October 2012

Dear Miles for Myeloma friends,

Thank you for helping us raise slightly more than $2 million in the last eight years to fund research to eradicate this nasty disease. You have surpassed all my expectations! Once again, I am amazed by the strength and dedication of the myeloma community. Once again, the patients and their families have rallied around the cause, all united and determined and without any hesitation.

This year the journey started in Covington, Kentucky, and we made our way to a ferry to cross the Ohio River. We rode along the river heading west and then headed north from Lawrenceburg to Columbus, Indiana. The first day we rode slightly over 110 miles on a pleasant fall day. We started near Cincinnati to honor and remember our patients from that area. Those who are struggling with the disease and those who left us after a hard-fought battle with myeloma were on our minds. I was so much looking forward to my patient Rosanne sending us off, but the disease took her away from us few months ago. She was a great wife, mother and sister. She was an accomplished author. She was gentle and brave and never was selfish. She did not hesitate to help her fellow myeloma patients by being a trail blazer and participating in clinical research. Her son David rode with us and reflected on her life and shared many rich memories with us. He is an awesome son and a great rider! Another cyclist, Mike, reflected on his mother Edna’s journey. About six years ago, she was not doing well but agreed to participate in a clinical trial anyway, knowing well that it would not help her. She told her son that she knew that it may be too late for her, but she did not want another person to suffer from myeloma. She knew participation in the trial would help someone else, and that was fine with her. This is true courage.

The first day ended with a nice pizza dinner in Columbus, and all the cyclists received free massages donated in memory of a dear patient. Our dessert was provided by the wife of a man who just died after a four-year battle with myeloma. It was very gracious of her to come and bring us treats less than a month after his passing. I will never forget the statement she made. She said, “I loved my husband, but I do not want him back.” Why did she say that? His life was scarred by the disease and the side effects of his treatment. His suffering was overwhelming to him and to her and that is why she did not want to see him back, continuing his suffering. I am sure she would want him back if he was free of suffering.

The second day we left and rode through Nashville, Martinsville and finally to Indianapolis. Who said Indiana is flat? Wrong. We climbed more than 6,000 feet in two days, and the second day was quite a hard 90-mile ride. My legs were reminding me of that many times. We all made it back safely despite a couple of close calls. Cycling can be dangerous. When we had close calls, the Davis brothers – who have been riding in Miles for Myeloma for several years – reminded me how their sweet mother felt about the ride. She wanted me to find a safer way to raise awareness about the disease.

The ride ended near the IU Health Simon Cancer Center on Saturday, and I was allowed by the rest of the riders to race to the finish line. About 300 patients and family members were there waiting for us, cheering our effort. We then hosted our annual patient dinner and had an excellent symposium with a guest speaker from the Mayo Clinic, Dr. Angela Dispenzieri. Her talk was followed by a panel discussion that included the myeloma team at IU Health and provided answers and promises of better therapies. We discussed where we are and where we
will be. We discussed why the future will be better. We all agreed that clinical research is the answer. As evidence, I asked Ruth to stand up. A year ago her disease was putting on an ugly face. Multiple treatments had failed to help her. But then she participated in an early phase clinical trial here at IU and was the first patient in the world to receive a new combination of two new drugs. A year later, she was at our symposium, enjoying the evening and living her life the way she wants. I thank you, Ruth, for leading the way. I thank you, Edna, for leading the way, and I thank you, Rosanne, for leading the way. We may not have won every time, but we will ultimately win the fight against this nasty disease for all who have been touched by it.

Why do I sound confident? I am confident because of you and because of our team. Your contributions of time, money and body have made a huge impact on the journey thus far. The effort and the time you put in will never go unrewarded. The second reason that gives me confidence in the future is the IU Health team. We now have five excellent physicians (I was told I should consider myself one of them ~smile~) who are determined to eradicate this disease. We will spend every penny raised and every minute we have to find answers and solutions that will help us treat this disease much better so a cure can be realized.

To all who helped make Miles for Myeloma, Year 8 such a success, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. To the planning committee members who went out of their way and spent days and weeks getting ready for this year’s event, I thank you. Linda, Myron, Carolyn, Jim, Yvonne and Steve, you are simply amazing. We made it and we are safe because of you. Thank you.

As I said in one of my posts on Facebook during the ride, you better watch out, myeloma, because we are after you and we will win.

Peace,

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