

Denise Royston

I was diagnosed with Stage 2B Pancreatic Cancer on January 17th, 2023. My illness started on Friday, January 6th. I woke up nauseous and started vomiting. I thought I probably had one of those 24-hour bugs, so I stayed home from work and hoped I would feel better if I slept it off. Later in the day I started having pains in my upper abdomen. Anything I tried to eat made me sick. The weekend didn't go so well, either. Nothing would mask the pain making it hard to sleep. I couldn't eat or drink anything that wouldn't make me vomit. On Monday, I went to the doctor. They told me it was a viral infection and prescribed steroids. Finally on Wednesday, I felt a little better. I actually was able to eat some supper that night. But it didn't last long, and I started vomiting again. Thursday it was back to the doctor. I told him I seemed to be constipated so he prescribed a Dulcolax. This did nothing. The pain was so fierce and vomiting would not stop.

On Friday I went to the doctor. I told him "This is day 8 and I can't take it any longer. Either put me in the hospital or give him something to make this pain bearable." After labs were done, it was determined something was wrong with my liver. The lab tech noticed that my eyes were yellow, so I knew things were bad. We received a call from the doctor that I needed to go in for a CT scan. I was a little worried, so I checked my reports on my Avera Chart portal and saw a note that scared me. It said the bio-duct to my liver was closed and a mass on my pancreas. WHAT??? I chose to ignore the "mass" part and worried more about my liver. The call from the doctor's office confirmed the results. Since it was late on a Friday afternoon, they said there is not much they can do until Monday. My husband, Mike, told them that this has gone on too long and she can't make it through the weekend. They advised us to go to ER at McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls and they will get things moving.

Get things moving is an understatement. Once we arrived at ER on Saturday, January 14th, things did get moving. We were advised that they would be doing a surgery to put a stint in my liver bio-duct and biopsy the tumor. Surgery was done on Sunday and on Tuesday, it was confirmed that I had pancreatic cancer.

"I have cancer" are words that I never thought would come out of my mouth. But here I am, on the cancer journey. Am I scared? Yes! Am I optimistic? Yes! I could not go through this without the love and support of my family. My number 1 is my husband, Mike. He has been by my side every step of the way. Cleaning, cooking, laundry, running errands, picking up meds all while keeping his Mike's Maintenance Services customers happy. The support of my family, my extended, my co-workers at Fischer Rounds & Associates (aka my FRAmily) and my friends have been overwhelming. I love them all so dearly.

Our family has been involved and supported the Heart & Sole Cancer walk for many, many years. We received a donation from Heart & Sole when I was diagnosed. Their financial support has helped alleviate some of our expenses. Thank you, Heart & Sole!

I will continue 3 more months of chemo and then have what is known as the Whipple surgery to remove the tumor. It's a long road but I'm not going on this journey alone. I know that God is with me and HIS plan is my plan. My cancer motto is "IN IT TO WIN IT" and that's what I'm going to do.