was tough leaving, but like I said she is doing great, sitting up the whole day Saturday, taking charge and the like. I won't pretend to say it should be easier this time - going through chemo is never easy - But with her attitude in place, her spirit high and her ability to get out of bed and be quite a bit more self sufficient, I believe this time will be better.

I plan on heading down on Thursday - Nancy insists on Friday - but we agreed to decide Wednesday night depending on how she feels.

She is back at UCLA Santa Monica, if anyone would have a moment to stop by, I'm sure she'd like that. Like I said this time she is ready, unlike last time, when it was overwhelming and she was still battling the ramifications of the fall on top of the chemo and radiation. I swear to God, I'd be off whimpering in a corner if I had my ass kicked like she has. To see her now, well lets just say all things considered she is doing great!

As always she reminds me to thank everyone for their thoughts and prayers and she said she just knows with everyone pulling for her, she'll get through this.

Much love,

Don & Nancy

Sent: Sunday, March 08, 2009 12:48 PM

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don...

Nancy had her second round of 8 day chemo, which ended on Friday February 27 (they stopped it a day early because she was pretty beat up). She stayed in the hospital through the weekend, then Monday and finally went home Tuesday night at 10:00pm! The doctors wanted more fluids and blood in her before she left. I took her to Maggie's Tuesday night and came home on Wednesday.

She is in recovery mode and really shouldn't have visitors yet, no fresh vegetables or fruit, no restaurant food either, only fresh cooked items until her count is back up. A home health nurse comes by to take vitals and blood and a therapist will be by tomorrow (Monday) to start working with her. She has this next week off (to recover) and the week of the sixteenth will be the follow up week, but we don't know any details yet.

She is getting better every day, but is still quite worn out.

As always she reminds me to thank everyone for their thoughts, prayers and good wishes.

Love to all,

Nancy & Don

Sent: Sunday, April 12, 2009 12:55 PM

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don...

Just a quick update on the latest.

Nancy started a radiation (low dose) treatment last Wednesday for 15 sessions to reduce a lesion.

We saw the oncologist back on March 31 and he decided to do this treatment now (first) before the next chemo treatment. The good news is Nancy is able to do this near Maggie's house so she (we) don't have to travel four times a day for a 15 second treatment. Yeah!!!

I have been home for a two straight weekends (Nancy's orders!) but I will be heading down this Thursday for a long visit.

That's really about all. I haven't updated in a while, because we really didn't know much. Basically Nancy is doing great, walking better, doing her exercises and getting stronger every day.

As always Nancy says thanks for your thoughts and prayers.

Don

Sent: Saturday, May 9, 2009 9:57:02 AM  
Subject: I'm Home !!

Saw my UCLA oncologist on Tuesday and he said he would be great for me to go home (June Lake home !!) for a few days. Will call him on Monday to see what's next...

There is a new, new drug (came out about 2 months ago) specific to my cancer and he will lobby to get me into that clinical trial.

Thank you all your emails, prayers, thoughts, cards over the last months -- they really do help and I attribute them to my great attitude!

Haven't been home in 5 months -- or on a computer !

Happy Mother's days to all the mothers!

xox,  
Nancy

Sent: Monday, June 08, 2009 12:26 PM

Subject: Update from Nancy

From Don...

Hi all,

Nancy started the new chemo treatment, which is specific to her type of cancer.

Basically it is a 24 hour pump of chemo into her through a port, then at least 21 days recovery, then another 24 hour treatment, then 21 days...

She will be staying at Maggie's for the first two (three) treatments, but then I hope to bring her home during the treatments either end of July and August.

As always, she thanks everyone for their thoughts and prayers.

Don

Date: Sunday, June 28, 2009 11:27:11 am

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don ...

Nancy had her second treatment of the new chemo drug. It is beating her up pretty good. The first round she was sick most of the time between, but they adjusted her nausea meds and this time she's not so sick, but has zero energy. Her spirit and mind are hanging in there, but her body is hanging back...

Next week she is scheduled for a new scan and another treatment that following Monday, but the doctor said she could push it out a week if she is not feeling up to the task.

She is still at her moms, I just got back last night after a week there. We are still considering bringing her home between treatments but...

As always, she thanks everyone for their thoughts and prayers.

Love

Nancy & Don

Sent: Friday, July 31, 2009 12:13 PM

Subject: RE: Update on Nancy

I'm home in between treatments -- nice looking outside and seeing mountains !

After 2 treatments, the CT scan showed that the tumors have significantly shrunk ! Doctor is thrilled !

Thanks for all your well wishes, etc. I know they are helping !

Have a great weekend.

Love and hugs,  
Nancy



Sent: Aug 1, 2009 9:39 AM  
Subject: Greetings from Nancy !

I am home in between treatments 3 and 4.  
After the 2nd treatment, the CT scan showed that the  
“tumors had significantly shrunk”. Doctor is thrilled !  
Will head back to LA/OC next Sunday for 4th treatment.

Wonderful being home and looking at the Sierras instead of  
buildings -- I've only been on one outing -- having blood drawn in  
Mammoth -- but the smells of the pines and afternoon rains are  
exhilarating !

I want to thank everyone for your good wishes, prayers, emails,  
notes, etc...

I know that everything is helping me keep strong and get through  
this difficult journey.

Having Don by my side helps too ! Love isn't what you find on  
the Bachelor/Bachelorette, it's someone who w/o hesitation changes your  
bed pan and vomit bowl !! ;)

Local note of interest: A celebrity chef (I've never seen her show)  
will be filming a segment of an upcoming show about outdoor cooking at  
our Annual Fireman's BBQ (next Saturday).

I won't be able to go to the BBQ (not enough strength and too  
many folks), but Don will bring me back a plate! This event raises  
money for our volunteer fire dept - the entire town shows up as well as  
tourists.

Love and hugs to all of you. Take good care of yourself and love  
ones.

Nancy xox

Sent: Thursday, September 10, 2009 10:23 AM

Subject: update...

hope you all had a good Labor Day weekend ?

heard from the doctor's office late yesterday that I was accepted into what I refer to as the "pill program". No more chemo!

As with the chemo I was taking, this is a clinical research study (with possible side effects -- but nothing can be as bad as chemo).

Will start the process in a couple of weeks.

Thanks for all your prayers and good thoughts !

Nice being home and looking out the window at the aspen leaves rustling in the breeze and the lush green mountains landscaped w/pine trees !

With love and friendship,  
Nancy

Sent: Wednesday, November 11, 2009 12:57 PM

Subject: Thank you!

Hope all is good w/you and you had a good weekend.

I had a CT scan and MRI on Friday.

Met w/doctor on Monday and the tumors have shrunk by 9%. Doctor is thrilled.

Apparently, I must be on the "real" pill.

Asked the doctor (again) if I could go back to work and this time he said YES, as much as I could tolerate !

Thanks for all your prayers and good thoughts. I know they are working. Will talk to you soon.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Xxxxooo, Nancy

Sent: Thursday, January 28, 2010 1:12 PM

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don...

Hi all,

Right after New years Day, Nancy started experiencing shortness of breath, she called the Doctor on Monday and we had an appointment on Wednesday – we were scheduled to go down for a treatment that weekend. Well as soon as she got to the clinic they put her on oxygen and transported her to the emergency room. A cat scan and a few other tests later they discovered a large mass growing in her lung cavity – actually both, but most dominant on the right side. Thursday was spent deciding what to do and the answer was to med-flight her to LA to let her “team” of doctors decide on a course of action.

The situation was deemed critical and every attempt was focused on getting her breathing regulated, as well as controlling the extreme pain she was in, in her leg again – a result of the mass on the left side pushing against her spine and crushing the nerves. After the first week, Nancy was transferred from pulmonary back to the cancer ward and they started a rather intense radiation treatment, trying to stem the growth of that mass.

By the end of last week, Nancy’s breathing had stabilized and the pain was under control – although she stays pretty sedated from all the drugs she is taking. On Friday she was released from the hospital, but required to stay local to continue these radiation treatments.

After seeing both oncologists, the clinical on Monday and the main doctor on Tuesday, the consensus is for her to finish the radiation treatments (next week) take a week or so (about 10 days) rest and then regroup with the main oncologist. While she is still considered critical, there is some relief as long as the breathing stays stable.

After another two weeks there, I came home for a couple of days. Sorry we haven’t gotten back to everyone sooner, but that last three weeks have been pretty fast and furious, with some real roller coaster sessions...

Last week, my daughter and granddaughter came in from Chicago and were there to help spring Nancy from the hospital on Friday, which really

made her day and perk up her spirits. In addition my son and daughter-in-law and their son (Nancy was there for his birth and visited them for his first birthday – the day before the fall that started all this) drove over from Phoenix to spend the day Saturday, so she was surrounded by family. While she may have drifted sometimes and took a long nap on Saturday she had a great day. In fact she told the doctor at clinic on Monday that “I was pretty sedated and my family likes it that way!” Always the quipster.

One other Nancy ism, the pulmonary doctor that was treating her, came in last week and after examining her said she was “way better.” She looked up through heavy eyes and said “You mean after eight years of school working here at UCLA and prancing around in your white coat, the best you can say is way better that is your diagnosis?” To which he responded smiling “pretty much.” Which Nancy then closed her eyes and said softly. “Okay I’ll take that.”

I will be heading down Saturday morning and will be there for at least the next week. The plan right now is for her to finish radiation and take those days off, which we have decided would be best spent at her mom’s house, we don’t want to risk the stress and elevation of coming back to June, then we see the doctor...

All I can say and the only way I can say it is: GOD DAMN she is a fighter...

Love to all.

Don & Nancy

Date: Tue, 23 Feb 2010 17:54:21

Subject: Update on Nancy

From Don...

Nancy is back at her mom's for another week of doctor ordered rest. Nancy had to go back into the hospital two weeks ago, mostly dehydrated and nauseous from the radiation, but got out that Friday and went back to her mom's house. But then we had to see the doctor twice and get another MRI, so she didn't rest much last week.

The doctor wants to review the latest tests, the ones from before and the ones they took while she was in the hospital, to get a feel for what is going on. We should hear from him this week on the new game plan...

Nancy is doing as well as can be expected. I swear to God, I don't know how she dose it! Even the doctors shake their head when they see her.

Since her and Maggie (her mom) both move in slow motion it is working out for them together. When I'm there it is chaos (and HOT! What's with this 85 degree stuff??). Nancy sent me home so she could rest. Still in charge!

That's about it.

As always thanks for your thoughts and prayers.

PS Nancy would love to chit-chat (her new word) with all of you, but she just can't. Even talking on the phone tires her out quickly. As you may imagine her energy level is bordering on the negative side, but she said to tell you all that she'll catch up once her energy level increases.

~~~~~

Five days after this latest email, I went back down to LA planning on spending the week with her. Nancy had follow up appointments that week. What happened in the next couple of days was fast and furious and certainly overwhelming. While I didn't have the opportunity to do any more dispatches, I kept a journal of those following days that are presented here, of course with more Nancy stories.

Once again the cancer had grown unabated, while she was undergoing the radiation treatment. After the radiation treatments, we spent a grueling week visiting the doctor twice, another MRI ... this all finally proved to be too much as Nancy continued to deteriorate. After another week to recover at her mom's house, I came back down arriving early on a Sunday afternoon, February 28. Nancy was not doing well and we decided to go to the emergency room, she was suffering from severe nausea and violent vomiting and had been most of the weekend. The original center mass was preying on her intestines and stomach, preventing her from eating or drinking anything. This was the same mass that had also been the cause of her hip fracture.

On the morning after the emergency room visit, Monday March 1, I met with the doctor and he informed me that the center mass was just too much and he didn't believe there was anymore they could do for her. This diagnosis was then confirmed with her main oncologist, who concurred. The doctor further explained that due to her rapidly deteriorating condition, she had maybe a few days left to a week to 14 days on the outside, and that the best course of action now would be for her to begin end of life care.

Nancy had told me the night before that she couldn't do this anymore. We had made a pact that as long as she wanted to fight it, we would, but when she had enough or didn't have anything left I would respect that decision. The cancer had continued to grow unabated since the New Year's Day episode and the tumors had again grown in the center mass, crushing her stomach and intestines, leaving her unable to eat or drink anything. The intense radiation treatments had arrested the growth in her lung cavity, but had so depleted her that she had little to no strength left. The pain was continuing to increase every day and the latest meds, although continually increased, were of little help.

The doctor talked to Nancy about the diagnosis and she said she was done fighting. He asked her if she wanted to be somewhat alert and

have some pain, or pain free, but probably not alert at all. She said pain free, please no more pain.

Day one and two were spent in the hospital while they worked out the hospice stuff. Her brother came by on Tuesday morning and they had their talk. Nancy had asked to stay in the hospital through Wednesday, which actually worked out. Day three, Wednesday, the paperwork, medicines and such were all worked out and she was transported to a facility for her end of life care. She was processed in, a DNR and a do not transport was added to her chart. I spent that first night with her.

On that night the hospice check in nurse came by to check on her and when Nancy said her pain was still a five, he said: "oh no, we can't have that" and prescribed further meds that basically put her to sleep.

Day four and five, her mom and best friend came by while we held vigil. Day six, Saturday, her brother and sister-in-law came by as well. Her best friend went home, but came back to spend the week with her mom and I. At this point, Nancy basically slept, not much activity due to the combination of meds.

On day 11, while I was sitting next to her, she gave a large gasp and I saw her one eye – the cancer had taken the other eye – roll back and I thought that was it. However, a moment later she opened that eye, looked at me and asked: "Hi Honey, what's up?" She did the same thing on Friday, day 12. On Saturday, day 13, the family came by to visit with her.

On Monday, day 15, she asked me: "What's happening? Why am I still here?" To which, I didn't have an answer, nor did anyone else. From that day on she asked me that every morning, which of course I still didn't have an answer.

During that period, she seemed to get stronger and better, holding conversations, very alert and not missing much. Each night, I went home fully expecting to get the call, but it never came. Each morning, I walked in and there she was, with her morning question.

I would arrive just before 7 am each morning and because it was early in the year, the sun was just coming up. I would walk in, set my coffee on the tray, put her purse on the nightstand next to her and open the blind on my side at the foot of the bed. It was a ritual, I would take her purse home – to Maggie's – every night and bring it back in the

morning. Sometimes she would ask for it and I would set the purse in her lap, but she would eventually fall back asleep and I would put the purse back on the nightstand.

There were two chairs by her bed, one right next to her on the side of the bed and the other at the foot of the bed where I usually held court. If she would wake up, she could see me sitting there. However, during these mornings when she was alert – she had decided to take the second med at night so she could be awake during the day even if she was in a bit of pain – I would open the blind by her and I would sit in the chair at her side, while we had a little “chit-chat.” We talked about many things and nothing.

I had tried desperately to get her back to her beloved June Lake, but the situation wouldn't allow it. I spoke with the doctors, the nurses and the hospice people and they did consider it for a moment, but decided that just wouldn't work and the best course would be for her to remain where she was.

Even with all the meds, Nancy remained alert and responsive. On most mornings our “chit-chats” were fairly comprehensive – with her giving me instructions of course! I held nothing back and we discussed everything that was going on, usually in detail. She understood. On one of those mornings, she was very lively and animated. She turned her head fully toward me focusing on me with that one eye – she usually stared straight ahead as we talked, but this time she focused in on me. Gathering herself and pointing she said – and I quote exactly here: “So, I'm going to die in Orange County? How the fuck did that happen?” I smiled back at her surprised. Nancy was not one to use that language that was usually left to me. She turned back facing forward still shaking her head.

On Friday, day 19, she turned to me with that one eye and said: “Okay, don't lie to me now. I want the truth. Why am I still here?” Of course, I still didn't have an answer... On days 21, 22, 23 and 24, she mostly slept, but on day 25, that morning was memorable.

When I arrived a little before 7am as I usually did, all the lights were on and she was wide-awake and obviously very agitated. She spoke in such clarity it was amazing. Her voice and speech had been deteriorating both from the disease and the heavy medication. When I asked her how she was doing, she responded: “How dose it look like I'm doing?” She followed that up with: “I need to die today.” And for me to

call her mom to get her here because: "I need to die today." I got her mom on the phone and Nancy told her: "You need to be here, because I need to die today."

Four days prior to being hospitalized, she had been unable to eat or drink anything and because she couldn't keep anything down, she stopped trying. We had developed a routine of her taking liquid, swishing it around in her mouth and spitting that back out, but recently her throat had healed enough from the radiation treatments that she was able to swallow. Unfortunately, she immediately vomited everything back up. She and I had reached a deal that if she didn't mind throwing everything back up I didn't mind cleaning it up. She had her "spit cup" that she kept close by and we used for this venture. However, this morning she drank water as fast as I could pour it and somehow kept it all down. Obviously something else was happening here.

I finally was able to get from her what was going on. Apparently she had a bad night and needed to die so she wouldn't have another bad night, so the bad people wouldn't get her, she said. Apparently when this particular overnight crew came in to change her they had been a little too rough and had so scared her, not to mention caused her great pain that she couldn't bear to go through that again. She said again she couldn't bear to have the bad people attack her again. The problem was that the center mass didn't move as fast as she did. She had to be rolled slowly, to let the mass catch up, otherwise it would drop down hard or over depending on which way she was turned, causing her excruciating pain. All of the regular staff knew and understood this situation and except for this one night that had never been a problem. I reported the incident to the day nurse who called her supervisor, who tried to apologize to Nancy, but Nancy wasn't haven't any.

Nancy was livid. Finally, her mom arrived and we were able to get her to take the other medicine that relaxes her that she only wanted to take at night so she could be awake during the day. After that, she was able to calm down. Once the medicine kicked in she slept in exactly the same position for the next seven hours. She was only awakened by the hospice nurse making her daily visit after which she went right back to sleep. I explained to the hospice nurse what had happened. The hospice nurse also looked into the incident. We had a Chaplin come by that night to do the spiritual thing as well, hoping to sooth her.

On Friday morning, day 26, she was much more relaxed, but still talkative and responsive. She said: "I guess I kind of freaked out

yesterday huh?” Later that morning, a hospice doctor came by to look Nancy over – truly surprised that she was still alive. Of course, Nancy asked this doctor why she was still here. The doctor looked at me, but I only pointed back to Nancy, saying I certainly didn’t have the answer. The doctor said that since Nancy was in such good health otherwise, heart and lungs strong, her body was fighting back hard, keeping her going. In essence, her good health was keeping her alive, while it was also helping the cancer grow rapidly. Nancy seemed to except that explanation. All in all, she had a fairly good day, chatty with the doctor and the nurses that came by, in good spirits, napping – drifting as we came to call it.

Saturday, day 27, she remained talkative and upbeat. Her brother and sister-in law came by as did her best friend and mom. On this day, Nancy held court, giving directions on what she wanted to drink, and how she wanted to drink it – she always wanted the ice on the bottom the cold ice, not the ice on top in her drinks. She would shake the cup rattling the ice around as she drank, a feat that was both mesmerizing and cute watching her. She kept us all hoping, focusing in with that one eye. We all visited until early afternoon. Nancy started to drift after that and basically rested. A pretty great day.

Sunday, day 28, I arrived a little earlier than usual and when she saw me enter, she watched me for a moment with that one eye, then said: “So, I guess I’m still here huh?” To which I responded: “Yup.” And she responded: “Oh Christ.”

I thought, oh boy, its going to be one of those days, but she basically slept the rest of the day, waking for moments at a time wanting a sip of water, but falling asleep before she could drink it or finish it. That night as I was preparing to go home – we had a routine, the swing shift nurse would help change her, freshen her up and give her the adavan, an anti-anxiety drug, the other med, to help her sleep through the night, but because she couldn’t keep anything down the drug was administered through an eye dropper under her tongue – I would wait a few minutes for the drug to kick in, tuck her in, put the call button in her left hand, the pain med drug button in her right hand and kiss her good night on the forehead. However, this night I said I wanted a real kiss. I saw her pucker her lips and I bent down to plant a wet one on her. As I pulled away I heard this faint chuckle. In her drug induced speech she whispered slowly: “Ha, ha ,ha, you kissed me on my adavan, now you’ll be asleep like me. Ha, ha, ha.” I actually started feeling my lower lip, until I noticed the wide grin on her face. She had gotten me again. I waited another moment before leaving. Those were the last words she spoke.

Monday, day 29, she was asleep when I arrived and they told me she slept through the night. Tuesday, Day 30 was about the same. On Wednesday, day 31, I had to go home – to June Lake – 350 miles away for the day to take care of a few things. I arrived back early on Thursday, day 32. Nancy was quite a bit agitated, but seemed to calm down once she saw me in my usual post at the foot of her bed. The staff said she had kept them hoping the day before and was glad I was back to take care of her, which they said with the greatest affection.

On Friday, day 33, I arrived early as usual. Nancy was in some distress. The nurse came in and gave me the look. We tried to calm her down, which she finally did knowing I was there. I sat next to her and held her hand.

Nancy died at 9:55a on April 2, 2010, Good Friday.

Her strength, stamina and courage continued to beat the odds. Although given 3 to 14 days, she hung in there for 33 days, all of them in good spirits, witty charming and graceful to the very end. I shall miss her every day.

Sent: Saturday, April 03, 2010 1:00 PM

Subject: Nancy

From Don...

It is with unbearable sadness that I must inform you that Nancy passed away yesterday morning (Friday).

She fought hard to the very end.