

CHAPTER 2: Thanksgiving

It was last Thanksgiving Day. I was watching football in the family room with my dad and my little brother, Trevor, when my mom got a phone call from her doctor. Usually doctors don't call people on Thanksgiving. I knew something was wrong. Mom hadn't been feeling well and I knew she had gone to see the doctor a few times. She took the call in my parents' bedroom instead of in the kitchen where she normally takes calls and where I can hear her talk. I guess she knew it was going to be bad news.

When she finally hung up and came out to the family room her eyes were wet and she was kind of pale and she had a sad look on her face. She looked at my dad with a blank stare and nodded her head like she was saying yes, then called me back into her room and sat me down on the bed. "Tyler, I have some not-so-good news," she said quietly. "I'm very sick. I have cancer. It's a type of cancer called non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Do you know what that is?"

I didn't answer. I didn't say anything at all. I just shook my head to say no. I didn't have a clue what non-Hodgkin's lymphoma was. My stomach started to turn and I felt like I couldn't breathe. I knew a little bit about cancer because Grampa Jack had it, too. He had something called prostate cancer. I knew that cancer was a bad disease that can kill



SNOWMAN ON THE PITCHER'S MOUND

you and that lots of people get it, even teachers and famous athletes and people in your own family.

“Are you going to die?” It’s the first thing that came out of my mouth. I was shaking when I said it, but I wasn’t crying. My mom’s eyes opened real wide. She looked surprised that I would ask her that question, but not angry.

“Oh, I hope not, honey, but I won’t be able to do too much for a while,” Mom said. “I have to take some medicine for the cancer first, and I guess I’m going to be pretty sick for a while.”

“How long’s a while?” I asked.

“I just don’t know exactly, probably for a few months,” she said, shrugging her shoulders and looking me right in the eye. Mom seemed more concerned about me than she was for herself. Like I was going to freak out or something. I guess it’s because of how hard it was on me when Grampa Jack, who was my dad’s dad, died two years ago from prostate cancer, which my mom said he actually had for a long time, like almost 10 years. Grampa Jack and I were close, and I didn’t accept the fact very well that he died.

“I may not get well at all and it’s possible that I may die from this and join your grandfather in heaven,” Mom said, gripping my right hand tightly with her hands. “You’re just going to have to be strong about this.”

I looked up at the ceiling, sighed a very long and heavy sigh, and nodded my head in agreement. I was determined not to cry and trying to convince her that I could handle this, but I wasn’t sure. Mom must have known that I was thinking: “Why are people I care about getting sick and dying around here? What’s going on?”

Then she told me some more things about cancer. I know it must have scared her to even think about it, but she was strong. She’s been so strong through all of this.

Just a few days after she told me she was sick, my mom started something called chemotherapy. That’s when they give you a bunch of really strong drugs through a needle that they stick in your arm to



kill the cancer. But sometimes the drugs can make you sick, too. The “chemo,” as everyone seems to call it, lasted like four months, and Mom lost her hair and wore a wig for a while and lost some weight and didn’t eat very much. She was very tired at times, too, and I could hear her in the bathroom getting sick a few times. But for the most part she handled the chemo pretty well. And the cancer went away, at least for a little while.

I guess my my dad’s aunt went through chemo, too. She had something called ovarian cancer, but no one told me until recently. I wasn’t even born yet when she had cancer, and I don’t remember her very well, but my mom told me that she lived for a very long time after she was diagnosed with cancer. She was brave. I think all people who fight cancer are very brave. I also think every kid whose mom has cancer is brave. At least I try to be.

But it’s going to get hard again, because yesterday morning my mom told me that her cancer has come back and she’s going to have to be treated again.

I had already invited Arnie to spend the night when I found out, and mom said to go ahead and have him over. This time, my mom is taking all kinds of natural supplements, which are kind of like vitamins, to help her body fight the cancer. And she is going to be taking a different drug. It’s a treatment called radio-immunotherapy that is just starting to help people, and the doctors tell her they hope and think it will work better than her last treatment. I looked up radio-immunotherapy on the Internet, and it does seem to be a pretty amazing drug but not many people know about it yet.

My mom is taking a chance with this treatment but she thinks it is a very good chance and she tells me that the studies say it actually works better than any other drug for the type of cancer she has. I know that this time I have to be brave for her, and for myself. I wasn’t quite so brave or strong last year when she first found out. Let’s just say I’ve had a rough time getting used to all this.

