

Ottawa Summer Season Honoured Hero 2012 - Lianne Zitzelsberger

“Upon receiving the diagnosis of having Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, in May 2011, I learned two things – first, that cancer is an epidemic. Everyone has been touched by cancer – everyone. Each person that I spoke with had a personal connection or loss due to cancer or was a cancer survivor themselves. Cancer is not exclusive to just humans either. I work with dogs that require hydrotherapy for health reasons and many people lose their beloved friend to cancer.

Secondly, I learned that I am surrounded by compassionate, caring people - they are everywhere. I was humbled by the out pouring of love that I received from family, friends, acquaintances and strangers. I know that my recovery is directly linked to the positive energy and love that I received throughout this experience.



I come from a family with a history of cancer. My mother died a long and painful death from colon cancer, my brother has had one of his lungs removed due to cancer, my uncle died of prostate cancer, and my grandmother died of breast cancer. When I discovered the lump on the left side of my neck one morning while volunteering at my nephew’s preschool I knew somehow that cancer was a likely possibility. While going through the stages of diagnosis I meditated on how having cancer would make me feel. I realized that I was not afraid to die and that I definitely did not want to go through chemo and, or radiation if I did have cancer.

I have family working in healthcare, my sister is a PhD Research Coordinator at the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, another sister who is a nurse and a brother-in-law who is a pathologist, specifically in cancer research. Because of the aggressive form of cancer that I had and the fact that I was already at Stage III, I was strongly urged by everyone to have chemo treatments. I wanted to try an alternative route. I did both and am now in remission.

I was one of those people that never thought that I would get cancer. One of the questions that will never be answered is – why? What factors or circumstances came into play that allowed cancer to develop in my body? I will never know and this makes it difficult to know how to prevent cancer from developing again. Whatever the future brings I am a stronger person for having had cancer and more alive for knowing that hugs are only an arms distance away.

Having ongoing support and knowing that you are part of a larger community of people that deal with cancer, in whatever capacity, is a vital component in the healing process. This is why the work that The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society of Canada does is so important. I was honored to be asked to be an Honoured Hero. It allows me to give back for all that I have received.”