

Mom's Struggle with Cancer

The Spring, Summer & Fall of 1999

Thursday, April 15

After some discomfort in breathing and hearing a wheezing sound, it was confirmed by catscan that my mom had cancer of the lung. A mass the size of a lemon was found located on the right bronchus. The doctors said that it was inoperable and incurable. It was endocarcinoma, the same kind of cancer that was eradicated from her cervix a year ago. This has baffled the doctors and all of us too. It has hit us hard and we have been reeling. All this news is so sad. Yet, we all have a sense that this has all come through the grid of God's love. We have found much peace and contentment in leaning on Him. What would we do without Him!

Friday, April 16

As Grace and I came down to complete the packing in preparation for Ethiopia. for a departure on April 21st ,we just circled our boxes in confusion not knowing what to do. Much time spent with Mom and Dad and the communicating of this sad news to family and friend begins.

Saturday, April 17

The Charlotte Eagles soccer team was prepared to come to move all our furniture and boxes into storage. At the last minute the trucks and the team had to be canceled. Focus was on Mom.

Sunday, April 18

At Sunday School at our home church, Calvary Church, Grace and I gave our farewell messages. Lots of hugs and lots of tears and lots of support. Sunday at 5:30 PM the elders and many of the wives pray and biblically anoint Mom with oil. Wow, what a powerful time of outpouring of prayer. Mom shared that she was prepared to die but would love to live but will take whatever is God's perfect plan. At 6:00 PM Grace and I stood before a huge crowd of people as the elders and the pastor laid hands on us and prayed prayers of commission. A very moving time to have these two events of intercession within an hour!

Monday, April 19

Off to SIM HQ to change our flight bookings. With SIM Travel's help, all worked out beautifully! Kyle and Kara due to fly out of Charlotte to Ethiopia on Friday, April 23. Emily Ardill will meet them in Chicago and continue the journey. Jolene Baker, a close SIM missionary friend will accompany them along with her two daughters. Perfect timing. Bill and Grace will tentatively plan to leave on Wednesday, April 28. This gives us time to see if Mom will be able to handle the powerful chemotherapy. Today was wig shopping day. Grace and my sister Gwen took Mom on this venture. It was a beautiful and fun time together. The owner, who heard their story was moved and gave Mom her wig at half price! Wigs are not cheap! God has gone before!

Wednesday, April 21

Today was the day we were to be returning to Ethiopia. Kara and Kyle will leave this Friday, the 23rd for Ethiopia. Mom came through her first chemo treatment quite well. As I type she is finishing the 2nd of four for this week. Grace and I at this point have booked our tickets to Ethiopia on the 30 of April. This is tentative based on Mom's response. Her trust is in the Lord. She is "resting" in His goodness and faithfulness.

Saturday, April 24, 1999

Mom, Elaine Harding, has come through the first four days of chemotherapy far better than she or anybody else expected. We believe it is the prayer of those around the world as well as the new methods of treatment without nausea. She will rest for a few weeks before she enters round two. After that 2nd round they will do CT Scan and see if the chemo is indeed shrinking the tumors. Thanks for praying! Yesterday we put Kara on the plane to Ethiopia. On Monday

Friday, April 30 1999

We were to have been taking off for Ethiopia as I write this note to you. We were notified that Kyle's visa is invalid and that the process must be done at the Ethiopian embassy in Washington, DC. We foresee that we may be able to make the next Wednesday flight and arrive in Ethiopia next Thursday. We place all this in the Lord's hands and we rest in Him. Never have we had so much time to pack! Mom is doing well. Her strength is greater some days than others. We are so glad that we have this extra time with her and with Dad. Thanks again for praying for us. Bill Harding IV

Monday, May 3 1999

Thanks for praying for us during this time of delay. This afternoon we received word that Kyle's visa has been cleared and is in hand. We are therefore ready to depart Wednesday, May 5th at 10:15 AM from Charlotte on a United Airways flight to Chicago. Late afternoon we leave Chicago for Frankfurt, Germany and on to Addis Ababa arriving at 7:45PM Thursday evening Addis time. Though it has been embarrassing saying good-bye over and over again, it has been fun!

We hope it all works this time. What better place to be stranded than at home. This has given us extra time with Mom who is battling cancer. We have considered this delay as gift of God to have that extended visit with Mom and Dad. Our son, Drew, and two other of his friends, will be arriving in Ethiopia just a few days after we arrive. I hope we get there first. They will be involved in a six week mission project of making Christ known to Ethiopian youth.

Thanks for standing with us in your prayers as we face the challenge of life back in Africa after a fruitful home-assignment here in the USA.

Bill and Grace Harding

Tuesday, May 19, 1999

Today Mom has started her second round of chemo. It was postponed one week because the white blood cell count was too low. Now that the count is up, she is able to start it again. She will be in for the next four days. Thanks for praying.

July 1999 update

Mom (Elaine) has just finished her fourth round of chemo. In spite of intense fatigue, she has had some very good days. The doctors report that the chemo is working effectively shrinking the tumor in the lung. She has been able to go to church and has gone shopping with Grace a few times. She will be off the chemo for the next three weeks. During this time she will be gaining strength. The last week of July will be a Harding family reunion in the mountains of North Carolina. This is the first reunion in over nine years. David and his family have come in from Jordan. Joe and Bill and their families are here from Ethiopia. Don and Gwen are here. What a blessed time this will be to honor Mom!

As Bill and Grace were preparing their return to Ethiopia, doctors diagnosed advanced lung cancer in Bill's mom...Elaine. Here are some requests and notes from Bill and Grace. Please take this to the Lord in prayer. (Scroll down for latest updates)

November 16, 1999

Dear family and friends,

Many of you know that my Mom, Elaine Harding, has been battling lung cancer for some time. The report this past Friday was shocking. In the past seven weeks the tumor in her lung has grown from the size of a dime to the size of a cantaloupe. Her time here is short. She is looking forward to heading to her true home, heaven. It is great that we are here at this time. Drew will fly in from Rwanda as soon as he can. My brother, David, in Jordan will come soon. Kelly and Kristen, my brother Joe, and Kay's daughters will be flying in from Kenya. Pray that Christ will be glorified in every aspect of this transition to GLORY. We cherish and need your prayers as we walk the valley of the shadow of death. It is a deep one!

Thanks for being there backing us and the whole Harding family.

He is ABLE!!!!

Bill and Grace Harding

November 29, 1999

At 1:15 this morning Mom peacefully went home to be with Jesus. We praise Him that she is no longer struggling and that she is cancer free. As she enters her mansion, the décor will be the glory of the Lord. (These were some of her last words.)

As in her life, her love for us released us for ministry. In her death, her love for us and our love for her drew us to be with her in these last days. What precious days they were!

**We stand in the assurance and hope:
that there is a God,
that He redeemed her through the blood of Christ,
that He loved her,
that He called her by name
that she is now HOME with HIM.**

Pray that her memorial will be a great testimony to the glory of God.

Later today I will let you know the time and place of the visitation and the memorial service.

Grace and I and the whole Harding family thank you for your prayers.

Thanks so much for praying for us at this bittersweet time of grief and glory. Here are some of the arrangements that have been made for Mom.

Visitation: Tuesday, November 30 between 7:00 and 9:00 PM at Calvary Church in Charlotte

Graveside ceremony: Wednesday, December 1, at 10:00 AM at Magnolia Gardens at Calvary Church.

Memorial Service: Wednesday, December 1, at 11:00 AM at Calvary Church

A special fund is being established in Elaine Harding's name at SIM for any memorial gifts and in lieu of flowers. Mom, Elaine, had served in Ethiopia so faithfully for most of her adult years. The family is establishing a fund to honor her memory for a ministry for Ethiopian Christians and churches and for evangelism there. Checks can be made to SIM, designated to Elaine Harding memorial fund, and sent to SIM, Box 7900, Charlotte, NC 28241

Thank you for standing with us and the whole Harding family at this time. We rest in Him.

Bill and Grace

December 2, 1999

Grace and I first want to thank each of you for the profound expression of care and consolation for our family. Hundreds of emails and phone calls have poured in from all over the world. All have been read and heard with deep gratitude to God for the family of God that has rallied to envelop us with love in this time of grief and sorrow.

Some have estimated that close to a thousand people came Tuesday night for the visitation to comfort the family and give tribute to Mom Harding. The lines were long, lots of hugs and kisses but what a beautiful thing to see the impact of Mom for Jesus Christ on so many lives!

At 10:00 AM, Wednesday, we had a brief grave side ceremony for family and close friends. After the reading of the Scripture and prayer by our pastor, Glenn Wagner, each of the 17 grand children were given a yellow rose from the spray of flowers on Mom's casket. Each of the five siblings received a white rose and finally Dad was given the red rose that was in the middle. It was simple, touching and very powerful.

At 11:00 was the memorial for Mom in the sanctuary of Calvary Church. Hundreds and hundreds of people poured in. Each of the sons, Bill, Joe, Don and David, expressed loving tribute to their

Mom followed by powerful poem written and read by Gwen, the only daughter. Tears flowed freely. Drew our eldest, represented all the seventeen grandchildren so well and recalled fond memories and profound admonitions from "Nina". We were very proud of him and Mom would have been too. Steve, my sister's husband, gave a history of Mom and the legacy she has left.

The music was awesome! After "Go Light Your World" was sung, Dad lit each of his five children's candles and they each lit each member of their family's candle. We, all twenty eight of us, proceeded out of the sanctuary together with the candles burning brightly and with the words ringing...

Carry your candle, run to the darkness,
Seek out the hopeless, confused and torn.
Hold out your candle for all to see it.
Take your candle and go light your world.
Take your candle and go light your world.

Jesus Christ was central and He was glorified and Mom would have been proud.

Sad and glad. The kiss of grief and glory still tender.

The following is a poem Gwen wrote in the week prior to her mother's death. I hope that this will help you in your understanding of life, death, affliction and beauty. It took Gwen a week to write this poem. Some, she penned by her mother's bed side. Some, she catharted with pen and paper on a silent train ride from Durham to Charlotte to be with her mom the last few days. As I read it, it is the combination of Gwen's entire life, belief in God and what we have learned together in the last few years. She read this yesterday at her mother's funeral and had the opportunity to read it to her mom prior to her passing away.

It Is Not In Vain
by
Gwen Ruth Harding Smith

The brisk autumn air, as if pleading , beckons me to the woods to pray.
In their colorful splendor, the falling leaves, though silent, seem to know just what to say.
My frozen heart, like ice, melts with the warm touch of the sun.
The healing balms of nature's glory assures the presence of the Holy One.

Though God doesn't take away my pain,
He whispers, while beside me:
"It is not in vain."

Though wrenching agony invades my fragile heart,
A touch of nature's beauty; a quiet ecstasy imparts,
The vibrant colors of an autumn tree blend so tenderly
with the pain in me.

An awe and wonder consume my soul
That both beauty and affliction have a godly role.
How is it that the sting of death can join with beauty that takes my breath?

Though God doesn't take away my pain;
His creation is whispering,
"It is not in vain."

The pain of affliction;
The ecstasy of beauty,
Are the whispers of God to my bleeding heart.
The pain is to prove me;
The beauty to soothe me.
Sacred gifts from God , for my gain.
The crunch of the leaves beneath my step whisper;
"It is not in vain."

These tears from a wounded spirit do flow;
Or are they from the joy I know?
That Jesus whispers while beside me;
"It is not in vain."

This beauty all around me,
This agony within me;
So, mysteriously entwined,
So, wildly, yet so loving, mold my soul to His design.

Designed to intimately know the Maker of my earthen vessel.
I cast my fears His way and pray for strength to trust and not to wrestle.

He, if anyone, has known this conflict of emotion.
Enduring a torturous death for me,
Has granted the gift of eternity.
He triumphantly conquered the chilling grave,
From death to new life.
What wondrous love He displayed
With affliction and beauty my doomed soul He saved.

Now, the beautiful love in God's timing is clear.
The gathering of children is finally here.
Too many miles have kept us apart.
Now, there is peace in our mother's heart.

Our spirits feel crushed by this pain that proves us
Then her words come to mind, like sweet beauty, to soothe us.
"God is good, no matter what!"

Though He doesn't take away our pain.
He whispers comfort, while beside us.
"It is not in vain."

Awaiting on the other side of pain
Sweet peace and love, forever ours and hers to attain.

We will longingly gaze into our Savior's eyes, then hear Him lovingly proclaim.
"Now, your here with Me, you see,
It was not in vain."

In Fond Memory of Elaine Harding