

# HOPE IN FACE OF SICKNESS—SHELLI SELLARS' BATTLE WITH CANCER

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LINKING GOD'S PEOPLE TO REACH THE UNREACHED

## The Bridge Report



Joe and Shelli Sellars, just before Shelli's colon surgery

### EXCERPTS FROM SHELLI SELLARS' JOURNAL IN HER OWN WORDS

**JANUARY 21:** HOPE is the word for this new race we're running! Though finding cancer in my colon & lung has thrown giant hurdles in our path, it hasn't broken our stride, nor shaken the fact that God loves us & plans to bring victory to our lives. We're running to win!... and we're going to finish with great joy! He's an awesome coach & we trust Him as we race into His arms, knowing that, even when the running gets hard, He is always good.

When you think of the Sellars, one of the first words that comes to mind is "adventurous". Well... we have found ourselves on a very unexpected adventure, the adventure of trusting God and having peace through a very difficult health issue - colon cancer, which has metastasized to my right lung.

I'd had a nagging cough for several months which kept getting worse and wasn't helped by any medications or treatment. I finally got a chest x-ray, which led to all kinds of other tests and two biopsies, resulting in the diagnosis that nobody ever wants to hear- cancer.

As scary as that word is, we KNOW that God is good, that He loves, and that He holds me in His hands! We KNOW that He is faithful and just and kind, that He's our ever present help in trouble, and that He will take good care of me! We KNOW that we are more than conquerors, that we are over-comers, and that we can walk in peace and joy, even as fear tries to overtake us. It's so true!!!! And, though I've certainly had my share of tearful and worried moments, I'm smiling. As usual! A lot! *My smile doesn't come from the happiness around me... nor does it fade in the sadness that surrounds. It comes from the assurance deep inside that I am loved and adored by a God who will never ever let me down!* No, I don't understand nor like our current path, but I do plan to walk it (run it! hike it!) with my head held high, knowing that I am a child of the greatest King, and that He is on my side!!!! It will be alright, no matter what....

Cont....

### JANUARY 27

Well, I'm sitting here on the eve of my first big surgery, sipping broth from my big blue "smile mug" and wearing my snuggly green "prayer shawl," thinking, "Yep, that's just what I need tonight, a big smile and a prayer- lots of 'em!" In other words, it's been a hard day.... You know how it is when you know something, but it doesn't become real until someone official says it? Of course, I know that when cancer has metastasized, it's officially "Stage 4," but... today was the first time my doctor used those words.... Needless to say, it hit hard.

Though it's not been easy to do today, I am rising up and encouraging myself in the Lord, remembering His promises to me, His love, His faithfulness, His care. I am not alone in this! He is going to bring me through!!! And I really believe that.

When I'm not fighting my "weepy" emotions, I am completely convinced that this sickness is not unto death. God's told me in so many ways! In fact, in late 2008, I had an amazing encounter with God at the lake, and He told me that, in addition to focusing on educating my kids, my job for 2009 was to stay fit, because I was *"standing before a physical crisis which I wouldn't get through unless I was healthy."* Yes, He really said that to me! And, yes, I really took it seriously. Now, I didn't live in



fear over it. I put the warning on the shelf for Him to do with what He wanted, but I took the directive to heart and obeyed.

No one, not even super-hard-on-myself-Shelli, can ever question whether or not I did the "unless" part. In 2007, I had lost 100 pounds, and in 2009 I lost more weight, bringing my total weight loss since 2007 to 115 pounds! Through knee injury, back injury, even discovering that I have a chromosome mutation and I am a clotter, I never gave up. I fought to stay fit and to get in even better shape. I did the "unless" and I fully expect God to do the "get through"! I will survive this!!!!

I am already so overwhelmed by how many people are loving and praying for me... and for the entire Sellars family. We feel so carried, like we're running this race on someone else's legs. Thank you so very much!!! We love you all and treasure every encouraging word, and every single act of service you've offered. It's so incredible that we're not running this race alone.

### JANUARY 28

**Joe here.** Just wanted to let you know that Shelli is out of surgery, which went well. The primary tumor was removed with a few lymph nodes. She is in recovery, I should be



# HOPE IN FACE OF SICKNESS

able to see her soon. Thanks for your prayers. One more step down in our journey!

## FEBRUARY 6

I made it successfully through my colon resection. Praise God, I didn't have to get a "poo bag," all my tubing seems to be working just fine! I'm also thrilled I didn't have to have anything else removed. Even though the tumor had "grown through my colon and stuck to my uterus and surrounding organs," the margins of malignancy are good, meaning, they think they left nothing behind in the colon area... and what little they may have missed, the chemo should zap. That's great news!

As for recovery, we've had a few little hurdles to jump. First, was my reaction to all the medications. Talk about loopy! So crazy, in fact (slurred speech, sudden sleep, dizziness, etc.), that I ended up getting another CT Scan and another MRI in search of evidence of a stroke or the spreading of cancer to my brain. And, though a very small mini-stroke was discovered, they are not at all concerned about this "abnormal abnormality". Best of all — no more cancer! Talk about happy news!!!

However, because of the MRI, the nurses had to remove my staples early, resulting in my healthy incision becoming infected. And that's where I'm living right now.... It's pretty miserable, also emotionally. Very frustrating! But... it's not the end of the world! And, though I've had to fight the blues pretty hard these past couple days (amazing how pain pulls you down!), I'm doing OK. Nah, I don't think I'm on top of my "being joyful in all things" game, but I'm playing. Hard! And I'm not giving up! God is so faithful and He's brought me so far already. We can beat this infection, too!!!!

## FEBRUARY 12

Wow! Today has been a really hard slap in the face... and I'm still reeling. Bad! Been super weepy all day, and the tears just don't seem to stop... Just yesterday, I was marveling from the side of being miraculously accepted by a fantastic general surgeon, as

well as an awesome lung surgeon... even though we have a puny \$25,000 capped insurance..

But... today, I was rejected by Medicaid... they even indicated we would have been better off if we were jobless and had no insurance. Doesn't seem right or fair. Very, very frustrating to say the least.

Worst of all, even though a particular oncologist has been promising me for nearly two weeks he'll give me chemo, suddenly he won't. It's an insurance game. I'm sure the doctor is not a cold, heartless person. But... how can a doctor turn someone away just because they're self pay? We really believe we're



### Shelli's Birthday Celebration in the Hospital

going to get the tens of thousands of dollars worth of chemo drugs donated (or at least at cost). He'd get his money, but because their pharmacy doesn't deal with my insurance or self-pay - let alone "donations" - they won't take me....

I feel thrown out of the life raft... and even the sharks are swimming away....Talk about feeling worthless and rejected....

Yet, though my heart is screaming in pain, **my mind knows that it knows that it knows that God has a plan! He'd never throw me out of the boat!...** He's somehow going to use this painful process to lead me to the oncologist who is just right for me.... It's going to be SO GOOD! **I've just got to bring my heart into alignment with that which I KNOW to be true!**

## FROM R.K.'S CORNER

This February marks a milestone in my personal life: **I am celebrating being cancer free after having had breast cancer surgery five years ago!** The fifth year is a marker in cancer survival!

As I was thanking God for this, I got a message that one of our Bridge partnering missionaries, **Shelli Sellars**, has learned that she has **metastatic colon cancer which has spread to her right lung**. **Joe and Shelli Sellars** and their two children moved from the States to Germany in Aug. 1999, where they lived and worked among Germany's youth. In Nov. 2007, they returned home to TN, with future plans to return to the mission field - at least on a short-term basis (see our website for more background info on the Sellars).

Joe and Shelli are a dynamic power-couple of faith who enjoy challenges. They have a deep love for the young generation and a passion for bringing the Gospel to them in a relevant, practical way that penetrates the global youth culture!

This is Shelli's ultimate challenge! Effervescingly articulate, Shelli has written an open, honest journal of her battle with cancer in which she exposes her joy, fears, anger, faith, and hope— all being part of that journey. Here are excerpts!

Unfortunately... it's not been an easy task. Today has certainly been a flower day. Praise God, I can usually grab onto His strength and reach for Him, strong and tall like an oak tree, but today I've been more like a delicate flower, easily trampled and blown about by the wind....

Thankfully, joy comes in the morning! And His mercies are new every day! Thankfully, I still have so very much to be thankful for!! My husband who takes such good care of me, fielding the hard calls, packing the infected wound, taking care of the kids, and so much more... my daughter who sweetly tiptoes into my room, gently kisses me on the cheek and tells me how much she loves me, restoring acceptance and love into my rejected heart... my neighbors who bring yummy treats and flowers, watch the kids and help with the yard... my church friends who cook the most delicious meals, including desserts that taste like they came from France... who text and call... who visit regularly... who send cards... who plan to fix my shower... who pray for me continually... my mom who listens, empathizes and encourages me as I cry...!

So ... though it is tough in light of my emotions, I'm choosing to grab hold of 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18, and **"Be joyful always; pray continually; giving thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for [me] in Christ Jesus."**

Shelli's chemo-therapy will cost several hundred thousand dollars — an enormous sum of money for a young family who has recently returned from the mission field abroad. We have set up a fund for contributions toward Shelli's medical expenses. Please mark your donation **8336 Sellars Medical Fund**. **Thanks for your prayers!!**



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**We're on the Web!  
www.BridgeInternational.org**

**Read Shelli's journal in full  
at [www.caringbridge.org/](http://www.caringbridge.org/)  
visit/shellisellars**



## ADDENDUM P. 1 — REFLECTIONS BY SHELLI

### Preface by R.K. Ulrich:

On February 11, a week plus after her colon surgery, but the day before she had been rejected for chemo therapy, Shelli wrote the reflections below in her journal. She directs these exhorting words to herself and those who are struggling in keeping faith through tragedy and trauma. I can relate well to the journey of faith that leads through the valleys of darkness and discouragement, across the mountaintops of hope and expectant joy... right into our Heavenly Father's heart. A true and tested faith lives right at the point of tension between the earthly and heavenly in us. Shelli's words come from that place; the medical community has good tools in doctors and medicine which assist in the healing process — but **God is the ultimate Healer!**

*While walking the halls of UT (University of Tennessee) Medical Center yesterday, I became more and more aware of the many people in need, of the hopelessness and despair on so many faces. It broke my heart....*

*I have hope! Even with pain in every step I take, I have reason to smile! Even with cancer spoken over our house, I have joy!... I wonder if it's the same for everyone else. Something tells me it's not....*

*When the doctors first told me the news five weeks ago, all I saw in the halls were older people, much older people, people who, if you'll forgive me, "belonged there." It seemed I was the only young and vibrant- yet desperately sick- person there. It was a complete mystery to me. Utterly baffling! But now, on the other side of God's grace, I see lots of people of all ages and walks of life. I am not the only one hurting... and, in fact, chances are quite good that I'm in much better shape than many of them. "It could be worse," I often say. And... it could be. Think about how God has prepared me for this challenge:*

- *He has always faithfully and lovingly led me through hard times in my life, and though this is the biggest challenge I've ever faced, He's made me tough, adventurous and fearless. **I AM BRAVE & COURAGEOUS!***
- *He directed me on a journey of health, helping me lose over 100 pounds in 2007 and, even more miraculous, maintain it- plus lose more!- over the past two years, bringing me to a place of great fitness. I was teaching aerobics and training for half marathons before all this hit! **I AM PHYSICALLY STRONG!***
- *In Fall 2008, He even warned me of a physical crisis to come, instructing me to stay healthy at all costs so I would "get through" it. **I AM WALKING IN KNOWLEDGE & OBEDIENCE!***
- *He made me a person of laughter and smiles. **I CHOOSE JOY!***
- *He brought me to a place of great support and help, giving me a fantastic family and an incredible group of friends all over the world. **I AM NOT ALONE!***
- *And... most incredible of all... **I AM CONVINCED OF HIS LOVE!!!** How many people out there would hear the word "cancer" and immediately begin to question God's love?*

*What about you? When bad things happen, the first thought is often "What did I do wrong?" or "Why is God punishing me?" Well, you get the picture.*

*Cont...*

## ADDENDUM P. 2 — REFLECTIONS BY SHELLI

*Friends, I'm being totally honest with you when I tell you that those thoughts have never once crossed my mind. I am so completely secure in His love for me that I know the big picture for my tragedy must be amazingly good for me and for the ones I love (family, friends, church body!), or God would have never allowed it. He's not seeking to destroy me (that's our enemy's job!), rather He's looking to draw closer to me. He wants all my heart... and He wants to make me a blessing to others. And, somehow, He knew I'd respond to His love, and choose to walk in grace. Though I would have never expected it of myself, He believed in me enough to know that I can handle it, that I would grab onto His strength and choose joy in the midst of horrible sadness and fear. Otherwise, He wouldn't have allowed it. He loves me! And good daddies never do bad things to their kids. They LONG for good! How much more our heavenly daddy?...*

*How about you? Are you so convinced of Papa's great love that you can withstand any storm, just knowing He's with you? Or... do you feel too unworthy?... totally lost in performing and earning His love? That's where I was four years ago. Back then, I would have only been able to understand this as punishment. I wasn't convinced of His love like I am today. I had to earn it. Had to prove myself. Had to be worthy. But... that is a lie! A lie that completely cripples and robs us of the marvelous gifts God has for us. It's NOT about how perfect we are, but about how perfect HE is!!! He can't not love us! He's too perfect to do any less. HE IS LOVE!! And He loves you. Desperately! Completely! Eternally!*

*"I know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. How will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8:28, 31-32, 35, 37-39.*

*He loves me (US!... and that includes you, too!) so much that He actually prepared me for this difficult challenge. He left nothing undone in giving me the tools I need to succeed! And though I can't yet begin to see the end to this road, I know that there's beauty and joy and laughter waiting on me. And... there is for you, too. Whatever challenge you may be facing, the God of love is here, right now, reaching out to you, offering love, comfort and guidance. He's prepared you. He WILL hold your hand through the storm... and bring you out to rainbows on the other side. Just keep your eyes on Him... and you will see great victory!!!*

*"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Psalm 23*

*May you find peace and restoration today. Whatever you may be facing, goodness is on its way!!!!*

*Love, Shelli*