



## 'Her Story'

*(As told by Jeanette K. Regnier & Emily Franz)*

Installment Fifty (October 17, 2007)

### **“GET UP!”**

"What? Did you just say something to me?" I ask again. "Yes", says Jim. "You need to get up." "But I just fell asleep", I say, drowsy with exhaustion. "Jeanette, she's gone," Jim says gently and I am up and across the hall in her room kneeling beside her bed in disbelief. "Why is it so quiet?" I don't understand what's going on and why the constant hum of the oxygen concentrator is silent. I touch her. She is cold. She looks like a beautiful and sleeping princess. Jim is beside me and I am touching her still. The baldness of her head with the constant sweat the narcotics caused was cool and present. She is gone and I feel my heart hurting, breaking, and being filled with the sad joy of knowing that she is no longer suffering silently inside of a shell that tumors and pain have taken hostage. It is still dark in her room. Matt rouses from his reclining chair beside his wife. He seems to understand her absence and process it much sooner than I. He is silent, and watches as I speak to her and ramble on about my love and pride in her life and battle. It is October the 22nd, in the wee hours of the morning. She is gone.

On October the 18th just days before Emily celebrates her husband's birthday: The last time Emily made it down the steps to the kitchen to show her husband that nothing could keep her from rejoicing in his existence and their joint love for each other and the baby girl they created. It was a long month of October, spent mostly at the U of M Hospital where nothing and everything was being done to sustain her. No hope of a cure or even a slowing of the progression of the monster inside but blood from loving donors, pain relief and the love of the many nurses and doctors who became her allies, friends, and more than anything, respect for each others differences. Emily forgave them all for their inability to make the disease process stop completely. Still, she had no intention of dying: None.

Matt's 28th birthday was so difficult. Em hurt and she was unable to do much more than lie in bed and wait for the minor relief of the Oxycontin or any other drug that could allow her to speak softly to her baby or sleep beside her husband once more. The house was full of family and Miranda from the Cancer center at the U. Emily and Miranda seemed to have a connection I could not see and each visit to the hospital brought Miranda out from the back of the clinic to share a dating story or a hug. I always gave them space to just be young women with so much to tell.

We had pizza and watched as Adam; once again, found a way to be just silly enough to make his sister laugh out loud. Oh, what a sound! Adam will hopefully get to reading this someday and know how much she truly loved him. Emily loved him, more than he ever understood. She would have loved for them to be closer; for him to know that she found him aggravating and loving and funny all at the same time. She always hoped if she ever needed another bone marrow transplant, that he would be her perfect match. Adam and Liz WERE tested a few months before in case they could battle back the dragon and get Emily strong enough for another transplant but it was shocking to find out that they were

only a match of 2 out of 6 antigens needed. Adam and Liz were only 3 of 6 for a match for each other. Jim and I never got close enough to pray for the need for us to be tested too.

The day of Matt's birthday, Pastor John made the long drive to Riverview to pray with and counsel his parishioner. He, Matt and Em spent a good deal of time in the early part of the day together in the suite of rooms they occupied. John lay beside Emily in her bed, offering her comfort and the promise of a healthy body and joy beyond any she knew here on earth. She just had to believe in the promise of Heaven and peace. She did believe.

Emily was animated at the birthday party for Matt. Matt's sister Tonya and his mother were enjoying the food and fun but Emily was just interested in watching Cecelia with all the people around her. She smiled so much I felt that just maybe, maybe, I was going to see a turn around in her and she would rebound and live for many more years. At one point in the party, Emily broke up every single one of us with one simple statement supplied with a sly little grin. "Um, did I dream this today or was my pastor in bed with me this morning?" she asked. Well, the laughter that erupted was louder than any I had heard, including from Emily, in a year or two. She timed that well.

It took four people to get Emily back up the stairs of the house after the cake and presents. Hip sockets loaded with cancer made moving up or down so hard. A swollen abdomen with the growing liver covered in lesions and tumors. Still, Emily was determined. Amanda held the pain pump, Matt at her right side, Jim behind in case she came free-falling into her father's arms. Me with the IV tubes and following up closely on her left. She climbed into the bed she has spent most of the last month in and closed her tired eyes after she smiled broadly at Matt. She whispered another "Happy Birthday" and fell into an uncomfortable rest.

It seemed that after Matt's birthday, life in our house became more about how to keep it all going than just spending time with Emily. Stolen moments that required time on the phone ordering the next drug or IV: At the computer, getting messages of status to Lindsay or Dr. J. I became a beggar of sorts and felt no shame in it. If she hurt and I could not get someone to the house to adjust her pain pump, I would run across the street to retrieve Rick, an anesthetist at a local hospital. It was becoming apparent that we would have to have the hospice group come in to help and make assessments for us. They sure do know how to be loving and kind in the face of so much constant pain. God sent them to keep me from becoming shrill and angry over her pain and lack of control. Wonderful women and nurses! This 17th of October was the last time Em saw her loved Dr. Jakabowiak as well. He came to be with her one last time.

The day after Matt's birthday, Verna and her daughter Sierra, came for a short visit with Emily. I was surprised to find her alert, awake and talking animatedly from her bed. I am unsure of how long the visit lasted but Emily seemed delighted to revel in their company. If she were in the usual tremendous pain, she hid it well. Not more than two hours after they departed, the hospital bed arrived. I ran to the store to get her NEW and different bedding before it was to arrive but by the time I got home, she was getting up from the queen bed and promptly climbed into the smaller, more comfortable bed against my protests of wanting to make it up beautifully for her. I guess she just knew it was time to stop dying next to Matt and create some comfort for her weary bones.

Emily never got out of this institutional-looking contraption again. The pain was coming in much larger waves and so, in turn, were the dosages of pain control. Soon the hospice nurses were coming over more often. Emily was not speaking much and getting her to eat was not possible, nor drink for that matter. We took turns swabbing her mouth with sponge pops soaked in a bit of fresh water. That night Lindsay and her spirit-filled husband, Doug, came to the house in the evening. Emily was no longer aware but we gathered around her bed and in a lovely and powerful plea to God, Doug asked for the Lord's will to be done. I was moved beyond words that they would make the trip from Canton and spend so much time in prayer at the foot of her bed: Messenger's with hope.

The last words my baby girl spoke to me were the ones I always knew but loved that it was for me. "I love you", she whispered. I returned the words over and over as she fell into a comatose sleep. I still feel blessed to have those three simple words as a gift that will last me until the day that I join her forever.

On the 21st of October, it seemed that Jim, Matt, Liz, Martha, Tonya and I were always in her room. Adam was at the house until he needed to sleep. All rooms were occupied including couches so Adam went home for the night. Martha; back to her hotel room. She would continue her prayer vigil in the morning. Martha looked so tired and I know she must have felt like an outsider with Matt and I always tending to Emily. Still, she was at Em's bedside whenever we could not be.

Jim was in with his first born daughter and telling her how much he loved her. She responded for the very last time to tell her Dad that, "She was HOT!" He adjusted her fan to cool her face directly while I called Lindsay to say that Em had not roused except to display pain and then I called Dr. J.: Oh, he was so wonderful. I insisted that her heart rate was far too high and her blood oxygen levels were way too low. He listened patiently and said it was normal. "Rest Jeanette." he insisted. "Go to bed, it's very late and Matt is right there beside her!" I knew he was right and we would all need the rest required to care for her the next day.

Sometime between 1 am and 5 am! She is gone!

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