

**SPECIAL!**

**1) "The Acadiana Catholic"**

**June 2011**

***Touching the hem of his garment—a story of faith and healing***

**By Fay Gossen**

**Wife of John William Gossen, son of Ralph and Marcella Elizabeth 'Mel' Habetz-Gossen,  
daughter of Pirmin Hubert and Catherine 'Frances' Hensgens-Habetz,  
sister to my mother Anna 'Gertrude' Hensgens-Monlezun.**

LAFAYETTE, LA

"This is the body of Christ." How familiar those words are to us "cradle Catholics." We remember walking anxiously up the aisle, all dressed up to receive the small white host that had miraculously been transformed into the Body of Christ right before our eyes. Though, in our youthful innocence, the concept was difficult to comprehend (A lifetime struggle for many people), the gift of faith allowed us to feel the significance of the moment. It is only now, at the age of 42, that I can really begin to grasp the hope and promise that is so generously offered to us in the tangible, edible form of that small white host.

Two and a half years ago, at the age of 39, I was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer. At the time of diagnosis the cancer had invaded both lungs and my ribs. There was also a tumor on my spine which severely damaged the vertebra in my neck and put pressure on my spinal cord leaving my left arm and hand very weak and immobile.

Because of the extent of the disease, surgery was not an option. Statistically I had a 15% chance to survive one year and a 5% chance to survive 2 years. Since I was a nonsmoker and had no other risk factors for the disease, the news came as a complete shock to me and my family. The most difficult moment of my life came when my husband, John, and I told our three children, then ages 13, 11, and 5.

I remember vividly, after returning from the hospital, my five year old son, Samuel, fell asleep with his arm around me. Anticipating my death, I just stared at him with tears running down my face as I grieved the fact that I would probably never even see him make his first communion.

The next few months were extremely difficult. I received vigorous chemotherapy and radiation treatments. The tumor on my spine required me to wear a neck brace 24 hours a day which was very uncomfortable because of the radiation burns to my neck and upper chest. Swallowing without choking became a challenge and communicating with others was frustrating due to the complete loss of my voice. I had very little use of my left arm and hand and I was in constant pain. Despite the physical and emotional challenges I was facing at the time, I also experienced a time of spiritual fullness and peace that is hard to explain.

The kindness and generosity of my family, friends and complete strangers overwhelmed me and showed me that there was an important message in the midst of my pain. Because I had numerous physical limitations and I was no longer able to drive or work as an RN (a job I loved and took pride in for 16 years), prayer and meditation filled many hours of my day. There were days that all I had the strength to do was lie in bed and pray. I became immersed in books about Saints, Catholicism, and suffering.

My favorite book, *The Imitation of Christ* was never far from reach and EWTN could usually be heard playing on the television by my bed. I cherished time to say the rosary and meditate on the mysteries (I can probably count on one hand the number of times I said a complete rosary before I was ill). Pope John Paul II once stated; "Yes, God alone is our true and unfailing support, just as love and prayer are the only sure spiritual levers with which it is possible to lift up the world." And this applies to all areas of life.

I lost my health, my job, my independence, and I was preparing for the end of my life. Yet, through prayer, I felt God's unfailing love and support. The mystery of why Jesus had to suffer so much became evident to me. If he had not suffered such emotional and physical pain, how could I expect him to understand my suffering?

Would I be able to call on him now to help me carry my cross if he had not first carried his *own*? I can't imagine going through this illness without the cross to look to in my time of despair.

O<sup>v</sup>er the next year, the cancer stabilized and my body began to heal. When I was able to get out and about on my own, I spent many hours in church, alone, in front of the precious Body of our Lord <sup>in</sup> the tabernacle. I felt his presence as I never had before. I soaked in the sights, sounds, and smells of the Catholic Church like a sponge. My focus shifted from earthly life to eternal life. My heart is filled with reverence and gratitude every time I receive the Eucharist.

As parents, fostering strong Faith in our children is our primary role. My husband, John, lost his mother to cancer when he was only six years old. But because of the love, guidance, and frequent prayers from so many of his devout Catholic family members, he grew up to become an incredible man, husband, father and role model.

So often in today's society sports performance, extra-curricular activities, and material things are seen as necessary for parents to provide to their children, yet attendance at Mass and prayer are lacking. So many children who have much by earthly standards never get the opportunity to be cleansed of sin through confession or united with Christ through the Eucharist.

There is so much evil and immorality in today's world, it breaks my heart to think of children who are not being armored with strong faith and the sacraments. I can honestly say my biggest fear is not that my children will lose their mother; rather, it <sup>is</sup> that they will lose their faith. The guidance and protection I can provide for them on this earth is limited, but the life that God can provide for them is eternal.

A dear friend once told me, "Our only real job as parents is to help our children become Saints". It is the best parental advice I have ever received.

It has been two years and four months since my diagnosis. My cancer is "stable" and I am able to spend quality time with my family and friends. I will be on cancer treatment drugs for the rest of my life and still experience ups and downs in my health but God *continues* to bless me with one day at a time.

On April 30, 2011 Samuel, along with 52 other children in our parish, received his first Holy Communion. I was so honored to be present and witness him receive the fullness of our Catholic Faith in this very important sacrament. It is such a blessing that all three of my children will be able to receive the sanctifying grace granted to us through the suffering of our Lord, Jesus Christ. We will all leave this world one day. When the time comes, I know that my heart will be overflowing with gratitude because of the blessings bestowed upon me through the sacraments of the Catholic Church.

Written May 2, 2011 in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament in St Elizabeth Seton Church, Lafayette, LA.

**2) Fay Gossen aired on 'Lead, Kindly Light' Catholic Television Segment, Diocese of Lake Charles, LA [www.lcdioocese.org](http://www.lcdioocese.org) scroll to Resources, click 'Glad Tidings', click LKL ~ 11 September 2011.**

**2A) Introduction and Questions for her interview...**

***Taping Date: 29 June 2011 & Airing Date: 11 September 2011 Fay Fruge-Gossen***

There is a special and dear lady here today who while in front of the most Blessed Sacrament in St. Elizabeth Seton Church in Lafayette, LA penned words of love, faith and hope entitled "Touching the hem of His garment – a story of faith and the healing power of Jesus Christ" published in the Acadiana Catholic diocesan newspaper June 2011. On December 12, 2008 Fay Fruge-Gossen was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer (adenocarcinoma) of the nonsmoker. She lives daily in a state of gratefulness and awe of her God, her husband John William Gossen and their beautiful children Olivia, Luke and John in Carencro, LA.

She was and raised with strong Catholic values the middle child, only girl, of three. Fay earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from University of Southwestern LA in 1993 having worked at Women's and Children's Hospital in Lafayette for 16 years as a staff nurse, education coordinator & supervision and management. She and John William, my cousin, are active members of St. Elizabeth Seton Church where Fay serves as Minister of Welcome, Eucharistic Minister, 6th Grade Catechism teacher, Leader of Adult Faith Formation Group, member of Pro-Life group, Summer Bible Camp Staff Member. *WELCOME!* I quote you... "Being a mother has been the most challenging, most rewarding, and most important role I have had!" How grateful are you to your parents for that which you are instilling in your children?

2. Do you see The Father's hand in your choice of the nursing profession?

3) Our cousin Alberta Hensgens-Lyons sent me the article which you wrote and I am in awe and moved beyond words...please tell us of your healing and hopeful story as compiled in front of the Blessed Sacrament...beginning with the words... 'this is the body of Christ'...

...the diagnosis...

...while bed bound...reading the Saints, Catholicism, suffering, EWTN, the rosary...

... "I lost my health, my job, my independence and I was preparing for the end of my life, yet through prayer I felt God's unfailing love and support."..... "My focus shifted from earthly life to eternal life..."

...parenthood...fostering strong faith in your children..."so many children who have much by earthly standards never get the opportunity to be cleansed of sin through confession or united with Christ in the Eucharist! 'I can honestly say my biggest fear is not that my children will lose their mother; rather, it is that they will lose their faith!'"

...Sam, your youngest, received Eucharist...“it is such a blessing that all three of my children will be able to receive sanctifying grace granted to us through the suffering of our Lord, Jesus Christ!”

...“We will all leave this world one day and when the time comes, I know that my heart will be overflowing with gratitude because of the blessings bestowed upon me through the sacraments of the Catholic church!”

4) You are a Volunteer for Hospice of Acadiana – providing support care to patients and family members, and, currently working on writing a book about my life, faith and cancer experience. What most of all do you want us to know about this precious life on earth and what will be in heaven...by our daily bread...

...Yours and John William’s vow to the Sacrament of Matrimony...in sickness and in health...

3) John William & Fay Früge-Gossen, parents and aunts were feted to an ‘Arthur Avenue Heritage Tour’ 24 September 2011 in Lake Arthur, LA.

**Today’s Date: 15 August 2011**

**TO:** Fay Früge-Gossen

**COORDINATOR FOR THIS HERITAGE TOUR and Their Contact Information ...**

**INVITATION EXTENDED BY: Bernadette Monlezun-Pontón**

**WHAT: “ARTHUR AVENUE HERITAGE TOUR” IN LAKE ARTHUR, LA  
MONLEZUN ANCESTRAL HOME OF ORIGIN**

**107-year-old home sustaining 90 years of artifacts, photos & memorabilia featuring familial heritage rooms of ancestors from France/Basque Country and Germany 1694 to 2011!!**

**WHEN: Saturday, September 24, 2011**

**WHO: Thirteen people is a good number for this Heritage Tour. THERE IS NO FEE!**

**HOW:**

9:30 am ~ Arrival and Welcome with Café, Raspberry Tea and Coffee Bread!

9:45 am ~ 11:30 am ~ “Heritage Tour”

11:30 am ~ Depart...could-it-be... for lunch in town with your group:

1. *Sugar Chic Bakery* on Arthur Avenue/Main Street ~ Wonderful sandwiches and salads and sweets...tis a sweet place!
2. *‘Nott’s Cajun Restaurant’* Arthur Avenue one mile north with the sign of a larger than life crayfish on a pole! Great food! (# 337-774-2332 to reserve your table).
3. *(July and/or August 2011 ‘The Regatta Steak and Seafood Restaurant’ on the water at the south end of Main Street will be open!! Call for information.)*  
*(‘La Scoop’ Ice Cream Parlor on Arthur Avenue for your trip home!!)*

**DIRECTIONS ...Pull into the driveway and come to the back door!!!**

**Lead, Kindly Light!**

***It was my distinct and humble honor to have them in my ancestral home of origin especially ‘The German Room’ where John William, my second cousin, saw a few of his high school photos standing straight and tall receiving the American Legion Award!!***



**4) You are invited to... [www.CaringBridge.com](http://www.CaringBridge.com) ...enter 'Faygossen'...**

**Connecting Family and Friends When Health Matters Most**

## Fay Gossen **My Story**

**I am a wife and mother of three children. I was diagnosed on 12/28/08 with adenocarcinoma (lung cancer) of the non smoker. This diagnosis came eleven days before my 40th birthday.**

**Welcome to my journey.**

**Be sure to read the latest in the journal, view the photo gallery, and drop us a line in the guestbook.**



### **Journal**

#### **1) Thursday, September 29, 2011 12:22 PM, CDT**

Greetings to all,

I apologize that I haven't been very good at timely updates lately. I have been feeling pretty lousy and have spent lots of time in bed. Last week I found out that a spot on my spine (t-11) that they have been watching for quite some time has grown and become more active. I am now undergoing radiation treatments AGAIN. I might have to start walking around in a Bio-Hazard bag pretty soon. Since the radiation beam will be going through the level of my stomach I must take nausea meds before each treatment which leave me feeling really sleepy afterwards. To line up the radiation beams they tattooed a cross on my upper stomach and one on each side over my ribs. I always prayed for the strength to accept my cross. Now I have a picture of Calvary permanently tattooed across my upper body. Sometimes the Lord whispers to remind us, and sometimes he shouts!

Olivia celebrated her 16th birthday on Sept 17 and is now driving. It is so hard to believe my little curly haired, blue eyed, baby girl is all grown up. It sure does help to have an extra driver around!

John has been so busy driving to appts and treatments and football games and grocery stores. He manages it all quite well I must say. There have been stretches of days that I have barely

Email: [leadkindlylight@bellsouth.net](mailto:leadkindlylight@bellsouth.net) 'Früge-Gossen'  
J.M.J. Website: [www.leadkindlight.net](http://www.leadkindlight.net)

gotten out of bed, yet the dishes get done, the clothes get done, the school papers get signed and the grass gets mowed. I guess I trained him pretty good throughout the years (lol)!

FYI We do not have access to your mail from caringbridge. If you would like to contact John about lawn service (still needs business..) you can email your contact info to him at [fgossen@cox.net](mailto:fgossen@cox.net).

I would like to thank Bernadette Monlezun for sharing her time and family home with us last weekend. It was a glorious day! That Arthur Avenue home was so filled with memories and I could feel God's presence the moment I walked in the door. It was a refreshing and insightful day for me and I long to return there for a little retreat of my own!

Gearing up for Germanfest this weekend. John's band hits the stage at 7:30pm. The weather should be wonderful so we hope to see you there.

Rejoice in the Lord Always! Fay

**2) Date: Friday, September 30, 2011, 11:50 AM**

From: T.A.Habetz

Subject: FAY GOSSEN

To: [leadkindlylight@bellsouth.net](mailto:leadkindlylight@bellsouth.net)

Hey Bernadette,

I hope all is well with you and your family. Thank you so much for the kindness you have shown to John, Fay and their family. She is such an inspiration to us all.

I am hoping, hoping, that you may have a copy of your interview with her on dvd. I would just love to have one. Could you possibly have me one made and send it to my address?

I would like to share her story with some of my co-workers here at school. We are doing a dinner fundraiser, and a blue jean fundraiser day for them. John used to teach/coach here, and is very well thought of by all who know him. He shouldn't have to be going through such a financial struggle now with everything else he is trying to do. I think her dvd will inspire those who do not know her to help even more!!

Thanks so much, T.H.

**3) September 30, 2011 7:10 PM**

**Dear T.H.,**

Thank you for your email of request which has been forwarded to my producer/friend and you should be receiving a DVD copy of the interview soon.

Fay is a phenomenal speaker and writer as she captures the essence of her faithful life which is the pathway to eternity as she will cross over in His time. I am so proud of John William and I know Mel is too; she is waiting for her daughter-in-law whom she has called by name and, in His time, will personally escort her around heaven! They have so very much in common.

Fay and John William certainly think the world of you two and in this I certainly concur...you are caring and wonderful people; I know where you come from!

I pray the message Fay beautifully conveys with such conviction will inspire others to know that the steady and daily practice of ones faith, spouse, children, parents are pivotal to the meaning and purpose in life for The Father calls us all to stay ready by incarnating all He created us to be in His image and likeness; to have time is a different kind of gift.

God bless you and yours in this worthy endeavor.

Lead, Kindly Light!

Bernadette, Cousin

P.S. Please let me know the date, place and time of this meaningful event.....'all will be well'...

**4) Fay Gossen's Journal Entries:**

***Thursday, October 27, 2011 8:37 AM, CDT***

It is with a heavy heart that I write to let all of you know my latest medical update. My brain scans on Monday were worse than the one I had before radiation. The brain cancer has grown despite the treatment. That was the final treatment. We will now focus on symptom management only. I have had a couple of days to absorb the information and tell my parents and our children (the hardest part of all of this). We all knew the day would come but there is an unavoidable sense of shock when you actually reach that point.

Because of all the brain involvement it is difficult to know what to expect. We will continue to take one day at a time as we always have. Sam regularly gives me "tests" to make sure my brain is still working. He asks me his age, my age, what day it is. So far, so good. I am still passing!

I plan to be an active participant in life's day to day activities as long as I am able. My days are very up and down. I am able to push myself to keep going some days and other days I just resolve to staying in bed praying, reading, writing, and sleeping. I pray that my vision and coordination will last a while so that I can keep reading and writing.

The children are as good as can be expected. The fear and pain was obvious in their faces when we told them (Liv and Luke) the latest news. The hardest thing a parent must do is watch a child suffer and not be able to do anything about it. This makes me think of my parents and how hard this is for them. It also makes me think of the cross and the hope that lies on the other side of it. Amid all the suffering I know that the cross is the sign of ultimate love and therefore I know that God will carry them through this as he has carried me.

John continues to be our Rock. He keeps everything flowing as usual and treats me like a princess. I know that his mother still watches over him from heaven because he seems to 'just know' things that can only be whispered by a mother's voice.

Sam only knows that Mom's radiation didn't work and I will probably be getting sicker and that he made an interception at football practice! We give him small bits of information on a "need to know" basis so that he can process things as they happen. He is happy and busy and quite confident!

Thanks to all of you for the cards, meals, rides, kind words, and prayers. I am so grateful for all the support that I have. In the midst of it all, I feel so blessed! We will keep you all posted. In the meantime all you Catholics better start practicing your new mass responses. I don't want anybody fumbling the words at my funeral!!

**5) *Sunday, November 27, 2011 1:53 PM, CST***

I am sorry I let Thanksgiving slip by without an update. I was very busy being thankful. We were able to spend time with both John's family and mine and had a very nice day. Some of the SLS families got together and arranged a two-night getaway for the family at Cajun Palms in Henderson the weekend before. We arrived at the cabin and were showered with cards, bible verses, posters, a basket full of activities, and PLENTY of food! Besides Sam getting stitches in his chin the first night, we all had a great time. Thanks to all involved for your generosity, time, and effort. We would also like to thank Kenny and Trina Habetz and the Ragley crew for the fundraiser they had for us. What a nice surprise that was!

The kids are doing fine. Luke's SLS football team ended the year with a bang by winning the championship game! I was so happy to be able to go to the game. We beat Opelousas Catholic 12-0 (sorry – I just had to rub that in because OC always wins the championship) GO LIONS! Sam has no idea what his flag football team's record was but he can fill you in on the details of all the incredible plays HE made! Olivia is enjoying driving and spends most of her time studying to maintain her 4.0 average in the gifted program. We are already getting lots of mail from colleges. Yikes!

I like to think of John as our rock and our river. He keeps things flowing smoothly on a daily basis yet he is the steady and stable foundation that we all need right now. I don't think the kids are able to realize how fortunate they are to have such an incredible father. They will someday. I certainly realize how blessed I am to have such a strong, faithful, and loyal husband by my side during such a difficult time. (I am sure I will get reminded of this statement often....).

My days are still like a roller coaster – up and down. Some days I don't get out of bed at all and other days I am able to run the roads with the best of them. My main symptoms are fatigue, nausea and pain. I try to manage the symptoms with medication but it gets tricky. The pain and nausea meds cause fatigue and the meds for fatigue cause headaches and nausea. I truly believe that at times the Holy Spirit does more for me than the meds. I have cherished my time reading, watching, and listening to information on the lives of the Saints, Sacred Scripture, and the traditions of Holy Mother Church. I have come to a much deeper understanding and appreciation for our "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic" Faith. I don't think I would have ever come to this place of spiritual fulfillment had I not been diagnosed with cancer. It is one of the many gifts that have evolved from the suffering and trials I have had to face. During the most difficult times, I hear the words of St. John Vianney; "shut your eyes, shut your mouth, and open your heart". When you are having a bad day, just do as St. John Vianney suggests and take a moment to allow the Holy Spirit to fill your heart. Take it from someone with experience, if you are sincere in your efforts, you will feel renewed for the journey!

I hope you all took delight in the new version of the Mass today. Praise be to God! Fay

## **6) Monday, January 2, 2012 2:01 PM, CST**

Happy New Year to all.

Hope you were all able to spend time with family and friends during the holidays. We kept things simple and kind of quiet around here. As many of you probably know, it was 3 years on Dec. 28th since Fay's initial diagnosis. She likes to get away from home after Christmas to keep her mind occupied so as not to think of 'that day'. So, this year, we went to New Orleans for a couple of days and stayed with Fay's Aunt Sue. We visited the WWII museum, Luke and I went to the Hornets/Celtics game while Sue, Fay, Olivia and Sam went to see Xmas lights at City Park. Thanks Sue and Jenny (Sue's daughter) for entertaining and feeding the Gossen crew. Not an easy task.

Fay always has a hard time during the holidays and the pain she's been feeling has not made it any easier. Her hair is starting to grow back except for a strip right down the middle of the top of her head. She calls it a reverse mohawk. Besides the pain, she is also fighting extreme fatigue. This really aggravates her because she does not feel productive but a burden to her family. How frustrating this must be for her to have a plan day after day but her body doesn't allow her to even get out of bed. She has always accepted her cross humbly and gracefully. I pray for her to have peace of mind during this time. More scans are scheduled for mid-January. Hoping and praying for the best.

The kids are fine. They are ready to get back to school.....no wait....that's not right....I mean Fay and I are ready for them to get back to school. (The kids usually don't read this. So I think I'm alright here.) During the holidays we have all been going to bed too late and waking up too late. We will be in shock when that alarm rings early on Wed. morning.

Jan. 9th is Fay's birthday. I won't mention how old she'll be (43) because I don't want her to get mad. Keep her in your prayers, especially on her birthday, that she have a 'productive' day.

A special thanks to all for your continued prayers, donations, food, etc....We believe it is your prayers that have helped us get this far.

Thanks and God Bless! John

## 7) Thursday, February 2, 2012 4:19 PM, CST

Hello Dear Ones,

Sorry for the delay but I really haven't had any new developments to share with you. I had scans of the lungs only on Jan 16. The doctor decided not to scan the brain because the results would not change the plan of care. The lungs were "basically stable" so therapy recommends that I continue taking Tarceva (the targeted cancer therapy drug that costs \$6000.00/month and makes me feel horrible – thankfully insurance covers most of it.) The Tarceva seems to be slowing down the growth of the tumors in my lungs but it is unknown whether it affects the brain at all.

So basically life goes on as it did before. Sometimes I feel like I am walking through a field of land mines, thankful for each little step I make forward with a beating heart. A couple of days after my scans I experienced several days of extreme lower back pain, fatigue, and loss of appetite. I had just changed my medication regimen for pain and fatigue and figured the symptoms had to do with the adjustment of meds. But, of course, in the back of my mind lurks the ever present question – *Is this the beginning of the end?* After a few days, I woke up in the morning without any lower back pain and hungry! When I told John, he responded: "I should have known all I had to do was get a few women involved." He told me that he had been praying to GOD to give me relief but my pain was not letting up. The night before, he decided to pray for the intercession of the Virgin Mary, his mother-Marcella, and Charlene Richard-"the little Cajun Saint." He asked that these women would plead with our Lord for the relief of my pain and VOILA!

I told John, "when things don't seem to be getting done fast enough, it is ALWAYS a good idea to seek the help of a few good women!"

John and the kids are doing fine. Olivia is doing well in the gifted program at Lafayette High School (4.0). She will actually start taking college courses at UL next year (her senior year of high school). She is still dating Mathew, who treats her like a princess. She is always willing to help me out or drive me around and could care less that I am bald and have no make up on!

Luke has grown several inches and is almost as tall as John and every bit as handsome! He has been banging away on the drums getting ready for the talent show at school tomorrow. I have no ear for music but I know he sounds good. John, who has been drumming almost 30 years, often stands in awe of Luke's talent and creativity. I am either lying in bed with a pillow over my head to try to escape the constant noise or I am dancing around the house to the beat. It depends on what kind of day I am having.

Little Sam still lives in the world of imagination, video games, and oatmeal pies. He is now attending John Paul the Great Academy and takes after his big sister when it comes to academics. He is an alter server at Mass almost every Sunday and is always willing to say the Rosary with Mom. He loves to play board games, which he and I do often, but he still needs to work on the art of "losing gracefully."

My Oncologist is amazed at my level of functioning considering that I have cancer in both lungs, my spine, and over 20 tumors in my brain. Despite the difficulties I deal with, I am often amazed myself at the things I can still do. I am certainly no special hero or pillar of strength. I consider myself pretty wimpy most of the time. It is only through the continued prayers, encouragement, and support that I can face each day and continue to beat the odds of this dreadful disease. I have not been very diligent about "Thank You" cards or returning messages lately. I apologize and will hopefully get back in the swing of things soon. Please know how much we appreciate every kind thought, card, email, meal, and gift that comes our way. Most of all we appreciate the prayers. I don't mean to sound corny but you all are "the wind beneath our wings." For now we will keep flying!

"To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven"  
Ecclesiastes 3:1

May GOD bless all of you. Fay

**8) Monday, March 26, 2012 9:03 AM, CDT**



Good Morning my faithful prayer warriors,

Yes, this is a picture of our beautiful daughter, Olivia and her boyfriend Mathew all dressed up for Olivia's Jr. Prom this past Sat. night. I distinctly remember an event that happened in March of 2009. It was a little over 2 months after I was diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer. I was in J.C. Penny's shopping for scarves and hats to cover my bald head when I noticed a section of beautiful formal/prom dresses. I stopped a minute to admire the dresses and my emotions took over. I began balling in the middle of the store. I was thinking at the time that I would never get the opportunity to see my daughter in a pretty dress like the ones in front of me. Olivia was in 8th grade then and chances were that I would not even be there to see her start high school much less send her off to prom. This memory has stuck with me because I think it was the first time that the reality of the situation really hit me and it was heart wrenching. But today, 3 years later, my heart is filled with joy and gratitude as I proudly post this picture.

I know of many tragedies that have taken place since my diagnosis. Friends have lost family members suddenly. Others have been diagnosed with cancer and died. Neighbors dealing with terminal illness. Parents experiencing very difficult situations with their children. Thinking back to those first days of my illness, I never asked God "why me?" I only asked God "what now?" I often wondered though, "why me, why now, why this?" I guess I never asked God because I felt I already knew the answer which came to me in my favorite bible vs. "Be still and know that I am God" Psalm 46:10. One thing I have learned is that God does not always give us the privilege of knowledge or understanding. What he consistently offers us is the privilege and opportunity to obey. Now I wonder why I am still alive and able to write this now despite the fact that I have cancer in both lungs, my spine, and over 20 tumors in my brain. I do not ask God "why" because, again, I know in my heart and soul that the answer has not changed. God continues to guide me one step at a time and answers my prayers on his time schedule, not mine! This moment is a prime example. I lay down to sleep about 2 hrs ago. As soon as my head hit the pillow my mind began thinking of all the things I needed to do tomorrow. I began to pray and put it all in God's hands. A Caring Bridge entry was one of the things on my list so I asked God to send the Holy Spirit to guide my thoughts and words so that I may continue to share the experience of my "cross" in life with others in hope that I can bring even one person closer to Christ. After praying I tried, unsuccessfully to fall asleep. I kept thinking of this entry and what I should include. After quite some time I became aggravated and thought "how can a

brain so full of cancer think so much?" The answer came immediately when the little voice in my head said, "Don't give so much credit to your cancerous brain. Remember that all things are possible with God. Did you not ask for help with your writing? Yes it is I, the Holy Spirit, sent by God as you requested!" My response to that was "Really? It is after 11pm. I am tired. Couldn't this have waited until morning?" "God works on his time, remember?" The little voice replied. I let out a big sigh, turned on my reading lamp and grabbed a pen and paper (I always write first before I enter in computer because my brain works faster than my fingers can type). Understanding – No. Obedience- Yes.

Ok, I know this entry is long but you can blame that on the Holy Spirit! There is another funny "Gossen story" that John insisted I share with you. So I will, once again publicly humiliate myself! The other night I had a dream that I was in a brand new, computerized, red convertible sports car. I drove up to the drive thru to order food. I didn't know how to work the car very well and it started rolling backwards when I got to the speaker. All my friends were with me trying to tell me what to do but nothing was working. The car rolled backward into the street as I heard the lady come on the speaker. She said, "Can I help you?" With my car still rolling backwards I yelled "I'LL TAKE A DOUBLE CHEESEBURGER PLEASE." Dream over...now back to real life. Minutes later I rolled over and awakened slightly. John was next to me wide awake and said "Are you o.k.?" I assured him that I was fine. He then asked, "Are you hungry?" Puzzled by his question, I responded "No. why?" He said "a few minutes ago you yelled loudly that you wanted a double cheeseburger!" It took me a minute before I recalled the dream I had and explained it to John. We both had a good laugh! I just keep getting more attractive to my husband every day!

Now for quick medical update: Glad to report nothing new. My last appt was in Feb. I refused scans because I didn't see the point in knowing anything more at this time. My next appt is in May. I still have bad days and good days and struggle most in the morning. I tire easily and still deal with pain. But, considering how "sick" I am I think I still manage pretty well. The Holy Spirit is reminding me not to take too much credit again!

My parents are coming with us to Degray Lake State Park in Arkansas for Easter Weekend. We plan to celebrate Easter and my Dad's birthday on a party barge in the middle of the lake on Easter Sunday.

God continues to care for me through all of you. I can't thank you enough. May God bless all of you! Fay

#### **9) Written May 6, 2012 3:10am...Hello everyone,**

It's 3 a.m. and I can't sleep because of some poison ivy on my left arm. It's not much, but bad enough to keep me from staying asleep. So I decided to update Fay's journal. The last entry had us going to Degray State Park in Arkansas with Fay's mom and dad. We had a very nice time with beautiful weather for all but one day. Of course that was the day that

we rented a party barge. We froze as it rained but amazingly Sam and Luke still managed to get in some tubing. I guess Pap and I are getting old. We were NOT getting in that freezing water.

The kids are doing fine as they look forward to the summer. Olivia made her Confirmation in April. Sam has a new friend in the neighborhood, so we never see him. We always try to add what the kids have been doing in our updates. I will dedicate most of this entry for the kids to Luke. You will understand why in just a minute. Did you know that God has a wonderful sense of humor? The other day after school, Tuesday I think it was, Luke brought over a black puppy that one of his friends in the neighborhood had found and asked if he could keep it. Now I'm a practical man and also an animal lover. I love a cute puppy just as much as the next guy. But as I told Luke we already have a dog (Penny), and two cats (Chloe and Rudy), AND a rabbit (Coco Puff). But, as Fay told me, Luke has always wanted a dog for himself. So, as the preverbal saying goes, to make a long story short, we let him have the dog. Can you here God chuckling yet? On Thursday Fay and I decided to bring the dog, which Luke named Ace, to the vet to get him checked out. By the way, the dog looked like a lab to us. Anyway, the vet comes in and begins to examine Ace asking all kinds off questions to which we have very few answers to. Suddenly, out of the blue, the vet says, "I think this is a Great Dane." At this point I can hear God laughing hysterically all the way from heaven. I don't remember much after that so I can't really tell what happened. I don't even remember driving home. Needless to say it has been very interesting at our house this week. We can now add a 'small horse' to the Gossen animal litter. Word to parents with children.....Find out the breed of the dog before saying yes.

Fay has been hanging in there still having good and bad days. The nausea is still the main challenge each day. She gets hungry, eats, and then it hits like clockwork. Thankfully the meds help but usually takes a while to start working. She has a dr. appt on Thursday the 10th. As you may recall she decided not to have scans unless her body showed any symptoms or signs that maybe the cancer was spreading. She recently had a few episodes of extreme dizziness and blurred vision. Although it was only 2 or 3 episodes and none in the last two weeks they were significant enough to warrant the dr visit. Please keep her in your prayers.

I will now try again to sleep. Any poison ivy remedies?

God Bless all of you and thanks for the cards and prayers. John

#### **10) Written June 8, 2012 10:43am**

Hello all,

Fay has had a couple of rough days. She doesn't want me to bother with the details but wanted to put all of her prayer warriors to work. Please say an 'extra' prayer for her today.

Thanks so much and God Bless. John

## 11) Written Aug 6, 2012 4:28pm

Warning: This post is rather long. If you are really busy you may want to save it for later!

Hello my dear and faithful followers. It has been so long since I have posted that I almost feel as though I need to re-introduce myself! I have no big medical news to share but I do have an appointment with my Oncologist at the end of the week. We will discuss whether or not to do more scans. I have mixed feelings about it. My last scans were in October, three months after my diagnosis of brain cancer. At that time all of the spots in my brain had grown despite full brain radiation. According to statistics, my estimated remaining life span was 6-9 months. Ten months later, I am proud to say that, once again, I do not conform to statistics!

The kids have had a very busy and enjoyable summer. Olivia and Luke have both taken beach vacations with friends. Olivia has been working at Chick-fil-A this summer and Luke has been busy with football training/practice for the Teurlings Rebels (all you Notre Dame Pio fans will need to find a little room in the corner of your heart for one special Gossen Rebel!) Sam and I took a very nice vacation to the Smokey Mountains with my parents, sister-in-law, and her children. It was a last minute decision for me because I really didn't think I was up for the challenge. I am so glad I decided to go! The mountain air did wonders for my body and soul. The weather was conveniently overcast so the heat wasn't an issue. I walked/climbed through Rock City and Ruby Falls. The beautiful waterfalls and mountain views were so refreshing after being cooped up in my house most of the time. Exactly one year after that awful day when the doctor called me and told me that the cancer had spread extensively to my brain I was in Dolly Wood riding rides with kids! My mother was quite nervous and my Neurologist probably would have refused me as a patient if I were still seeing him! I enjoyed much needed child-like adventure! We ended our trip with a visit to Aunt Mary and Uncle Eddie's house in Georgia, which is always a treat! Of course, nothing lasts forever. I experienced several rough days when we returned. Nausea, dizziness, and achiness got the best of me. I guess that's what I get for rattling my brain a bit and pushing myself beyond my capabilities. I am feeling better now. I know I have to endure the bad times so I can truly enjoy the good times!

After a whole year of wigs, scarves, and caps, my hair has finally grown just enough to go in public bare headed. The first time I was bold enough to make the big reveal was at Sunday mass. After rounding up the crew and getting to Church, Sam hurriedly jumped out of the truck (he likes to be early so he can offer to serve as alter boy every week.) He pulled open the front door of the church and looked behind him with a motion to hurry me along. Suddenly he had a terrible look on his face and he let go of the door and ran back to me in a panic. He said very anxiously, "MOM, You forgot your hair." I just giggled and assured him that it was planned. He responded, "You mean you are going in church like that!" They were in need of an alter server so at least he didn't have to sit by me!

I spend most of my waking and able hours cleaning and cooking meals. My house is frequently the visiting spot to many children of all ages. I am not complaining – I would

have it no other way! I am glad they feel welcomed. It seems that as the children get older and more involved in activities I have also become a sales consultant! Due to my limited social life these days (and the fact that I am the only person in the world not on facebook) I will take advantage of this opportunity to let you know about some amazing deals! Olivia's boyfriend, Mathew Ewing is a new, upcoming country music artist. You can hear his music on several of the local country music stations. He has just released a new CD which contains all original music. It is really good (I am not just saying that because he might be my future son-in-law one day and will need to support my daughter- he is really talented!) You can check him out at [mathewewing.com](http://mathewewing.com). If you would like to be among the first supporters of this soon to be country music star, you can send me one easy payment of \$12 and I will mail you the CD for your listening pleasure! Checks can be made out to Mathew Ewing or to Cash and I will forward all proceeds to him. You can also help by calling any of the local radio stations and requesting that they play his music. If you are not a country music fan, Sam is selling raffle tickets to support his school, John Paul the Great Academy. For a \$10 donation your ticket will be entered for a chance to win one of several prizes, including a golf cart, an IPAD, gift card to Wal-Mart- just to name a few. To increase your chance of winning you could even buy more than one ticket! Just send me a note and your donation in the mail and I will mail you your tickets pronto (127 Froeba Dr. Carencro. La 70520).

OK. Maybe you are not feeling real lucky lately. You would rather spend your money in a more practical way. Well, have I got a deal for you! Luke's football team is selling discount cards for \$20 a piece! You can use this card to get amazing discounts at your favorite stores and restaurants for a full year. This card is also good in Lake Charles and New Orleans (hint hint). Come on Uncle Bill – you know how much you love discounts! Again send me a request and payment and you will receive an envelope full of savings in the mail. Checks can be made out to Teurlings Catholic High School.

Don't miss out on one of the above fabulous offers brought to you by the Gossen Family. Act Quick. Supplies are limited!!! (I think I missed my calling.)

Back to family matters. John is still drumming and mowing lawns. He comes home exhausted, drenched in sweat, and filthy but he is much less stressed than when he was teaching! (For those of you who are not up-to-date, John retired from teaching after 21 yrs and was able to keep all of our medical benefits and receive 40% of his salary for life. He started a small service and does other odd jobs to make up the difference in income. This way he can be more readily available to me and the kids when we need him. If you know of anyone who lives in our vicinity and needs lawn care you know who to call-ok just one more sales plug, sorry.)

Time for reflection: When I was diagnosed with Stage 4 metastatic lung cancer in December of 2008, Olivia was in 8th grade, Luke in 5th, and Sam in kindergarten. I didn't think I would live to see the end of that school. This month Olivia will be a senior, Luke a freshman, and Sam will be entering 4th grade. I have no doubt that it is the prayers of so many faith filled people, including family, friends, and strangers, that have carried me thus far. I cannot begin to express the gratitude that my family feels for those many, many precious moments that I was able to be a part of. Someone asked me recently if I considered myself a miracle. My response to that is this: All life is a miracle, whether it is yours or mine. If we could all truly grasp that fact then perhaps much less of our time would be spent on material things or petty disagreements and more

time on appreciating and loving each other. We all have a chance to be united to our Almighty Miracle Worker in eternal love and peace when our time on this earth comes to an end. That truth is what gets me out of bed when I don't have the strength to do it on my own. It is the source that holds my broken heart so tenderly. It is that power that allows me to still experience joy. Until next time.....

Love,

Fay

## 12) Written Aug 28, 2012 1:13pm

Greetings to all,

I actually have a real medical update this time! Last week I requested to have scans because I was having more upper back pain and shortness of breath. John and I went to my appt. to get results yesterday afternoon. My suspicions were unfortunately correct. The tumors in the lungs and spine have grown and there are new spots in lungs and on ribs. I did not have scans of the brain. My Oncologist said that when he diagnosed me in December 2008 he would have bet a million dollars that I would not be here today and he is not giving up on me yet. He will do some research to see if there are any treatment options out there that may slow the progression. We will meet again in 2 weeks to discuss any options I might have and whether or not the side effects would even be worth the effort.

Yesterday evening was long and tough for all of us. We were already experiencing the expected stress of the beginning of the school year and the activities that come along with it. John has been very busy with the lawn service and I have found it increasingly difficult to deal with regular household duties, busy schedules, meetings, and activities. The scan results we received yesterday just confirmed that my physical struggles were not just due to all the busy days lately.

It is always heart-wrenching to share bad news with the children, especially now that their plates are so full with school, sports, clubs, work etc. Each one of them handles it differently. We give them information and support and then we must give them time and space to deal with their emotions in their own way.

For now we must deal with the next big storm in our lives, literally - Isaac. God is creative at giving us all a day off in the house together with no activities. Good family time for talking and processing! I will be using an inhaler or nebulizer to help me breath better and I will keep pushing myself to be as active and productive as I can during the time I am blessed with. John continues to be our rock. His strength and energy seem to never run out! Please pray that God will keep providing us with the faith, strength, and finances we need to face the challenges ahead. Thanks again for all the support and prayers. We will be praying for the safety of all of you who will weather the approaching storm with us!

Peace and Love to all...Fay

### 13) Written Dec 25, 2012 2:31pm

Merry Christmas to all.

Hope you all enjoy spending time with your loved ones on this Christmas Day. Just updating things at the Gossen house. Fay has outdone herself once again this Christmas season as our children were blessed with plenty of gifts that, for the most part, she herself shopped for. Her good friend Jenny Comeaux helped out alot. Thanks Jenny. I'd like to be able to take some credit here for helping but I'd be a lying fool and none of you would believe me anyway. Our house looks like a war zone but she wouldn't have it any other way. It is, however, driving her crazy not to clean up today.

The kids are looking forward to some vacation time away from school. They have all earned some time off as they have been immersed in studying for midterm exams. Liv and Luke have posted some excellent grades so far this year, as has Sam. Sam just finished acting in a play at his school ("A Christmas Carol") playing a lawyer....go figure. He was perfect for that part. Trust me.

Fay and I are looking forward to spending some down time with the kids during their break as it has been nonstop coming and going the last few weeks. We may try to get away for a mini vacation as Fay's anniversary diagnosis date approaches. She likes to get away from the house to take her mind off of anything that reminds her of the terrible heartache she endured 4 years ago on the 28th. We are all so thankful and blessed to still have her with us especially during the holiday season. She still does so much for her family. It truly amazes me.

Fay will have scans at the end of January. These scans will include the brain. We were going to have them done in Dec. but Fay decided to wait until after the holidays and her birthday (Jan 9) for obvious reasons. I think she made the right decision. We will use the results of the scans to chart a course from there. It is always such a difficult and anxious time waiting for the results. Please keep her in your prayers along with all of those affected by the school shooting in Connecticut. What a tragedy! And we think we have it bad. Anyway, we will keep you all informed.

God Bless and thanks for your continued prayers and blessings whether it be food or monetary donations. Thanks so much.

John

#### 14) Written Jan 7, 2013 7:27am

Happy New Year.

I have been wanting to post a video of Fay that aired on Sept. 11, 2011 on local television. The show is called "Lead Kindly Light" and is hosted by an awesome cousin of mine Bernadette Ponton. She read an article Fay wrote for 'The Acadiana Catholic' and was so moved by it that she asked Fay to appear on her program. It was taped on June 29, 2011 just two weeks before finding out the cancer had spread to her brain. Some of you may have seen it but for those of you that didn't get a chance to I have posted a link below. Her interview starts at the 28 minute mark. I'm sure you will be moved beyond words after watching.

See #2 above on this link...

God Bless!

John

#### 15) 21 January 2013...Written 22 hours ago

Hello my dear ones,

It has been quite some time since I have written. The last couple of months have been somewhat difficult. I am so grateful for the time I have been blessed with but the cancer and all the meds and treatments have left me quite weary most of the time. I long to stay involved and productive but find that I am becoming less and less active. This is quite frustrating because my mind has trouble slowing down to the same pace as my body. Things that once came easily and naturally now seem to require much effort. It is hard for me to allow myself some respite without wondering whether I am giving in to weakness. I often spend days in bed looking out of my large bedroom window. From my bed I have a view of the upper parts of the large oak and pecan trees in my front yard. A bird feeder hangs directly in front of my window with two large bushes on both sides of the window. I watch the leaves and branches fall in autumn and new life emerge in spring. There is a red bird (I named him Charlie) that frequents the feeder during the cooler months and an orange/yellow bird with a distinctive crown of tall feathers on his head that hangs around in the warmer months (His name is Patrick.) Many other birds come and go but those two are regulars. In the spring the yellow butterflies often flutter around for a few weeks. I think of how free they must feel after being in a cocoon for some time. The squirrels are present year round and seem to be filled with endless energy as they chase each other up, down, and around the tree branches. Every now and then a grasshopper will get caught between the window and the screen but always seems to find his way out. Although it is the same window and the same landscaping day after day the details are ever changing. Seasons come and seasons go. Life begins and life ends. Colors change. Light turns into darkness and darkness into light. The brilliant light of the stars is sometimes on display for all who look to the heavens but at other times hidden by the clouds. Through my

difficult hours of idleness I am forced to see the scenery God provides for me, a scenery of nature and the small wonders of his creation. As I am lead to become aware of the present reality of nature, I focus less on my lingering problems and possible future scenarios. God reminds me that he has called me to accomplish much less by human standards but to appreciate much more by spiritual standards. I know that the only way to live in peace is to accept the gift of fragility.

I know you are probably wondering why I am going on and on about such ordinary things. I feel that I have been called to share my journey with you but often feel that my life is so limited and boring, filled with daily struggles that I have nothing worth sharing. I pray often for guidance, vision, and purpose. It is only through much prayer, reflection, and spiritual reading that I can see things in a different light. The roller coaster of physical pain, fatigue, dizziness, emotional trials, financial burdens, and parenting issues can be blinding to God's glory and grace. But then someone shows up at my door with a home-cooked meal (still coming twice a week thanks to Kelly and Tracey), a card of encouragement comes in the mail, a friend picks me up for a lunch date, we receive an unexpected monetary gift or a phone call that someone anonymously paid the school tuition for one of our children, and I am quickly reminded that I am not just lying alone in my bed staring out the window. God is working in very specific ways through his own disciples to help me carry this cross. Our hearts overflow with gratitude for all of those who stand by us, pray for us, and help us in so many ways. It is often humbling to be the recipient of such generosity. I was recently playing a Catholic trivia board game with Sam when he asked me what humility means. Having the catechism book handy (mom would be proud) I read him this definition; "the virtue by which a Christian acknowledges that God is the author of all good. Humility avoids inordinance, ambition or pride, and provides the foundation for turning to God in prayer". I then quietly and privately thanked God for allowing me to experience much humility during my illness.

Speaking of humility, I will share with you the unique humor that exists in our home. Those who have seen me recently realized that I have gained a few pounds during this 4 year battle (30 to be exact). After the brain radiation my hair did not grow back normally. There were patches where the hair grew back and patches where it did not, which really looked quite odd, so I continue to shave it and wear caps and wigs. The tarceva caused a bumpy rash on my upper arms. In light of all of this, Sam made up a song about me that he sings when he hears me complain. It goes like this:

*"I like 'em BIG! I like 'em PLUMPY!*

*I like 'em BALD! I like 'em BUMPY!"*

Flattering huh? When he sings it and does his little dance around me, rubbing my hips and bald head, I can't help but laugh! I gave up my vanity long ago!

John, Olivia, and Luke are doing well. Olivia is now working at Guilbeauxs pharmacy in Carencro and already starting to prepare for graduation. Luke recently got his permit to drive (SCARY!). He is managing a busy social life and good grades so I am trying to allow him a little more independence. Sam is busy playing video games, and making up silly jokes and songs. John is working on remodeling a "flip" house for his step-brother. On Wednesday, January 9th I turned 44 on the fourth day of the week after surviving stage IV cancer for four years! I told all my friends that they should give me 4 gifts each!

One of them actually did just that! Some of my friends and my mom arranged a last-minute luncheon for me at Chedders. Although the weather was quite dreary that day, I really enjoyed the company, conversation, laughter, and good food!

I will be having scans on Jan. 30th but I will not get the results until my Dr. appt on Feb 4th. Please pray for my family and I to be strong and gracious as we face the next set of results.

*I will end with a quote from the book ,Undaunted, by Christine Caine. I read this book last week and this particular statement jumped out at me and stuck with me.*

*“God doesn’t call the qualified. He qualifies the called!”*

*Rejoice in the Lord Always!*

*Fay*

**16) 06 February 2013...Written 21 hours ago**

Hello to everyone.

We wanted to update all of you on Fay's scan results. Basically, without getting into too much detail, the brain has improved, the chest and spine were stable, but the lungs have gotten worse. Still, the results were better than we were expecting. Dr Brierre wants to try another round of chemo (avastin and alimta) that he thinks Fay will be able to better tolerate than previous chemo combinations. She agreed and will begin on Feb 18th the first of three treatments every 3 weeks by IV. Each treatment lasts about 3 hours. Scans will follow and the rollercoaster ride continues. Fay had a rough day today as her mind ponders many thoughts and her heart feels the burden of the cross she has so graciously accepted. She has always preferred quality of life over quantity. I know it was not an easy decision for her to make. She's put her body through so much already. But, she continues to fight for her precious children to be here for them as long as God will allow. We continue to leave everything in His hands and pray for the strength to accept His will in all things.

Thanks for your continued prayers and generosity. Trust me when I say we can feel your prayers coming our way each and every day.

Signing off with a heavy heart tonight. I just wish I could make her feel better and rid her of her sadness on days like today.

God Bless John

**17) Written Feb 27, 2013 7:43am**

Good morning,

Just letting you all know how things are going. Fay's chemo last Monday went as planned. It took about 4 hours and she slept through much of the treatment. Although most of her days following the chemo were rough she did have a few good ones where she was able to get out of the house and be productive. Next treatment will be March 11th.

Kids are doing fine. Olivia will graduate from high school in May. Luke is doing well in his classes and getting ready for spring football practice, Sam can't wait until he's old enough to play 'tackle' football, and Ace continues to run (I should say ruin) the Gossen house. Believe me when I say he's only good when he's sleeping. But we love him anyway. Just can't for the life of me figure out why.

Our friends Tracy Credeur and Kelly Zaunbrecher continue to organize meals for us on Mondays and Thursdays. Thanks ladies and thanks to all who give their time and effort to bring those meals to our door. We really appreciate it. This might be a good time to warn all of you who bring us meals. Ace gets very excited when company comes and tends to jump up on unsuspecting patrons. He doesn't mean any harm but is just 'soooo' happy to see visitors. So, honk when you pull in our driveway and I'll make sure that he's taken care of before you get out of your vehicle. If I'm not home then I'm afraid you're on your own. Enter at your own risk. You'll probably have paw prints all over your clothes. Sorry Trista.

We continue to thank God for the good days and ask for his help and healing hand on the bad ones. He, along with all of your prayers, have gotten us this far.

God Bless and enjoy this beautiful day.

John

**18) Written Apr 1, 2013 5:19pm**

Hello everyone,

Hope you all had an enjoyable Easter. We had boiled crawfish at Ralph and Margie' for lunch and then went to Fay's mom and dad's house for supper. Needless to say we all had our fill and then some.

Just wanted to let all of you know that Fay has finished another round of chemo today. She has had a rough go of it the last couple of weeks continuing to battle fatigue, nausea, and headaches. But despite this, she continues to push herself to try and keep things as normal as possible at the Gossen house. We will again do scans in a few weeks and see

where we go from there. We are both anxious to see whether or not this round of chemo has been effective in slowing the progression of her cancer.

Kids are doing fine. Olivia was off of school last week and the boys are off this week. Luke and Sam are looking forward to some down time. Unfortunately this usually means more work for us.

We continue to take it one day at a time and as always I ask that you keep Fay in your prayers.

Thanks and God Bless!

John

**19) 25 April 2013**

Spring Greetings to All,

It's actually me this time. John has tried to convince me that you all were tired of hearing from him. I seriously doubt that! I had 3 rounds of the new chemo regimen about 3 weeks ago. It has certainly taken a toll on me. I have been facing many physical, emotional, and spiritual challenges. Scans of my lungs only were completed last Friday and I got the results on Monday. The results revealed no new growth and "maybe a tiny bit of improvement". After \$80,000 worth of chemo (thank God for health insurance) it seems like I should shine like gold and sparkle like diamonds yet I feel like a useless slug. I will now have 5 weeks with no treatment in order to gain back some strength and hopefully feel better. During that time our family will have several events including academic award ceremonies, Olivia's High School graduation, Mother's Day, and Sam's 10th birthday. I really want to be present and feel decent for these events, so the timing of the break works out well. Whether or not to continue treatment will be decided in early June. I just keep living one day at a time and I pray for the wisdom to cope with my diminishments in life, to accept my physical ailments each day and the courage to conquer the fear and negative thoughts and emotions I strive to be content in my weakness for God tells us; "whenever I am weak I am strong." -2 Corinthians 12:10

The family has been functioning as most families do, sometimes smoothly and sometimes very distressed. John has been busy running the household on days that I stay in bed. He is still doing lawn maintenance and some light house repairs and improvement. He has been having trouble with elbow pain recently and the Dr. told him he should not lift weights or play drums until his elbows heal. If you know John you know how well he is adhering to that advice! Luke is completing his Freshman year and will start spring training for football soon. Sam will finish 4th gr. at JPGA and will return to Sts. Leo-Seton School for 5th gr. They both continue to do well at school, though Sam has a tendency to be the class clown at times!

Olivia has been busy with senior year events, preparing for graduation, and working at the pharmacy. John and I were honored to attend her Senior Prom because she was nominated for the PROM court. Of course she looked absolutely beautiful and we were bursting with pride seeing what a lovely lady she has become. When I look at my children I am in awe of how far I have come since that heart-breaking day in December 2008. I have beat all odds and expectations and I will continue to do so as long as GOD wills it. I must admit that the last 4 ½ years have left my body weak and my soul sometimes weary so I humbly ask that you all continue to lift my family and I up in your prayers daily.

I want all of you to know how very grateful we are for all the prayers, delicious meals, cards, rides, treats, encouragement, and financial donations. The Lord has many followers who serve him by providing for us. From the bottom of our hearts we want to thank you all for being vessels to GOD's infinite love.

Love and Peace to you and your families.

Fay

### **20) Hello all, Written August 15, 2013 8:27pm**

Sorry it has been so long since the last entry but Fay has had a rough couple of months. This will not be one of her uplifting entries. All of Fay's prayer warriors are needed this evening to ask for her peace and comfort as she tries to get some kind of respite from her illness. I know you have not forgotten about her but ask that you all say an extra prayer for her tonight.

Thanks so much and God Bless.

John

### **21) Prayers!**

Written September 16, 2013 5:22pm

Hello everyone,

Fay needs our prayers at this time. She has really had a rough time lately. She continues to be strong and offers up her suffering for our Lord. Not sure how much more she can take. Please pray for her comfort and our children as it seems there will be very difficult days ahead. As always, we leave everything in God's capable hands.

Thanks for your prayers and all of your continued help and support. It will never be

forgotten.

God Bless!  
John

## **22) More Prayers for Fay**

Written September 27, 2013 10:54pm

Dear Family and Friends,

Fay's illness has progressed very quickly these past couple of weeks. I feel she will not be with us much longer. She has suffered so much these last 5 years so gracefully with nothing but faith, love, and kindness in her heart. But I believe with all my heart, when our Lord calls her that this amazing woman will go straight to heaven where she will find only joy and happiness for all eternity. We all know she certainly deserves it. I ask for your prayers once again that God's loving hands surround her with His peace and comfort this night.

Thanks so much and God Bless!  
John

## **23) Heaven Has a New Angel**

01 October 2013

Blessings,

Fay has lost her battle but won the war as she is in Heaven with Jesus. She passed away peacefully at 1:05 pm today. Her suffering is over and now we can let her love surround us all. I will post the funeral arrangements when they become available. Thanks so much for your outpouring of prayers and kind words.

God Bless each one of you.  
John

## **24) Fay Fruge Gossen**

(January 9, 1969 - October 1, 2013)

A Funeral Ceremony will be held Friday, October 4, 2013 at 11:00 a.m. at St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic Church in Carencro for Fay Fruge Gossen, 44, who passed from the arms

of her family and friends into the arms of her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, on Tuesday, October 1, 2013 in Carencro. Fay had battled a non-smokers lung cancer for the past five years. During her illness she continued to care for her family, volunteer for Hospice and actively serve in the church parish that she loved, St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic Church.

Visitation will be observed at Fountain Memorial Funeral Home in Lafayette on Thursday, October 3, 2013 from 3:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. and resumes on Friday, October 4, 2013 at 8:00 a.m. until time of services.

A rosary will be led by Father Mario Romero of Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church on Thursday, October 3, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. in the funeral home chapel.

A private interment will follow in Fountain Memorial Cemetery in Lafayette at a later date.

Father Gary Schexnayder, of St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic Church in Carencro and Father Mario Romero, of Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Scott, will officiate.

Fay was born Thursday, January 9, 1969 in New Orleans and was a resident of Acadiana. She was a registered nurse for 20 years and worked most of her career at Women's & Children's Hospital, where she was friends with everyone she met.

Fay was an inspiration to all who knew her. She was known for her wonderful laugh, generosity and kind spirit. She was an excellent nurse, providing skilled and compassionate care to all of her patients. Her greatest accomplishments were her marriage to her best friend and love of her life, John Gossen; and being a devoted mother to her three children, Olivia, Luke, and Sam. Her beauty and grace was apparent when she spoke of her children and husband. Most of all Fay enjoyed living her Catholic faith, loving and caring for her family, and serving in her beloved church.

Mrs. Gossen is survived by her beloved husband of 19 years, John Gossen; one daughter, Olivia, two sons, Luke and Sam; parents, Albert Fruge and Linda Lusher Fruge; two brothers, Benjamin Fruge and his wife Jaime, and Troy Fruge and his wife Nileta; and her beautiful nieces and nephews.

Pallbearers will be Mark Fruge, Brian Lusher, Greg Lusher, Kevin Clew, Todd Reinke, Kevin Reinke, Randy Gossen and Leo Didier.

Honorary Bearers are Troy Fruge, Benjamin Fruge, Luke Gossen and Sam Gossen.

Fay and her family wished to express their most sincere appreciation for the support of family and friends. Fay said she was always so touched by the generosity, grace, blessings and prayers of her friends and many strangers. The family also wished to express their thanks to all of the doctors, nurses, and staff at Acadiana Oncology, Oncologics, and Hospice of Acadiana.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made in honor of Fay's daughter, Olivia Gossen, to the Gossen Children Educational Fund by visiting your local MidSouth Bank or to Hospice of Acadiana at [www.hospiceacadiana.com](http://www.hospiceacadiana.com), 2601 Johnston Street, Suite 200, Lafayette LA 70506, (337) 232-1234.

## 25) The Blue Curtain

Oct 6, 2013 10:55pm

Blessings all,

Thanks to all who made Fay's funeral the most spiritually uplifting experience of my lifetime and I'm sure many who attended would agree. I wish I could list by name each person who has helped us through Fay's difficult journey that began so long ago but I know that would be impossible for there are so many. I hope no one gets offended if I mention by name Carl and Jenny Comeaux and their wonderful family. They opened up their home after the funeral for our entire family to have a place to get together and celebrate Fay's life. What an incredible gift! Thank you both so much. I would also like to thank Christa Billeaud for her efforts to fulfill Fay's wishes to the last detail in making the funeral so very unique and beautiful.

As many of you know, Fay began to write a book about her journey with cancer. Although she was never able to finish it, she was able to write the first chapter. The book was to be called 'The Blue Curtain'. You will understand the title after reading what she wrote. It is a window into her heart, and mind, as to what she went through during the hours just before and after her initial diagnosis. She worked so hard on what follows below. I just felt that I owed it to her to let all of her prayer warriors have access to it.

### The Blue Curtain

*An inspiring true story of how a family faced tragedy with love beyond logic, hope beyond reason, and faith beyond vision*

Wrapping my fingers around the handle of the refrigerator door, I realize that I can't grasp it. I can't make my left hand grab the handle hard enough to pull. My right hand is stretched to its limit holding the heavy platters filled with the miniature stuffed tomatoes elegantly placed on the bed of greens, little slices of black olives sitting on top of the chicken salad that fills each little tomato. My creativity and ability to work best under pressure are quite evident as I prepare to host the Gossen family Christmas gathering at our home. I sit the tray down on the table covered with the holiday dressing of poinsettias. Taking a deep breath, I try to ward off the nervous tension that is threatening to join my underlying fear of a serious medical condition. The air is thick and humid, a sharp contrast to the rare winter snow we got earlier this month. Little twinkling lights

align the upper edges of the screened -in back porch in an attempt to create an atmosphere of holiday cheer, despite the 80 degree humid air and the fact that Santa unloaded his last gift and was back at the North Pole 48 hours ago. My brain tells my fingers to grab a little tighter and pull a little harder, but something is missing in the chain of command. I give up and open the door with my right hand. "Just get through the evening", I tell myself. The pain in my left shoulder blade has gotten almost unbearable at times and now this. "Now my left hand seems a little weak and numb" I say casually to John as he works diligently on his "honey dew" list. I don't want to sound too alarmed, for there is much to do before all the family starts to arrive. Our 14th wedding anniversary is fast approaching and as I try to mask the fear in my voice, I know there is enough history between John and I that my attempts will be overcome by familiarity. He has had to help me in and out of bed lately and has anxiously awaited every new doctor's solution – physical therapy, pain meds, chiropractic adjustments. Twelve weeks of physical therapy, a round of steroids, muscle relaxers, even narcotics and I am more miserable than ever. But right now I have to prepare to host 17 people, besides my husband and three children, and create an atmosphere of peace, joy, and excitement as we join together amidst good food, plenty of gifts, and the love of family.

Remnants of wrapping paper, boxes and a few stray cups with red punch stains would usually not be a welcome sight before my first cup of coffee in the morning, but this particular Sunday morning the disarray serves as a reminder that I made it through the evening with a courteous smile and now I can put all of the "holiday madness" behind me. The unrelenting pain in my left shoulder blade did not allow me much sleep even though I felt utter exhaustion when my head hit the pillow later than usual. I call the hospital to check in on the nurses, feeling a sense of gratitude that I was not called the evening before to handle a staffing crisis, an irate doctor, or an influx of patients beyond what the nurses could handle. As I attempt to make that first cup of coffee, which is instant because I am the only one in the house that drinks it and making a whole pot just seems like a waste of time and money, I am harshly reminded that the weakness in my left hand has not subsided. I must see a doctor...again. Tomorrow is "payroll Monday". I must verify the time worked for all the staff on my unit before 10 am. I wouldn't want a payroll error, especially during the holidays, when everyone has spent too much money and is anxiously awaiting the next paycheck. I pull on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. Even though it is December 28, a light jacket is all I need because, even though we had snow fall earlier this month (a very unexpected surprise for South Louisiana), it is warmer than usual out now.

The knot in my stomach becomes tighter as I peck at the keyboard with only my right hand. I now find it difficult to open and close my left hand and certainly cannot move my fingers enough to type. As I make it to the end of the list, my right hand is now shaky from nerves. I am always amazed how much more I can get done when I am in my office on weekends or after hours. I have only been a Nurse Manager for the past 3 months. Most of my previous 15 years of nursing I have done direct patient care or education. I miss the patient contact but needed more stable hours and was already being treated for my back pain when I was offered the position, so it was like God intervening on my behalf. My office door is open and I hear a doctor's voice out at the nurse's

station. I print the report and walk to the nurses' station to get an opinion on my back pain and hand weakness from the OB doctor.

“ I will meet you at my Mom's. We will leave the kids there and you can bring me to the emergency room.” I could hear the hesitation on the other end of the line. Looking forward to bonding with the remote control and ESPN and looking forward to another week off of school, this is the last thing John was expecting to do today. After 18 years of teaching high school, he looked forward to his days off more than anybody I know. “O.K.sure, I'll be there as soon as I can.”

“Try not to swallow or cough. This should only take about 20 minutes.” The instructions were familiar to me because I had already had an MRI of my neck 3 months ago. As I glide into the huge cylinder, I think how impressed Sam, my 5 year old son, would be to see this. He spends most of his waking hours in “in a land far, far away” playing with his Star Wars figurines and futuristic spaceships. I try to use my imagination like he does and pretend I'm on the beach listening to the waves but my mind won't go there. It seems that it has been way over 20 minutes. It is hard to judge the time when you are just laying as still as possible trying to think of anything but what is real at this moment. Has it only been 15 minutes or has it been more like 45 minutes? *Just relax, slow deep breaths, try not to cough, try not to swallow. He didn't say, try not to cry but I am sure that was implied.* Finally, the loud banging stops. I hear what sounds like a huge a/c unit shutting down. My body then glides out of the huge cylinder and back into the cold, quiet room where the radiology tech greets me once more as if I have returned from a trip to outer space. He is a handsome young man and is friendly and polite despite the fact that he was called in from home on a Sunday afternoon to perform this test. “That was long”, I say, hoping that I had misjudged the time. “Well, I took some extra pictures so we can try to figure out why you are hurting so much. Here, let me help you up.” He places one hand behind my neck and hands me the other to grab. The simple act of sitting up caused excruciating pain in my upper back. John had been helping me get up from a lying position for over a week now. He even had to help me pull my shirt over my head the last couple of days. The pain I felt with sneezing, coughing, or yawning was so extreme that I quit doing these things all together. My body quit having these basic, natural reflexes. The pain was taking over my body. Now I could not feel or use my left hand. I was terrified. It was time for answers. I told the technician this as he helped me into the wheelchair and back to my ER station. I felt the need to explain things to him. He had just driven here from his house on a Sunday afternoon and spent the last 45 min looking at the inside of my body for God knows what. I felt like I owed him an explanation – like I had to fill in the blanks. Yet he was the one who knew the answers. The answer that was about to change my life. John is relieved to see me back from the MRI and, though he noticed the delay, he chooses not to comment on it. During our 3 year courtship and 14 year marriage he has always been very skilled at knowing when to keep his thoughts from becoming spoken words. It is a skill that I have never mastered and have sometimes failed miserably. The tech then assists me out of the wheelchair and back onto the stretcher. *Why is he treating me like a china doll?* He wishes me luck (like I will need it), shakes John's hand before he exits, carefully pulling the curtain closed behind him. Now the wait. My heart is pounding so hard it feels like it might explode. My stomach is in

knots. I keep trying to make a fist with my left hand and it doesn't work. *I am sure the "pinched nerve" has become more severe. They may recommend surgery. I should have enough paid time off to last 4 weeks. I wonder if I can go back to work in a neck brace. My mom can help with the kids. John is off 1 more week before he has to return to teaching. It will be fine. I could use a few weeks off of work anyway. Maybe I can do some of the paperwork from home.*

The blue curtain that separates my cubicle from the others has a wavelike pattern. John is usually the one who notices the little details. I am the one who sees the "big picture". Yet I lay on the stretcher and stare at the wavelike pattern and wonder if someone really thought that the pattern would actually have a calming effect on patients. I wonder how many patients even notice the pattern. Suddenly the waves disappear as the curtain is opened with a quick, decisive movement. The ER doctor steps inside the curtain and closes as quickly as he opened it. He stands there, near the blue curtain with the wavelike pattern. He comes no closer. The expression on his face was so serious, so sad, so fearful that I found it hard to look at him. The look on his face made me feel like I was smothering. John instinctively moved closer to my stretcher and grabbed my hand- my cold, numb hand. It was like everything was happening in slow motion. "Mrs. Gossen, I am sorry to have to tell you this. You have a large mass on your spine." All I could do was repeat his words – "mass on my spine?" like he had been speaking a foreign language and I needed clarification. Then came the dreaded question that every person fears most; "could it be cancer?" The doctor, probably about my age, probably a husband, probably a father, responded, "I am afraid there is another mass in your lung". I felt like someone just punched me in the gut after I was already down. "Cancer?" I repeated, still hoping beyond hope that he could give me some other explanation for having, not one, but two masses growing in my body. "I am sorry" he said. It was all he could say. John squeezed my hand and I could not even look at the man who had already lost his mother to cancer at the age of 6 years old. How was this possible? "I can't have cancer. I have three children. My youngest is only 5." I am not sure if I was talking to the Doctor or myself. "We are going to transfer you to Lafayette General now. A neurosurgeon will be waiting for you. There is pressure on your spinal cord and that can be very dangerous. I am sorry Mrs. Gossen." He slipped back on the other side of the blue curtain, the blue curtain that divided my life into *before cancer* and *after cancer*. When those curtains opened again it would be a whole different stage, a new audience, a different plot and I would have to give up my old familiar role and learn a new one, whether I liked it or not.

"I have a 39 year old female with metastatic CA involving the lung and a possible spinal cord emergency due to a large mass at C-7 and T-1. Vital Signs stable. Currently immobilized with IV infusing, ETA 10 min". The EMT placed the handset back in the receiver and placed a small probe on my left index finger to measure my oxygen level. "I guess you were talking about me since there is no one else in here with us" my strained, shaky voice remarked. "I know that you must be in shock. Just try to relax. We will be there shortly." I could hear the sirens overhead and I could tell that we were moving fast. *Is this really an emergency, I thought to myself. I was hosting a Christmas party last night and I was in my office entering payroll into the computer a few hours ago. Now I am strapped to a stretcher with a neck brace and an IV in the back of the ambulance*

*speeding through town with light sand sirens. The technician is talking about me like I have a deadly illness. How can this be? This is a horrible nightmare. I can't wait to wake up. Somebody please wake me up! Oh John. I know that he was planning to follow the ambulance. God, please keep him safe. Don't let him get in a wreck. John, please be careful. I know how upset you must be. Don't try to keep up with the ambulance. I will be fine until you get there. The kids need you now more than ever. The kids. The kids. Tears running down the side of my face. I feel like I am smothering. I am going to vomit. Think of something else, anything else.*

The technician wipes my tears with gauze. "Gauze" I think. How impersonal. Don't they have Kleenex in an ambulance. "I feel like I am smothering, like I am going to vomit", I say. He quickly places a small pink emesis basin beside me and instructs me to take slow, deep breaths. "We are pulling up at the hospital. You will be out of here shortly." *Oh. Like that is going to make everything better. You will just drop me off and go about your merry way. You will probably go home tonight to your wife and children and thank God that this is not happening to you.* As my body slid out of the ambulance, I could see that it was dark. *Was it dark when we left the other hospital? I don't remember. I wander what time it is. I don't think this hospital is covered on my insurance. They said I had to come here because the only neurosurgeon on call in the city was here. Oh I hope my insurance will cover this. .. Bright lights, call bells, phones ringing. I stare at the ceiling. The lights are shining in my eyes. I cannot turn my head. The neck brace is so tight. Why can't I just sit up? I have been walking around for six months with this pain in my back. I have been doing neck exercises and was placed in machines that pulled my neck up and down like it was a mechanical part. I recall the deep tissues massages for the "knotted up muscles" and the "alignment exercises" for the "scoliosis". How many doctors had I seen? How many appointments and therapies and medications? All this time cancer was growing in my body and nobody knew. We send men to the moon. How could nobody know?*

"Hello Mrs. Gossen. My name is Shane. I will be taking care of you." He is young and has a radiant smile, a stark contrast to the expressions of the staff at the other hospital. They lined up to bid me farewell as my stretcher rolled out of there. It was so disturbing to me to see the sadness in their eyes. They looked as if they were attending a funeral. "Shane, can you do me a favor?" "Anything Mrs. Gossen" he replied, as if the world were his to offer. "Can you please just keep that smile on your face because I really need it right now." "No problem. Anything else?" *Should I start a list. There is so much I need right now.* "Can you just make sure my husband can find me. He was following the ambulance."

*God, I am so confused. Please just show me what to do. I can't even pray. Please help me. Please help me. Please help my parents, and John, and the children. Oh nooooo. I can't bear to think of them. I feel like I am smothering again.* "Can I help you?" echoes loudly from the speaker on my call bell. "Can you ask the nurse if it is time for my pain medicine yet?" *How long has it been? 2 hours, 4 hours, 6 hours? My left shoulder blade feels like there is a knife stuck in it and the nerve pain in my elbow just gnaws at me. "I am going downhill fast. Could this really be cancer? What if I am beyond help? Is Sam old enough*

*to remember me? He is only 5. Do I have memories of when I was 5? I remember the snow we had when we lived in our old house on Arizona St. I remember climbing the tree with my brother Troy who was one year older than me and the two neighborhood boys, Vince and Chuck. I remember moving to our new house on Dewberry Dr. when I was 4 years old and my Kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Hayes. John was six when his Mom died and he has a few memories of her. Oh, I want him to remember me.*

"Mrs. Gossen, I have your pain medicine. On a scale of 1-10, how bad is your pain?" *If you thought you were dying and leaving a husband and three young children behind how bad would your pain be? A scale of 1-10, hum, maybe a 50.* "I guess about a 7. Do you have any children?" Checking my IV site (which was a good excuse not to look me in the face) she answered, "Yes, but mine are grown. The last one will graduate from high school this year. It happens so fast." I felt the lump in my throat. I could not speak. "I know" were the only words I could manage to force out without falling apart. But the fact is I didn't know and I probably wouldn't live long enough to find out.

I felt John's hand grab mine. He was on the little sofa next to my bed. He was never very articulate about his feelings but I always knew that he would be by my side no matter what. I knew he was a man that would stand by his words, "for better or for worse, in sickness and in health. My eyelids are heavy and the pain in my back is subsiding. It was getting late and I could hear John yawning. He followed the nurse to the door and spoke quietly to her. He then came over to my bed to ask if it would be OK if he ran home quickly while I was resting to pack an overnight bag. He needed his contact solution, a toothbrush, and a change of clothes. He reassured me that the nurse would check on me often while he was gone and asked if I needed anything from home. I am usually not a light packer when I leave home but as I lay there decorated with an IV in my arm, a catheter in my bladder, a neck brace, an oxygen probe on my finger, my ankles and feet wrapped up in devices that would inflate and deflate periodically to keep my blood flow good in my legs, I could think of very little that I needed from home. "Toothbrush, makeup, and a robe would be good" I slurred, drowsy from the medicine. I can't imagine how people in third world countries go through things like this without the comforts of beds, air conditioning, and drugs. Drifting off into a drug induced slumber, I think; "As bad as it is, it could always be worse."

I suddenly awoke when my nurse came in to check on me. She apologized for awakening me but said that she promised my husband she would check on me often until he came back. She refilled my water pitcher and asked if I needed anything. "I just need to sleep but it is hard to get comfortable with all these tubes, wires, and braces." She hurried off to get two more pillows to try to prop me in a more comfortable position before being summoned by a loud, elderly patient across the hall. I thought that I would doze back off immediately but the sudden sleepiness seemed to have worn off already. I raised the head of the bed to a 45 degree angle and looked around the room for the first time. It seems that all hospital rooms are a lot alike. I realized at that moment what a serious situation this is and that I am in fragile condition and yet I lay here completely alone. John went home to pack up some stuff for us. My Mom and Dad are watching our 3 children and trying to keep the news from them until we find out more in the morning.

All my friends are getting their kids to bed for school in the morning. My co-workers are working their shifts and trying to find someone to do my job also. I have always been proud of the fact that I have a fairly big, close, loving family and lots of friends. Yet, here I am completely alone in a hospital bed after receiving the worst news of my life. *Oh John, I know that you are tired and worried. Please be careful. I need you now more than ever. I need you. I need you. God help me, keep me calm, let me feel your presence, give me your orders. I can't think clearly. Door creaking, light follows in. JOHN!* I could tell instantly that he had been crying. He put up the toiletries and clothes and then sat next to me in bed. He admitted that he "broke down" as soon as he got in his car. He told me who all he called and they would spread the news. "You will soon have a whole lot of people praying for you." I nodded with tears running down my face. He wiped my tears, hugged me and suggested that we both try to get some sleep because tomorrow would be another challenging day. He lay on the cot right next to my bed and held my hand until I fell asleep.

I awaken suddenly by a noise. It is a beeping. I am confused. For just a moment I forgot where I was. But reality blasted me like a bulldozer. The panic, fear, and terror rushed at me like a tsunami. I was soaking wet. My hospital gown, my sheets, and my hair were drenched. I checked to see if my IV was leaking. It was securely in place and working fine. I realized that I was sweating profusely from being in pain and cold. I called for a nurse who responded quickly. "I am soaking wet and in terrible pain. I didn't think it was possible to sweat so much." She assured me that night sweats were a common side effect of both the medication I was taking and cancer itself. **Cancer.Cancer.** *Did she really say that word? Is it final already? I haven't even had all the tests yet? I still can't deal with the word tumor, much less cancer.* Within minutes two other women were changing my gown and rolling me side to side to change my sheets as I moaned in pain. How often had I done this very act for my patients. I am supposed to be a nurse, not a patient. How can life change so quickly? Once I was settled with dry linen, the nurse returned with a syringe in her hand. "I can see how much pain you are in now that we moved you all around. I will give you this shot for pain because it will work much faster than the pill". I could tell by the way she spoke to me that she did not know I was an RN. At that point I didn't care. I just wanted relief. John sat next to me appearing dazed, holding my hand as, once again I drifted off, feeling guilty that I had drugs to help me through this and my exhausted, worried, scared husband did not have the luxury of a periodic drug induced respite from the harsh reality that has just hit like a bomb from outer space.

Hints of sunlight peeked through the curtains. Voices of strangers in the hallway could be heard. Doors opening and closing, carts rolling, the welcoming sounds of morning. When I worked as an RN those familiar noises were a sign that my long 12 hr night shift was about to end. Many of the 16 years I spent as a nurse, I worked the night shift, 7pm until 7am. The night shift was appealing for several reasons. One, of course was money. I got paid significantly more at night. It was also less hectic. The schedule allowed my children to be home more. I always tried to make sure that I was spending as much time with my children as possible. There were many mornings that I don't know how I made it home without falling asleep while driving

Knock, knock.” Good Morning Mrs. Gossen. I apologize for visiting so early but I have a full day ahead of me. How was your night?” I began to fill him on the events of the night as he evaluates my left hand. He holds his hand up and instructs me to mimic his finger movements. My fingers do not cooperate. They do not open up all the way or close to a fist all the way. They are locked in a claw like position. I cannot touch the tip of my thumb to any of my fingertips. My hand is numb and I have a shooting pain in my elbow which started during the night. The pain in my left shoulder blade seems to be steadily worsening. Once the Neurosurgeon completed the neuro exam and listened to my list of complaints, he stood silently for a moment gazing at the floor. It appeared as though he was deep in thought. The serious look on his face caused an immediate panic reaction to occur within me. Although I was able to maintain my outward composure, the inward reaction sent adrenaline rushing through my body like a rocket ship blasting off. My heart was beating so hard and fast that I felt like my chest would explode. “I would like to tell you some encouraging news, but, I am afraid I have none. I thought about you all night. It is one of those cases that really tugs at your heart. Your condition is very serious. I have consulted an Oncologist who will see you this morning. He is the best around. I will continue to follow you due to the spinal cord involvement. The first thing we need to do is get the pressure off of your spinal cord. I have started you on IV steroids. We will need to do more scans to determine the extent of the disease and whether or not you are a candidate for surgery. It might take a team of Doctors to come up with a plan but I promise you that we will do our best. Is there anything that you need from me right now?” Silence. John and I searched each other’s faces for answers that weren’t there. Unable to speak, I just shook my head. The Doctor grabbed my hand and said “I am sorry Mrs. Gossen”. In all my years of nursing I had never heard a Dr. speak with such genuine expression before. As tears flooded my eyes and despair crushed my heart, all I could say was “thank you”.

*Work, money, tuition. How long will I be out? How many hours of paid time off have I accrued? What about sick leave? What about insurance? Registration for the kid’s school will be soon. My new deductible will start after New Years’ Day. That is only a couple of days away. What will all of this cost? I probably spent too much on Christmas shopping. If only I would have known. My thoughts are racing. The ripple effects of this situation are starting to dawn on me. My heart is racing along with my thoughts. Deep breath in. Let it out slowly. Deep breath in. Let it out slowly. Relax your muscles. Let go of the tension.* It was time to rescue myself from panic by using the skills I had learned as a certified Childbirth Educator. I would teach my participants how to consciously relax when faced with great pain and anxiety. We would perform the training exercises every week at class so they would be prepared for the arrival of the real event. The problem is I that my “event” was not exactly planned or expected. Though the back pain that I have been experiencing for the past 6 months should have been a warning, I had no idea it would be that bad. Ironically, many of the women who thought they were prepared for childbirth also commented afterward, “I had no idea it would be that bad”.

As Dr. B exited my room, he crossed paths with a cheerful, middle aged black woman in purple scrubs. “Good morning”, she said cheerfully as she placed a tray on my bedside table. “Your breakfast is here!” She pulled the curtain open letting the uninvited

sun shine brightly through the window into my very dark world. She plucked a pair of latex gloves out of the box on the wall and began picking up all of the tear soaked Kleenex on my table. "I was told you had your linen changed during the night so I will just have housekeeping come empty your trashcans and tidy up a bit. Just buzz if need something hun". She went out as quick and cheerful as she entered. Staring at the "breakfast" tray of apple juice, coffee, and broth, it took me a moment to figure out what had just happened. Did that woman just cluelessly walk in here and act inappropriately considering that I have just been given such horrible news or was she an angel sent by God to reassure me that life goes on before I even had a chance to pose the question to myself? What ever it was, it stopped me in my tracks long enough to put on the brakes before I fell off the cliff. *God, I will never ask you 'why me' but can you please just tell me 'what now'.*

After a couple of brisk knocks the door to my room opened slowly. The worried, anxious face of my mother appeared peeking in to make sure it was o.k. to enter. I could feel the heaviness in her heart as she approached her only daughter lying in a hospital bed with a neck brace and tubes and gadgets everywhere. My hair was a wreck and my eyes swollen from crying. I know she just wanted to fall apart but she actually appeared to be more composed than I expected. I remember when I was 5 yr old and I accidentally slammed my finger in the car door on Halloween evening. The finger was damaged pretty badly and she had to take me to the emergency room. When they started to stitch my finger she passed out. She was supposed to be supporting me during this tragic ordeal but instead someone else had to come in the room to care for her! My Mom is a wonderful, caring woman but she has always expected the worse and worried too much. I knew this would be as much of a challenge for her as it was for me.

I gave her a brief synopsis of what had occurred since I spoke to her on the phone the night before. She then helped me to brush my hair and teeth and put on a little makeup. She knows that I was the type of person that wouldn't check the mail before doing my hair and makeup. As I was looking in a handheld mirror disappointed by my failed attempt to look decent for the visitors that I knew would bombard me now that the word got out, in walks my nurse followed by another new face decorated with that familiar white coat. He holds out his hand as he formally introduces himself as Dr. Gene Brierre, Oncologist. Just hearing that word made me want to vomit. I remember dreading each day of my oncology rotation during nursing school clinicals. I wanted no part of it then or now. He was friendly and professional while not wasting time getting to the point. He first acknowledged how difficult and shocking it is to see something like this in a fairly young, healthy, nonsmoking woman with no significant family history. He informed me that he viewed the MRI done yesterday that revealed a large tumor in the left lung, a tumor on the cervical portion of my spine and another suspicious spot in my right lung. He verified the strong suspicion of metastatic cancer (cancer that has already spread) but said that more extensive scans were necessary to find out the extent and the origin of the disease. He did not bombard me with possibilities or information I was not ready to hear. I could see the genuine concern in his face. That look both comforted me because I knew he really cared and scared me because it endorsed the fact that I was dealing with a deadly disease.

The stretcher arrived to pick me up shortly after the doctor visit. It bewildered me when I thought about what I had been doing for the past 6 months and now I am suddenly required to travel by stretcher. If someone who saw me a few days ago would see me now, they would probably think I was suddenly involved in a terrible accident. Riding around flat on a stretcher with a neck brace on is no fun. I had to close my eyes to avoid getting dizzy. I was medicated before I left the room so the memory of that long process is a sort of blur. The things that stand out in my mind are the noises of the machines, waiting alone in a little cubicle between scans, trying hard not to cry during the scans because I could not reach for Kleenex. I do remember noticing that the curtains between cubicles were plain white, not like the blue wavelike print like the ones in the ER. It is strange that in the midst of the worst crisis of my life I can recall the most insignificant detail. I have no real explanation for this except that perhaps it was easier for me to notice the curtain because I was unable to look beyond it and face the harsh reality that awaited me on the other side.

Beautiful flower bouquets and cards decorated my room when I returned from hours of scans. My lunch, which looked very similar to my breakfast tray, had been placed on my bedside table. I realized that I had been gone a few hours and the last dose of pain medicine I received had worn off during my very expensive photography session. I realized that I hadn't eaten in over 24 hours but had no desire to. I was told that I would not be allowed to have solid food until a decision was made on whether or not I was a surgical candidate. The nurse was prompt to assist me back to bed and hand me the two white pills that had become my only bit of respite from the nightmare that I was experiencing. John was relieved to see me and filled me in on the visitors I had missed and the flowers and cards that were delivered. My mom was no longer there. She would be returning soon enough with our three children.

*God please give me the words to tell my children. Mrs. Marcella, I know that you are up there in heaven. If you can hear me, please pray for me and your son John and your Grandchildren. I call to you now because I know that you have been through this.* I remember when I first learned that John's mom lost her life to cancer at the age of 31 leaving behind a husband and two young boys, ages 6 and 10. I could not even imagine how awful that must have been for her and her family. How does a mother face the fact that they are going to die and leave their young children without a mother? Never did I even entertain the idea that I would follow in her footsteps and be faced with the unthinkable tragedy that she faced. I dozed off with tears running down my face as I thought about what I should say to the kids.

The pain medication seemed to numb my physical and emotional pain just enough to allow me to function like a robot and remain reasonably pleasant. Every now and then a thought or comment would put a crack in the door to reality and threaten to reveal the unimaginable heartache that awaited me, but I would slam that door with every ounce of strength I had left. Keeping the door shut allowed me to treat my situation like a technical issue for the time being.

\*Many of you have asked for a copy of Fay's final message so beautifully read by my cousin Bernadette at the end of the mass. I will add it to this website later this week.

God Bless!

John

**26) Letter penned by Fay Gossen 26 October 2011 and read at her funeral  
Friday 4 October 2013...**

Greetings one last time to all my dear family and friends. You should have known who would have the last word! I want to thank all of you for coming here today to celebrate my life and to support my family and each other during this difficult time. It warms my heart just to think of all of you gathered together in my favorite place – the Catholic Church. I pray that you will truly see and appreciate the beauty of the church, the stained glass windows, the large crucifix, the statues, flowers and candles. I hope that you really hear the glorious music and the spoken word of God in the liturgy. May you smell the distinct smell of holiness that is seemingly present in all churches and feel the renewal that comes through holy water that is constantly flowing through the fountain. May you taste his promise to us in the bread and wine, his body and blood. I have spent many hours in this church – at Mass, in adoration, or just sitting alone in the presence of our Lord pouring my heart out and having it filled again. It has been these very things that have sustained and guided me during this most painful and difficult journey. The Spiritual peace, strength, and even joy granted to me during my illness are impossible to explain except through faith. I know now, it is the only real reward worth seeking.

I know there will be times of pain, loneliness, and grief for those I leave behind. They are necessary components of true love. For proof of this, all you have to do is look up at the cross. But, beyond the pain is strength, beyond the loneliness is appreciation for life and others, beyond the grief is wisdom and hope – hope that we will all once again be united with God and each other in eternal glory forever.

John, Olivia, Luke, Sam, Mom, Dad, Troy and Ben. When I look back on my life I am most thankful for the amazing family that I was blessed with. You are all incredible people and I hope and pray that you can go forward with joy in your heart appreciating the time we had together and all the wonderful memories we created. Our time together may not have been the longest but it was the best!

John, Love of my life, my rock, my best friend, and my co-manager of the home. God doesn't make them any better than you. Don't worry. I will continue to pray for you daily. Olivia, Luke and Sam. You were my pride, my joy and my inspiration. As you leave the house everyday may you hear your mother's voice saying "Make the right choices"!

To my dear friends. You have been so important in my life. May your laugh often when you think of our time together (I know you will..) I hope that the spirit of "Team Fay" will live on in your hearts forever.

As for me, I am the luckiest of all. I had a life filled with incredible family and friends, a career I loved, the best husband and children ever, fun, security, and most of all Faith. What more could a girl ask for? Now I am planning to finally rest in eternal peace and glory with God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Until we meet again...

Fay

### **27) A Little Lagniappe from Fay**

Nov 6, 2013 7:54pm

Hello everyone,

First of all I wanted to let you all know that the kids and I are doing ok. Of course, we all miss Fay very much. The house somehow seems very different, very quiet, but we are managing. In going through Fay's things recently we found several journals that she kept up through the years going back to March of 1998. She had one for each child (this will be priceless to them someday) and a couple of personal ones for herself. I often saw her writing in these journals, mostly before bedtime, and she would not even let me glance at a single word that she wrote. These words meant a great deal to her, even before her illness, but obviously much more after. I have, over the last few weeks, read each of these journals and I must say that her words continue to leave me in awe. Out of all the entries that I read there was one in particular that really struck me as one that needed to be shared. I have struggled with this as I realize how precious and private her journals were to her. But I really believe that she would have wanted me to do this because I can't stop thinking about it. Anyway, here is a portion of that entry. It is dated October 1, 2010.

I am sitting in the chapel at Sts. Leo-Seton school. It is my first Friday adoration hour. An hour of silence, escape, and reflection. A time for gratefulness, seeking, listening.

Wondering why I am still here while so many others with cancer have passed away. I have spent much time over the past year trying to figure out my purpose, my meaning for being. The conclusion that I have come to is that life will not answer that question for me - instead life is asking me the same question. I have discovered that I must get up every morning and answer that question through my deeds and through my words. I must create a meaning to my existence. I must not define my own meaning. I know that God is in me and that one day my body will cease to exist, but hopefully my soul will be united with God forever. He allows me to create my own design for my life while I am here. He does

not intervene. He does not take away pain. He does not grant favors. He gives us a blank piece of paper and allows us to draw our picture. We choose the colors and the theme. When time is up, we must give it back to God. He will then judge if it is worthy to save. He does not judge beauty like we do - visually appealing, symmetrical, colorful. He judges whether the picture is filled with love, with compassion, and with sincerity. My hour is up. Gotta go.

\*Not sure how many of you noticed the date of this entry. Exactly 3 years to the day before she passed. Maybe that is why I had such a strong feeling about posting this entry. Please continue to pray for us as we try to move on without our precious Fay.

God Bless!  
John

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