

A Katy Tiger's STRENGTH

Sharon Washington, an active parent on the Katy Bengal Brigade & Cheerleaders booster club battling lupus and stage 3 lymphoma, remains strong in faith while bringing hope to others

Written by Anna-Catherine Rose | Select photography by Sara Isola

Having managed lupus most of her life, Sharon Washington suspected her blackout in January was a result of her disease. Nonetheless, she called her doctor and received the validation she needed to dismiss it. In retrospect, this is something she wishes she would have followed up on more formally.

Surrendering Control

On February 5, 2016, Washington received a diagnosis of stage 3 Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. In shock, she waited several weeks before she told her family. And after doing so, this "supermom" strategized and added this to her to-do list. Washington reflects, "I had a plan. I scheduled all of my doctor's appointments after 3 p.m. so they wouldn't interfere with my work. I created spreadsheets detailing my treatment plan, medication, medical team contact information, etc. and gave them to family and friends. And then, reality hit."

Washington recalls leaving a radiation appointment one evening so exhausted that she had to pull her car over and ask a friend to come get her. It was the last time she drove herself. "I was faced with the fact that I can't always be in control. I had to surrender," she says softly.

Support and Compassion

Washington, someone accustomed to giving everything to those around her, learned how to receive. The many ways her family, church, the Katy community, the Katy High School's Katy Bengal Brigade & Cheerleaders (KBBC) booster club, and her co-workers at St. Peter's Early Childhood Development Center have ministered to her have changed her forever. From meals and financial support, to transportation to appointments and prayer, Washington experienced the love and compassion she had so consistently invested in others. Just after she was told she might have to undergo a second round of chemotherapy, she received the unexpected news of clear scans, suggesting her cancer is no longer detectable.

Her doctor, in disbelief, has cautioned Washington, stating the term "remission" is not a word her medical team is ready to use until three months of clear scans are achieved. But Washington informed them to the contrary, "You don't know the God I serve. I'm cancer-free!"

"I knew my mom was strong before, but I've witnessed a whole new level. I wouldn't be here without her. Her faith is so strong," adds daughter Ashley.

Hope For Others

Washington uses her strife to help reach out to and support others. "When I was 13, I was diagnosed with lupus," explains Sydney Le, the 2016 to 2017 KBBC major. "Although it's physically disabling, it's an even greater mental disability. No one understands this more than Sharon. She is the epitome of strength and has taught me to not be bitter toward my disorder but to be brave, courageous, strong, and kind. Most importantly, she has taught me how to turn my greatest downfall into my greatest strength."

Susan Price, KBBC Booster Club president, shares, "Washington is a true inspiration and has handled this illness with unrelenting determination and unwavering faith. My hope is that someone hears her story and finds the courage and strength they need."

Grounded in her faith and surrounded by those who love her most, she is already thinking beyond a formal release into remission. "When I was diagnosed, everything unimportant faded," she says. "That wouldn't have happened if I hadn't undergone this." **KM**

ANNA-CATHERINE ROSE is grateful for the opportunity to meet and visit with inspirational souls like Sharon Washington. She lives in Katy with her husband and 5-year-old son.

Sharon Washington, a Katy mother of four, managed two jobs, the care of a disabled son, and a high level of involvement with Katy High School's Katy Bengal Brigade & Cheerleaders booster club in support of her youngest daughter, Ashley, when she was diagnosed with Stage 3 Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma

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