

“What a Difference a Year Makes, a Tale of Two Photos”

By Misty Adams

From her Facebook Page.

So I'm not generally put off by sharing an unflattering picture of myself, but there are some rules for that sort of thing. It's gotta be full on ridiculous, an intentional charade of self deprecating sport, a poke-at-myself sort of moment perhaps with me and a goat covered in straw, or an exemplary attempt of mine to make it on America's Next Top Model.

This one though, is not any of those kind of unflattering pictures. It's the sort that makes me more than a little uncomfortable. Not with you seeing it (I mean, there is that), but with the reality of “that was me.” It was that bad.

But the thing I want to allow you to see is how far we've come. The redemption. The hope fulfilled. The beauty from ashes. The gift of life. The fight. Those who fight for you when you can't. The message of Gabriel the angel revealed in my life — “With God, all things are possible.”

Last year, in October, doctors in Nashville told me to go home and “get my affairs in order.” They very directly said there was no one in the world who could help me. They were going to send me home, for good.

The very night the medical experts came in one by one and stated the same dismal news, a former maxillofacial surgeon turned cancer fighting doctor at a private, unaffiliated practice whose unorthodox methods I was adhering to heard the news and came to see us, after his own long hours, and sat beside Justin and me in the tiny little ICU room, took our hands and prayed, and declared that surely somehow somehow somewhere there was a cowboy surgeon out there who would be willing to remove the stent that had eroded through my esophagus, into my spine, and was about to hit my trachea and subsequently take my life. He wept with us as he prayed and asked God to make a way.

The next day I lay in the ICU bed, and my lifelong childhood best friend and my Allensville kindred spirit came to see me. They thought they were coming to say goodbye. Though the memories of them standing beside my bed in some ways seem like some sort of underwater dream, I can clearly picture them there, and hear them asking me what I wanted.

I wasn't ready to give up. I wanted to find a doctor who would fight for me. They took those words to heart, and decided to help me in the ways they could. That night my best friend stayed up late and typed away at her keyboard as tears fell, lighting a beacon of a Facebook post, sending out a cry, daring to reach the far corners of the world and find the “cowboy surgeon” who would pony up and help me with this daggum stent. She waxed a little more poetic than that, but you get the gist.

A couple days later, through the wonders of social media that one little post had made its way 750 miles north, and my husband found himself texting the personal phone number of the physicians assistant to one of the world's leading thoracic surgeons at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. Texting her personal phone. On a Sunday night. Figuring out what needed to be done to get me up there. STAT.

Did you catch that? For those of you who have ever had to deal with scheduling and doctors, I reckon you understand how that works. And this ain't it. But so it was.

The following days my husband worked tirelessly, sending imaging, reports, and more imaging to seal the deal while I lay low in a hospital bed looking out at Kid Rock's house on the Nashville horizon. We walked laps as long as my back allowed, and at night he sang hymns to me to help me sleep.

Finally, a couple weeks later, the medivac came and he and I strapped into a rinky dink passenger plane with two EMT's and two pilots and bedded down for our small winter's flight. Not quite first class, but one of the flight nurses put a rom-com on her laptop and passed it back to us. We shared headphones like Jim and Pam from The Office.

Arriving in Minnesota, we met a team of nurses and doctors that understood the severity of my situation, but also claimed the hospitals mantra of “treating the untreatable,” and it showed in how they approached my complex case. We had found the cowboy surgeon. A doctor who outright said, he didn't know if it could be

done, but I deserved the benefit of the doubt. A doctor who encouraged his residents to remember that Mayo is the last stop on the train for a lot of folks.

I, my friends, was one of those folks. And we all knew that.

On December 20th of last year, Dr. Wigle, accompanied by some of the most brilliant resident docs I have ever seen (I've seen a few in my day), and a best in the world spinal surgeon by the name of none other than Pete Rose, performed a surgery that some claimed to be impossible.

They removed my esophagus despite the extensive radiation damage that made it hard for even this world class feller to know what was what inside my thoracic cavity. Before surgery he was very upfront about how he had no idea how it was gonna go down, but he emerged from the OR after eleven hours of operating upbeat and happy to inform my husband and dad that he was able to get all the stent out, there was no tumor, and that he wouldn't have to stabilize me for the night and continue the surgery tomorrow since he was able to complete all he needed to.

Seriously, y'all. NO tumor. The world-class doctor at Mayo told me so in shock and disbelief. They didn't understand it. The long and short of it is that this ain't how esophageal cancer works. You see, right after I was diagnosed and was about to begin chemo, docs in Nashville determined that I couldn't do more radiation, so the plan was chemo and immunotherapy to hopefully "control" the tumor, but none of them thought it could be cured. It was too advanced for cure, and in their minds an esophagectomy to remove the cancerous area of my esophagus was off the table. But Jesus had a different plan.

And when Wigle went in with guns blazing to perform that "impossible" procedure, he need only remove the stent and damaged esophagus, there was no cancer for him to round up.

Folks, if you're in the thick of it, here's a real live-in-technicolor picture of what a year's time can do. Hold tight to those who fight for you when you can't, listen to the prayers of those who speak real truth, find your proverbial cowboy surgeon, and hope like none other, for with God nothing is impossible.

Misty Adams lives in Kentucky and worships at the Allensville Church of Christ.

