

# The Journey of Vickie Minnich

From December 21<sup>st</sup> 2002 to May 21<sup>st</sup> 2003

My goal is describe the journey of my wife Vickie from her double vision on December 21<sup>st</sup> until she became an Angel on May 21<sup>st</sup>. I looked up the word journey in the dictionary and it says, traveling from one place to another, travel or passage through time, or from youth to maturity. I believe my vision of our journey would be a passage or journey through time.

It is a journey that you are not prepared for and one that so often you feel so helpless. You have to make many decisions on the spot with the best information then and there. Many times I talked to Vickie and explored all the options with her. I never made a decision without her approval. On two occasions, we needed to have a group meeting with what I called Vickie's Angels . Her sister Josie, my brother Skip and his wife Sue and our two sons, Mike and Jason. We made the best decisions possible at that time.

As I describe Vickie's journey I hope to pass on to others what I have learned, hoping that my experiences would help others traveling down the same road. I will attempt to offer insight from my experience. .

Vickie and I would talk on occasion about how difficult it would be to live without each other. When Fran Ganter lost his wife suddenly to a brain aneurysm I said to Vickie how difficult it was going to be for him. We talked how we would react if we lost each other, and how difficult it would be. Should we remarry, etc. We both agreed that we would not remarry. We discussed how Vickie's mother suffered for an entire year from ovarian cancer and how she did not want to go through the same experience with the daily pain and no real quality of life.

This insight helped me with Vickie's cancer in that I knew that she did not want to go through the same experience. At the end of the journey, when I knew that the cancer had won, and we were ready to bring Vickie home to become an Angel. We met with Hospice and had the hospital bed ready and the morphine drip ordered. But we decided not to feed the cancer and have Vickie suffer any more that she had too.

The last evening, as difficult as it was, in the hospital we all told Vickie that cancer had won and we had fought gallantly every step of the way. But now, it is OK to let go and go to heaven and be with your mother, father and brother before me. I told her over and over how much I loved her, but I know she knew that with my actions and life with her and not my words.

I ask the boys to do the same and that was very difficult for them. At first, I think, they were angry with me and felt I was giving up the fight to soon. They told me there could be a new drug that we could try, let's just keep trying. Please do not give up was their

message to me. It was a very trying time for me and Mike and Jason as they loved Vickie so much. She was such a great mother and they were her babies.

I took them by the bed, and quietly talked to them so Vickie could not hear me, I told them to look at their mother and the pain she is in, and her breathing pattern. Even though Vickie was in a coma, I believed that she could hear and comprehend everything said. The nurses explained to me the breathing pattern, and there is a name for it, and it happens when the end was near.

They finally agreed to tell their mother that it was OK to let go and become an Angel and go to heaven before us. This was a very emotional time for all of us that is difficult to put into words, but you always do what is best for your loved one.

Vickie was ready to come home at 9:30am the next morning under the care of Hospice. However, I really feel she was aware of everything and decided to become an Angel, on her terms, at 1:48 am on May 21<sup>st</sup>. I feel that she was in control because from midnight until about 1:30am the boys were distraught to say the least, they could not sleep, and jumped up at any sound from Vickie. But, when I saw Vickie's breathing pattern change into shallow breaths I knew that her becoming an Angel was near, and would you believe the boys were sound asleep. I wondered should I wake them. Would this memory be too tough on them later. I decided to wake them, but I could not and they did not wake up until Vickie took her last breath. We had the Angel Symphony playing and her favorite passage played when Vickie became an Angel I purchased this Angel Symphony at Innerconnections in New Cumberland and in April and May I played it every night when we went to bed. My story was always the same, "Vickie, lets pray that the Angel of Mercy and Healing will enter the room tonight and wrap its wings around you and heal you. But, the Angel of Mercy and Healing did not come, but I was relieved that Vickie was no longer in pain, but, at this moment, it was difficult to realize that I would never see her again, hold her, kiss her and share all the little simple things. Share being grandparents that she was longing to do. My feelings of loss are just as strong as I write this now, and my last caring touch was to tuck in the covers because she was starting to show the blue veins on her legs and arms. I tucked everything in just so her face was only showing. She was so calm and beautiful with such smooth skin. I cannot erase from my mind my last image when I left the room and looked at Vickie on the bed. It was like a dream and so surreal. Like I stated above, realizing that you will never see the one you love so much is very difficult to deal with, and for me, it is a daily battle.

I really believe that Vickie did not want to come home to become an Angel. Like I said above, she controlled everything. Me, I was broken hearted, but I did not want her to suffer any more, and she was fighting cancer on two fronts – multiple myeloma and undifferentiated malignant neoplasm. Plus, I knew she did not want to live in this world in her present condition. I now know that when you hear the word undifferentiated that means they can not identify the cancerous cells. Usually the cancer then is very aggressive and fast. I learned all this after the journey.

We did not talk to Vickie about heaven until two days before she became an Angel. In fact, we had just had a metaport inserted in her chest which made it easier to give Vickie her medicines and take blood when necessary. We were ready to have a food tube inserted so we could get food and medicine in to her as she could not really eat or swallow. We were fighting each hour with hope that she would make it. We just needed to keep her strong until the medicines kicked in. A nurse stopped in on May 17<sup>th</sup> and told me that she was just like Vickie and she was feed for 6 months through her metaport, but she recovered and is now well and healthy. That was our mind set and Vickie was such a fighter each step of the way.

Vickie never complained to me or the boys, and I think she was protecting us and did not want us to worrying any more than we had to. She was never really sick a day in her life.

Vickie's journey started on December 21<sup>st</sup> when we made our last trip from our former home at 160 Conley Lane to collect few items. We drove in separate cars and when we left and arrived at 512 Park Ave. our new home since October of 2002 and she was in tears and said following me she developed double vision. After checking as best I could, if we covered her right eye, and she could see just one image. From that day she lost her ability to drive.

On December 23<sup>rd</sup>. our anniversary, we saw our family Doctor, and he thought maybe there was an infection in the ear and gave Vickie an Antibiotic. Three days later we saw a doctor at the Premier Eye Group. After an examination, they said the 6<sup>th</sup> cranial nerve was affected and that nerve controlled the muscles that caused her muscles in her right eye not to focus. They were not sure what caused it but they thought it was a virus something like Bells Palsy. They indicated that we should see a specialist at the Hershey Medical Center, but the first appointment available was the last week in January. I discussed with them about an earlier appointment, but they kind of brushed me away. That was my first encounter with a kind of insensitivity to our needs. I could understand it with how busy they were, but Vickie was really struggling and we needed a little more help and information. That was the beginning of not securing enough information that was accurate. We were just told many times to find about it on a web site. At times, that was easier said than done.

Our anniversary and Christmas were very different, but the boys understood and we did buy them gifts in January. Vickie's Anniversary card moved me to tears and I noow read it every week. The front cover had "My Caring Husband:" at the top and at the bottom, "My perfect Soul Mate" The inside went something like this, If ever two hearts were meant to be one if ever two paths were meant to be joined they were meant to ours, there was another line like the above, and she signed it "to my wonderful husband." Thanks for the 36 years of bliss with many more anniversaries to come, all my love Vickie. Pastor Paul read the card at her services and we were blessed to have 36 years of a wonderful relationship. We thought we had the perfect plan and at 65 for me and 60 for Vickie we could spend winter months in Arizona, enjoy each other as she always told me I was a different person in Arizona being so relaxed. Every night in Arizona we took our meditation walk and saw the sunset. They were special walks together.

On January 2<sup>nd</sup>. 2003, she had such pain in the head that I took her to the Holy Spirit emergency room at about 7am and the Doctor could see the problem with the right eye and requested a cat scan. The neurologist on call said the cat scan did not show anything, but he scheduled a MRI for the next day. We did that and met with him on January 10<sup>th</sup> and he told us that Vickie had a growth/tumor in the cavernous sinus area which is right behind where the optic nerves cross and behind the pituitary and right around the 12 cranial nerves which are as small as a human hair. It was a very dangerous crowded area of the brain..

I ask what is the next step, and he said to see a neurosurgeon. I ask who is the best and who is available. He mentioned one, but that we could see him for two months. Naturally, I ask who else was available and he referred another doctor who saw us the following Monday, January 13<sup>th</sup>. He saw us and reviewed the MRI and felt it was not malignant that it might be a chordoma or a meningioma. The doctor wanted to make sure the tumor was not a secondary cancer that started at another spot in the body so he scheduled an appointment January 15<sup>th</sup> and Vickie had a mammagram , lung x-ray, blood tests for the liver, etc. We met with the Doctor January 20<sup>th</sup> and he said all the tests were negative for cancer, and that Vickie appears to be feeling good and we should go about our business and to see him in march. That was it, and Vickie was such an upbeat person and had such a sparkling personality that she probably gave a better appearance then she was really feeling at the time.

Before I continue with the journey, allow me to tell you what I have learned. Unless you look at the cells from Vickie's tumor under a microscope you do not know for sure if it is cancer or not. However, there are risks with any procedure. But at Duke they did go up through her nose and biopsy the tumor. So, it can be done and the risks from that procedure are minimal. The biopsy should have been done in January.

But, what if it is cancerous, how do you treat it. You could use radiation and Vickie had 7 days of radiation and it did help a little. There are side effects with radiation but you are talking about life and death. If I had to do it all over again I would want to know if it was cancerous in January. Then you would look at the facts all the risks, and make the best decision based on the information you have. In Vickie's case, the risks could be having an optic nerve damaged, blindness in one or both eyes or cut one of the 12 cranial nerves and a part of your face would affected.

But, Vickie and I could have discussed all the options and make the best decision together. We would have known that her brain tumor was very rare, very aggressive, deadly and maybe terminal. But, we would search every hospital in the USA that treated brain tumors. Again, from what I have learned after the fact from some of the doctors I wrote to seeking information, Vickie's tumor was probably terminal. At this point in time, I cannot tell you the decision we would have made. Even though, we discussed weighting the benefits of treatment vs. its affect on ones body and the quality of life Is the treatment really worth it. You always do your best to maintain ones dignity and quality of

life. But, the important point is that we should have a choice. Plus, I would have taken a leave of absence starting on January 20<sup>th</sup> and spent every hour of every day with Vickie

What did I do? Worked everyday with both of us thinking that it was just a matter of finding a way to shrink the tumor and get her vision back. Without Vickie being able to drive, I started work at 5am and came home at 9am with coffee the paper and we had breakfast together. I then came home for lunch and we did our shopping. But, I still worked until March 25<sup>th</sup> when we left for Duke. I beat myself up everyday about this.

Another caution, to my knowledge, there is no real screening test for cancer, In addition to what they did at Holy Spirit they should have taken bone marrow and that would reveal Multiple Myeloma or a blood, bone cancer like Multiple Myeloma.

Back to the journey, on January 20<sup>th</sup> we left the Doctors office with the understanding that it was not cancer. However, I wanted a second opinion and talked to a few friends affected with a brain tumor and survived. One told me to contact John Hopkins and the other told me to contact Dr. Allan Friedman at Duke, one of the 5 top brain surgeons in the world.

I was unable to contact the right person at Hopkins, but through friends I was able to make contact with Dr. Friedman and sent the MRI's to him. This was a very difficult process and took time. I hate to say it but it is who you know many times to see a doctor early. I sent the MRI's on February 5<sup>th</sup> and after his evaluation he called me and explained that it was in a bad place and was inoperable, but let's try to shrink the tumor with steroids. He worked with Dr. Vickery and started Vickie on Steroids on February 24<sup>th</sup> for three weeks to freeze or shrink the tumor. After which we should do a second MRI on March 15<sup>th</sup> and see Dr. Friedman on March 25<sup>th</sup>. That was our plan of attack, and Dr Friedman used the same words as Dr. Powers, chordoma and meningioma and that it did not appear to be cancerous.

Dr Friedman did tell me that it appeared that the tumor was inoperable because of its location, and he told me how small the 12 cranial nerves were. But, this approach was about the best that we could do. He indicated the vision could be back to normal with surgery. Again, though a difficult time, hope was right around the corner.

Dr. Vickery met with us and told us the horror stories of steroids, the mood swings, weight loss, etc. Vickie started the steroids February 24<sup>th</sup> and what a journey. She had night sweats and lost weight.6 pounds in one week. It was so bad that I called Dr. Vickery after two weeks, and he lowered the dosage. But Vickie was getting weaker and in a letter in March to her friend Dot in Arizona she told Dot that she could not walk well, and how brutal the steroids affected her. But, there was hope after the steroids.

In addition to getting weaker, she spoke in a whisper and I was very worried and faxed both Doctors for advice and help. But everyone thought the steroids were causing all these problems. But, I now know it was the brain tumor and the multiple myeloma which decreases you red blood cells and platelets. As I look at the photos of Vickie and Brooke,

our granddaughter on January 28, 2003 at the hospital you could see that she was not well.

We had the second MRI on March 15<sup>th</sup> and I read the results Monday and the tumor had grown. She ask me the results and I told her, but we still thought the steroids were causing all these problems. The tumor growing had me worried. But as we prepared for Duke we still believed hope was right around the corner and we just had to deal with this tumor, operate on the muscles and get her 20/20 vision back and move on with our life.

We left March 24<sup>th</sup> and our son Mike drove and when Vickie got into the car she had to use her hands and lift her legs in the car. That really worried Mike and made him realize how ill she was.

We arrived at Duke ,checked in the hotel and the next day we went to see Dr Friedman and after a few words he stunned us by saying that something else was going on with the tumor and that we needed to get it biopsied and to see another Doctor that day which we did. The new doctor said he could do it but we would have to come back in three weeks. I pleaded with him about Vickie's condition and he said he could do it March 27<sup>th</sup> and he could have the tumor evaluated right away and find out if it was cancerous. He did the bioposy at about 9am and he came to me about 11;30AM and said that it was cancerous, but they could not determine what type, and that there are 30 stains to go through to identify what type of tumor it was. Well, to make a long story short, they could not identify it, and on Vickie's death certificate I read the cause of death was " an undifferentiated malignant neoplast " Secondary caused was " multiple myeloma " Vickies was fighting two cancers at one time. I will explain more about the brain tumor later in the journey, and I have written to all doctors asking information and one half responded and the information they provided was very helpful. I am ready to write them again and review what Vickie's life was worth as a person and quickly review the Angel Walk and the positive effect it is having on families fighting cancer that cannot pay their medical bills. I will also describe the nursing scholarship program for high school seniors. But medically, there are a few unanswered questions. They went through 30 stains at Duke and could not identify the tumor and called it undifferentiated. To me, they now have stain 31 which is Vickie's. They know what the cells look like. They have the Miranda Rights when you arrest someone. I would like them to have Vickie's Rights when dealing with unknown tumors. They could say, we can not tell you if it is cancerous unless we do a biopsy and identify the cells with a stain. How do I have that happen. Back to the journey.

But here we were at Duke with the instructions by the doctor to contact an oncologist and that he would see us tomorrow to check the incision, etc. I can not quite remember what I said to Vickie in the recovery room when she ask the results, but I think it was something like, not good news ,and they still must identify what type of cancer. She took it well, but I was as strong as I could be with Vickie, but when the Doctor told me it was cancer, in a corner of the room I broke down.

When we went to see the Doctor the next day, he had an emergency and a resident treated Vickie and was so cocky and impersonal and a little rough as he treated her incision.. He hurt her one time, and there was a drip of blood that we had to deal with after the surgery and there after. I had to tape a small patch under her nose to catch the blood. I am sure that the infection she had later came from that incision

We did not know what to do. There we were at Duke and not being able to see Dr Friedman or Dr. Schier for any follow up, and it was Friday, March 28 and we did not have an appointment, and we probably would have to stay an extended period of time. We decided to travel back to the Harrisburg. And find an oncologist as soon as possible. It was a difficult drive home even though we did not talk about the cancer.

I called my sister in law Sue as soon as we arrived home and her oncologist was Andrews and Patel.. I was able to get an appointment on March 31 and at this time Vickie was very weak and had problems keeping her other eye open. I now know that was the brain tumor affecting the cranial nerves and the eye lids. I encountered the most impersonal doctor I had ever met. She gave me a rough time about the brain tumor and was it cancer since Duke did not tell them what type it was. I explained to her that they could not identify what type of tumor it was Anyway, the doctor was tough to deal with, but Vickie's blood work was not good and I found out that they had to give her platelets at Duke before the biopsy. Plus, she was down platelets again and needed three units of blood. We had to go to the Holy Spirit the next day and it takes about 2 to 3 hours per unit of blood. We came home that evening and I was really worried because Vickie was very tired, could not really talk, and could not eat. We were in a real information vacuum, and again, I felt so helpless.

What a change since the biopsy. Did the biopsy do this ? I felt so helpless, but I needed to be strong and positive for Vickie and give her the best comfort and love possible, and not let the treatment by some medical personnel get to me. I needed to be smart and sort out all the information and the best next step to take. Vickie was counting on me to make sound decisions.

But on Wednesday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>. Vickie was in great pain, listless, drank very little and could not eat. I called the doctors and asked them to take her has a patient at the Hoy Spirit. I convinced the doctor of the seriousness of her condition and Vickie was admitted to the hospital about noon on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. She handled this OK and I went home that evening at 11pm and came back early the next day and that was the last time I left her side. Why ? The nurses are great but are so busy with to many patients they apologized for not getting to Vickie for over 30 minutes when she was stuck in the bathroom. I now know how busy they are and if you are not 24 hours a day things like that happen. If your loved one is seriously ill I recommend you find a way to have someone with them 24 hours a day.

However, I found the nurses to be "angels of mercy" They did their best to comfort Vickie and keep me posted on her condition. I want to make that loud and clear so the above does not give them a bad picture as they have far too many patients. It is like

A teacher having a class of 50 students when it should be 30.

Vickie was getting worse and she had many different doctors treating her. I worked with each one and kept telling them that Vickie was very sick and that is why her eyes were closed. I told them about the double vision. The one oncologist could not understand the effects of the brain tumor, and told me she was depressed and wanted to put Vickie on an antidepressant. I felt that was not the problem and this Doctor talked loud right over Vickie about all this and this bothered Vickie to the point she put her fingers in her ears and I had to ask the doctor to talk to me in the hallway and to be gentle with Vickie and not talk so loud. I discovered that when someone is really ill, loud sounds bother them, and they are more sensitive to roughness of touching, etc the need special care and the staff needs special training..

Vickie was getting worse and developed bad infection that for about 5 days they could not control her temperature. Her fever at night was 103 to 105 and we packed her in ice, and she had a pic line put in her left arm so they could give her the drugs needed without the needle in the arm, but the pic line was becoming problematic and the one port was not working properly. They had to take this out and put a second pic line in her right arm, but a small bleeding problem developed. I feel the infection was in her sinus cavity where they did the biopsy.

As you can see this has been a tough journey and I stayed with her 24 hours a day and comforted her and maintained her dignity as much as possible as we all tried to bring the fever down, treat the infection, get her to eat and take in fluids. The most difficult part was getting pills down. It was the aggressive brain tumor that affected her swallowing ability, her speech and her eye lids. She could not control either eye lid and both eyes were closed.

Constantly, I ask for the type of brain tumor Vickie had and that the reason her condition is serious was due to her illness. Not because she is depressed. Can you believe it! But it was like, what do you know. I keep telling them I know Vickie and I have been with her every step of the way. Vickie is sick.. Treat what is causing her to be sick. We now know today that she had a very rare and aggressive tumor. Then, they took bone marrow and discovered she also had multiple myeloma. I ask Dr Patel what is MM and tell me about MM. He said there is not cure for MM, and again it knocked me back into the corner and I broke down in front of one of my sons. It was tough, but we decided that miracles do happen and let us do our best and love Vickie, comfort Vickie and maintain her dignity at all times.

I learned to give the best massages, put hot hand towels on her face, keep her mouth clean, and we made it to the bathroom every time. We did have to put a portable toilet right by the bed. Vickie did develop a bed sore, but I rang the bell every time she went to the toilet and they could treat it. You learn quickly how to keep wrinkles out of the sheets, and how to move Vickie gently, the right positions on the bed, and how to move her during the night from her back to either side and how to prop her with pillows between her legs. What ever it took to make her comfortable. Mary, a nurse and an Angel

of Mercy really took a special interest in Vickie and helped me so much. Vickie loved Mary.

On about January 10<sup>th</sup> Dr. M came in and he was a radiologist and he must have found out about how bad the tumor was, and he suggested radiation of the brain tumor. The Dr. Vickie and I discussed the treatment and we decided that what choice do we have. First, he wanted to radiate the entire brain and naturally that really worried me, but again, what choices do you have at that moment. Then he decided just to radiate the tumor, and they measure and mark the face permanently with little markers. They picked Vickie up at 7:30am and transported her and me to the radiation center. We got up about 6:45am, ate some cream of wheat, and prepared for the trip. I bathed her, combed her hair, and made her look as pretty as I could. The litter would stop at the door and I would help Vickie out of bed and she would walk with my help to the litter. Why did she walk to the litter? We talked about trying for her to stay as strong as possible and to fight every step of the way. We did not know that she would become an Angel in about 6 weeks.

As sick as she was, we constantly talked her about getting better, spending time with Brooke, walking, taking care of her cat, her cardinals, working in her garden, and traveling to Arizona in the fall. Her attitude was amazing, and she worked hard, stayed as positive as possible, and trying to fight through the effects of the brain tumor on her speech, her swallowing, her eyelids..

The radiation caused a thick mucous problem and she would blow out globs of blood clots through her from the biopsy. It was a battle and she did have problems sleeping. Some caused by her condition, and a lot caused by the hospital procedures where they constantly wake you for the blood pressure and temperature. With steroids, high sugar is a by product, and they jab the finger to take blood. Many times she needed injections of insulin. There must be a better way to all of the above and the jabs into her fingers were very painful.

Vickie had about 7 treatments of radiation and it did help her other eye lids to open . We went through the same routine every morning, and the most difficult task was getting any information out of the Doctor. He had to know what Duke had found out about the tumor. He had to know that it was terminal, but, like I said before, the first time I saw “undifferentiated malignant neoplast” was on the death certificate. I ask myself why and maybe it was that Vickie was such a nice sweet person and we were trying so hard and fighting in a positive way each day. I do not know, but this is one of my biggest complaints with many of the doctors. They seem to be so busy that they tell you very little and show very little emotion and empathy. I guess they see so much and can not get attached, but they should offer you the true facts and take time to do that.

Vickie had a physical therapist who was now working with her daily, and had Vickie walking each day. He was a nice guy and he liked Vickie. At times Vickie would mimic him, by saying “Vickie, Vickie, come on you must get up and walk”. Naturally, I think his name was John, and was not there and we would laugh. Her spunk and spirit never wavered.

On Saturday, April 12<sup>th</sup> Vickie and I talked and she said she was even going to try harder. She said she must use it or lose it. She talked about the one doctor who said, "Why are you just laying there like a lump" "We both remember that statement, and it motivated Vickie. She was tough.

We took her fighting spirit to the next level that we talked about doing our best to go home and our best plan was for Vickie to be as perky as possible when dealing with any doctor or whoever. Vickie, God bless her, put her best foot forward and looked everyone in the eye with the best smile possible.

Eating and taking pills was still very difficult, but I ask Vickie to eat to the best of her ability so I can show all the doctors that we are striving to reach 1000 calories daily. We charted everything and added up the calories as well as her fluids. We calculated everything that mattered. And I reviewed these charts with the doctors daily.

Finally, around April 15<sup>th</sup> they indicated there was a chance to go home for the weekend and we would talk at night about what Vickie wanted to do, She said the simple things, see the flowers the backyard and the flowering trees. Sit on the front porch, pet the cat, take a little walk, be able to drink a cup of coffee, hold Brooke, yes the simple things.

On April 18<sup>th</sup> we came home about 2 pm and I still remember the feeling when she got off the stretcher in our living room and I held her in my arms. It was like the entire house embraced us with warmth, and love. She took a little nap and we watched a little TV and her favorite show, Law and Order. . Yes, we endured 16 days at Holy Spirit. Like I said before, I learned so much that I would like to pass on the hospital administrators and I will touch on that later.

When we left the hospital, the doctor said to call him in 7 to 10 days which sounded strange to me because we had not started to treat the MM yet. The doctor indicated to me that he was going to use thalidomide and decadron to treat the MM. He actually added Cumindin which is a blood thinner and will help to prevent blood clots. Later, the Cumindin proved to be our undoing because Vickie had a nose bleed that we could not stop. This was particularly bad because her platelet count was so low.

We scheduled an appointment asap after arriving home, and saw the doctor around April 22<sup>nd</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup>. and Sue Bowers helped me to get Vickie ready and she walked to the car with my help, and at the doctors office I used a wheel chair to get to the front door. Once at the door she walked in for the appointment ,sat up the in the chair in the waiting room. I will never forget Vickie when she walked past one of the doctors who always seemed to blame Vickie for her condition. I know that sounds strange, but that is how we both felt. Would you believe that the doctor did not even say hello, or good to see you, or a great job walking. Later, when Vickie had to go back to the hospital the second time, the doctor told me that she was surprised that Vickie was even walking.

Again, this was Vickie at her finest, trying so hard to beat the cancer, and I was her biggest fan and coach. I was so proud of her, though so worried because I was with her every moment and saw how weak she was and how difficult it was for her to eat and she was losing weight, and she was down to 99 pounds.

One doctor tried to bring me to reality by telling me that Vickie would eat if she could, and that she was very sick and the two different cancers will be tough to beat. I could not think that way.

What was most difficult for me was that Vickie and I could not really talk much because of her brain cancer. In May, it was so tough because I could not understand her and she had to write words to me and this frustrated Vickie and I felt so bad. We did not have a chance to talk about our love for each other, our life together, the possibility of her becoming an Angel, nothing.. Our entire focus was trying to stay as strong as possible and beat the two cancers.

I was trying at all times to get information about the brain tumor, and do another MRI and maybe do some more radiation. I never received a straight answer and the total treatment focus was the MM and thalidomide and decadron. As I look back on it, there was no hope at all and it was just a matter of time. Vickie and I never thought that way and fought everyday. Was that fair to either one of us? Probably not.

We were home 18 days until the nose bleed caused us to call 911 and return to the Holy Spirit. Also, I want to tell the incredible job that my family and two sons did to get through each day.

We had visiting nurses come in to take her blood pressure and temperature, and a physical therapist would visit and help Vickie to walk and exercise. We had a walker which Vickie used to go from the bed room to the dining room. I did my best to get Vickie to sit on the front porch and wear her sun glasses and her Mickey hat. I would walk her through the house many times a day for exercise, and in the kitchen she would hold until the sink and do some short knee bends.

We did everything possible to prepare anything she would eat. Milkshakes with carnation, root beer floats, light soups, water. I again charted everything but it was a real challenge. We tried pieces of a McMuffin. Pancakes, you name it, we tried it.

Pills were still a big problem but I did my best, especially the thalidomide which was a big pill. Sleeping was difficult because Vickie could not sleep much at night and I know that she was in a great deal of pain because both the MM and brain tumor were very painful. We did not have the best pain management program at that time. For me, I was really exhausted as I went days without sleeping. I could not sleep during the day at all.

Plus, Vickie trusted me with everything, as it should be. But, I probably could have used a little help. I finally mastered giving Vickie a shower and kept her warm. Shelly came over and cut her hair short. I massaged her many times a day, changed her clothes, and

put hot hand towels on her face, and rinsed her mouth after each meal. I did my best to make her comfortable, love her, talk positive, read to at times words of encouragement, listen to records and popular songs, what ever it took.

We would get out old photos and look at them, and did that once with skip and sue.

I ask Dave Grimes a 8 year survivor of MM to talk to Vickie and try to encourage her. He did his best and was such a good guy. We are friends to this day and what a fighter he is. I was hoping to have Vickie be another Dave. If she would not of had the Brain tumor she would have made it. There are new drugs everyday even though the odds are against you.

But on May 7<sup>th</sup> Vickie had a nose bleed at night and I called Dave's wife to help me and we did appear to stop it. But in the morning it started again and Vickie vomited large quantities of blood. I had to cut off her sweat shirt and change it as fast as possible. I called Sue to help me and it would not stop and I called the doctor. The nurse said the best way to get treatment is to call 911 which I did. They came and we took Vickie to the hospital on May 8<sup>th</sup> and they put a plug in her left nostril and it still bled a little but I kept a piece of cotton next to the packing and changed the cotton many times.

At this time Vickie was very weak and needed 2 or 3 units of blood and platelets. We settle into a room and a new doctor from the group was there to treat Vickie. We talked about pain management and I was thinking how to make Vickie comfortable when I got her home again. I wanted to get out of the hospital as fast as possible.

On Friday May 9<sup>th</sup>. I ask the current doctor to tell me the truth and what are Vickie's odds of making it. She said she read all the charts and records and Vickie really has a bad dose of cancer and probably has two months. She said there are always miracles, but it did not look good. She was the first doctor to share compassion and level with me. I wished this doctor would be Vickie's permanent doctor but it does not work that way. You must work with whoever is on call at that time.

Our goal was to get Vickie home by May 15<sup>th</sup> and we put a metaport in so all needles and taking blood would be through the metaport. The doctor who put in the metaport told me that Vickie was in great pain. She was not eating well and we discussed putting in a food tube. I checked with the doctor and we were ready to do that. Why ? Keep Vickie as strong as we could, and allow the medicine work.

But who were we kidding. Nothing was being done to fight the aggressive brain tumor. I kept asking about it and another MRI, but could not get off first base. I think they had given up on Vickie. We did not give up and we were hoping for a miracle.

May 11<sup>th</sup> was Mothers day and Vickie was beaming for three hours and loved every moment. Vickie was a great grandmother and always wanted a grandkid. The doctor even stopped in and said we should bring in Brooke often because of her effect on Vickie.

Our goal was to come home Thursday May 15<sup>th</sup>, but that day she had a small turn for the worst and Brooke came up that evening but Vickie was too sick to see her. So, you know she had to not be feeling well.

To make it worse the doctor who we did not like came on her duty. But, I never let her talk over Vickie and we talked in the hallway. Sunday, Josie and Linda visited with Jason and Mike and Vickie had a better evening and I can remember her giving hugs to all when they left. I can remember the morning of the 18<sup>th</sup> when they had to take blood from Vickie and how the nurse was so gentle and Vickie said thank you when the nurse left. She was so sweet and I realized how much she liked people and wanted to be liked and please people. You know what, that is exactly how I am. I know, they say people walk all over people like me and Vickie. But who cares, and we are who we are.

Getting ready for bed that evening I was able to have Vickie take all her pills about 10pm and ready to settle for bed. Every time, I got Vickie up for anything I got my hug and kiss and I told her every time that I loved her

This night was to be different in that Vickie was in great pain and they could only give her morphine every hour and to increase the amount they had to call the doctor on duty to increase the dosage. This happened every hour until 5am and they put in a morphine drip. When the doctor stopped in about 10am she looked very concerned and said who OKed the morphine drip, and I said you did. Vickie was in a coma and the doctor said the morphine did that and to start cutting back on the dose. I did not agree with that and I told her about the pain that night. She lifted Vickie's arms to see her reaction and looked at me and told me to call in the family on this day of May 19<sup>th</sup>. Which I did. You know, I never saw that doctor again. She did not stop back to see how Vickie was doing, or talk to the family, nothing. The doctor with great compassion did come by that evening to talk to the family and I will never forget her kindness.

Vickie was now in a coma and we just did our best to hold her hand, comfort her, what ever we could do. It was difficult for everyone to say the least.

That morning May 20<sup>th</sup> about 3 am, Vickie was in a lot of pain again because the morphine was being decreased and I went to the nurse and told her the situation and they made Vickie comfortable. This really affected Jason because he saw the pain. In the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Vickie developed a different breathing pattern and almost like she was choking this really bothered Mike and we even ask a nurse to drain out the mucous in the back of her throat. They could not do that and the nurse told me again that the breathing pattern is typical when the end is near.

Another doctor stopped and checked Vickie and said we should take her home the next day under the care of Hospice. We ask how long she had without food, and he said maybe a month. That was not the right thing to say and really was not true for someone in Vickie's condition. That is why at the beginning of this journey I indicated the boys felt there was hope and we should try new drugs at home.

We never made it home as Vickie became an Angel on May 21st around 1:39am and I explained this briefly in the beginning.

I think I did talk to Vickie the evening of May 20<sup>th</sup>. I thought her eye opened and looked at me and I told her how much I loved her and to give me a kiss. I again, thought her lips came together and I kissed her twice. At times I thought she was trying to talk to me.

She had such great pride and dignity in the transition from this world to becoming an Angel. What was difficult for me was asking the nurses to put in a catheter which was the morning of May 19<sup>th</sup> about 9am. My last time to get Vickie out of bed was about 5pm and we made it in spite of her being so weak. I ask her for a hug and she gave me the tightest warmest hug ever. It was a strong hug and I do not know if that was because she was so weak or she knew what was happening.

Anyway, once in the coma I knew we had to use the catheter. The nurses were as gentle as they could be.

On the night of the 20<sup>th</sup>, Josie, Vickie's sister was going to stay but she felt a presence in the room and she felt the room was crowded and she should go home. She did leave and it was just Me, Mike and Jason.

I would like to offer some insights from my journey and they will follow and maybe they will help you.