

Thank You for Your Support

One of the main reasons I was able to survive and not die against brain aneurysm from February 2007 – to January 2009 and then from Leukemia (APL) from May 2009 to February 2011, was that people I know and love gave me cards, emails, and phone calls. For my birthday, we planned a celebration that I was still alive in August of 2007. About seventy people out of the hundred invited dropped by through the day and evening for the event. The fact that they came to see me and celebrate my birthday after the victory against a brain aneurysm gave me the courage I needed to keep standing up against these powerful illness challenges. I am very lucky where I live. My condition was obvious and yet all of the people who work and live here were patient and kind to me. I am alive because of their effort and support.

I am sharing this because when challenges were at their most difficult I would pick up an email, note, or card and read it again and/or get another new one. It made me feel like it mattered if I died at my relatively young life long age of 59. I believe now that we all should work together and adopt the Together We're Better motto. We agree and accept that all of us will arrive at death one day, but we all want to keep living as long as possible. We want to share living with our loved families and friends and be able to be supportive and help meet their needs as they do for us.

I received hundreds of communications over the three and a half years I struggled. I now know that I am still here and totally cured, as determined by my medical surgeons and doctors. I am very well now and exceptionally happy each new day. The tremendous support given to me through various means of communication made a huge positive difference that directly helped me beat the negative challenge.

We were able to complete the book, *Humdinger! Noun: An Extraordinary Person or Event* and hopeful that it reaches our goals. The first goal is that the story has information in the struggling against an illness that will help others meet their goal, namely to help their loved one beat the challenge of an illness and be successful. Our second goal is that readers who look at our website and read our book will see how important it is that each of us takes the time to connect with our family and friends in writing emails, notes, or cards to be supportive. Finally, our third goal is that by writing the book and distributing it we are making progress towards ending leukemia and brain aneurysms.

We hope you will join us and that you too believe, "Together We're Better".

Samples of Emails (abbreviated) sent through Caringbridge in February 15, 2007 – April 6, 2007.

The book, *Humdinger! Noun: “An Extraordinary Person or Event”* also has emails taken from Caringbridge that are not included in the samples here.

Email, Saturday, February 17, 2007 5:52pm

Stephanie

I'm sorry to hear about your accident. I am praying that you'll recover soon, so we can meet at Arnie's in Mulkilteo.

I'm working at Chico's for the moment, and when you get better we'll go shopping. (smile)

Take care,

Tunde

Email, Saturday, February 17, 2007 9:44pm

Stephanie—My positive thoughts are with you. I look forward to good times with your sense of humor. Be well!

Fondly,

Christi Clark

Email, Saturday, February 17, 2007 10:02pm

Dear Stephanie – We are thinking of you with best wishes & thoughts of support & love. We will keep posted on your progress & please let us know what we can do to help. Sending you lots of encircling & shielding prayers for your good recovery & many blessings. Here's one I love; At night I turn all my problems over to God; she's going to up all night anyway.

Deep peace,

Nina C

Email, Sunday, February 18, 2007 10:05am

Paula, you are an amazing friend to Stephanie. I just want to send some encouragement to Stephanie about getting off the breathing tube, because I've been there with dad. It was so scary for him, but he did it and Steph will too. It just takes time. You will get off of it, so try to remember when they try to wean you off, so you don't get so worked up. ...

Love,

Cindy Little

Email, Sunday, February 18, 2007 10:10pm

Hi Stephanie (and Paula),

I am thinking of you so much right now and sending lots of prayers, good and positive things your way. I am a friend of Jenna and Susan, and have met you, Stephanie, a couple of times. I am thinking of you all...the power of friends and loved ones is beyond what we can imagine!

Love,

Cheri Bortleson

Email, Monday, February 19, 2007 9:35pm

Hello from Whidbey Island! I love this web site as a way to keep posted. Very cool! It's good to read the progress being made and read everyone's comments in the guest book. We're sending lots of positive thinking your way. Hang in there!
Therese Forster

Email, Tuesday, February 20, 2007 1:37am

Stephanie
Shirley and I are sending you our prayers and positive thoughts. The journal is great for keeping up with your recovery. Fight, fight, fight!!
Love,
Geoff Miller

Email, Tuesday February 20, 2007 5:57pm

Stephanie, my prayers are with you. I can just imagine the three stooges at your side giggling and having fun. I absolutely love your website. I shared with Bi Hoa that you were my son's principal at Canyon Park and we laugh how small this world really is...
Gloria Mitchell

Email, Wednesday, February 21, 2007 12:09am

Hi Steph, Paula and gang,
It is good to hear that you are making progress and it sounds like you are getting a little ornery. That is great news. As the "Wizard" you know how to make people believe and we all believe in you. Now you take a little from the Lion, The Tin Man, Scarecrow and Dorothy and come home. I am waiting for you to speak your "favorite" word and then I will smile, until then you will be in my heart with positive thoughts sent your way 24/7.
Barb Vadakin

Email, Wednesday, February 21, 2007 2:56pm

Hi Steph
It's great to hear that you are making headway. Fever is down and it sounds like you are on a mission to get that tube out! I don't blame you. Hang in there...all will come in due time. Meanwhile, keep thinking positive thoughts, My positive thoughts are with you every day.
Janet Straus

Email, Wednesday, February 21, 2007 9:45pm

My thoughts and prayers are with both of you. Paula, I just found out about Caringbridge and huge thanks to you for posting on this amazing site. I've felt so helpless but after reading the entire journal I feel I've been with you for days. Your positive attitude, sense of humor and the many guestbook entries can only enhance the physical battle. To you Stephanie, my very best wishes for strength as you continue to fight for recovery.
Marilyn Holen

Email, February 22, 2007 9:40am

I am so pleased to know that you have this website as you have been in my thoughts since I first heard. You are in my thoughts and prayers and I wish you both much strength, times for smiles, and may all the moments be filled with positive energy that surrounds you.

Cheri Meyer

Email, February 23, 2007 11:53pm

What wonderful news. I was so hoping for this all day. Continue taking it one day at a time and following Dr.s orders.

Angela Horton

Email, February 24, 2007 12:43pm

I've been following this site on a daily basis and was so pleased to read the latest update. It is truly a miracle on how far you have come Stephanie, and it only goes to show what sheer strength and willpower can accomplish. I know you still have a long road ahead of you, but I have the utmost of confidence that you will accomplish everything that needs to be done to be well again.

Shirley Burbank

Monday, February 26, 2007 10:39am

We were so surprised and shocked to hear news about what all you both have been through. Frankie told me about all you both have been through and the journal website. What a great service it is and it's wonderful to see how you are improving with each day. Please know our thoughts are with you and how inspired we are by your strength. Sounds like you (Stephanie) are in very good hands with the care you are getting and incredible support with Paula and good friends.

Neighbor, Lisa Geradi

Monday, February 26, 2007 2:21pm

One of my best friends has the same story. Rushed to Harborview, really hit hard and now, lots of recovery. He is a wonderful person and I would love to hook the 2 of you if you desire. All the best to you. Take care! JG

Jordan Gussin

Note: His friend did communicate with me and what he had to say is amazing and his remarks have been put in the book. I never thanked you JG for connecting our communication. It really mattered. Thank you both from the bottom of my heart. Steph

Email, Tuesday, February 27, 2007 9:36pm

I'm back from Mexico and am so encouraged by reading this journal and seeing the progress you are making. I can see you are bringing to this experience all the energy and determination you have brought to our school improvement work. I know you will be back, but in the meantime, I will really miss your wise counsel. Hurry up girl, I miss you and need your help.

Karen Hanson

Email, Thursday, March 01, 2007 3:44pm

I finally returned your email. You will find it in your inbox when you return home. This is a lesson not to procrastinate. Miss you dearly and await your return.

Lisa Long

Email, Saturday, March 3, 2007 3:33pm

Frankie sent me your website. How wonderful the news is. It seems every day there is new progress. What is Steph's favorite music...we associate so much with our favorite tunes...she might enjoy that.

Mimi Buescher

Email, Monday March 5, 2007 9:15am

Tenacity is a marvelous quality - glad you've got so much. My thoughts are with you and Paula.
Adam Gish

Email, Monday, March 5, 2007 11:31 am

Barb called last night to share your story with me. Of course, I was heart broken. After I read the journal entries today, it is nice to know that Steph's personality is still in tact...ornery, ornery, and ornery! I wish I wasn't so far away but pray that the recovery goes as well as humanly possible. I remain optimistic that Steph is stubborn enough to not let this get her down for too long. I will continue to read the journals and hope every day.

Natalie Johnson

Email, Monday, March 5, 2007 9:29pm

Thanks for the update. Sounds like Stephanie is on the road to recovery. Is her speech clear? Does she participate in 2-way conversations? Jean-Claude and I continue to pray for more healing.
Love always, Barbara Renoux

Email, Tuesday, March 6, 2007 12:40pm

I am so very sorry to hear of your head injury; however, I know how truly strong you are! Even though we have not seen one another for years, I have fond memories as fellow Administrators in the Lake Washing School District. Take care, my friend and I will keep you in my prayers!

Jo Lynn Woods

Email, Thursday March 8, 2007 10:47am

My email has been done, but have that fixed and have weeded through the old stuff to find the gem from Frankie with the link to this site – it is so awesome to read of your progress, Stephanie! I've spent the last hour reading through all the postings and am in awe of your strength and stamina, as well as the evidence of incredible friends you've created. We will have you in our thoughts and prayers and hope for a swift recovery – for your sake as well as the nurses. Paula, your strength is in your humor – you have it in spades and it will stand you in good stead. I think there may even be a bestseller in there somewhere. You inspire us all!

Roberta Piercy

Email, Saturday, March 17, 2007 7:44pm

Hey Steph -I just heard the news today—what a frightening experience. It sounds like you are getting stronger each day and, hopefully, will be able to go home soon. Are you up for visitors in the meantime? Take care!

Barb Kuznetz

Email, Monday, March 19, 2007 9:49pm

Stephanie when I heard the news I couldn't, didn't want to believe it. More than once in my very short teaching career you have been my strength when I needed it. So during this time I hope to bring you strength. From what I've read, you're probably everyone's "favorite" patient. I expect nothing less. My prayers and support are with you both! Hope to see you soon.

Jasmine Riach

Email, Monday March 19, 2007 8:52pm

Steph – Great news to hear the surgery went well; hopefully this brings some balance back, and hastens your recovery. Glad to hear things are becoming more familiar—that's great progress. Sure enough you'll soon be back at ranch. Hope all the visitors have given you as much as I'm sure the opportunity to see you has for them. We'll be in touch soon.

You are in our thoughts & prayers.

Mary Jo Pritza

Email, Monday, March 19, 2007

Hi Paula, what wonderful news for a dreary Monday...I'm so happy to hear that Stephanie is beginning to understand her situation and asking questions etc. Things can only get better from here. Love and prayers coming your way,

Suzee Davis

Email, Wednesday, March 28, 2007 5:13pm

Hi Paula, I am so glad to hear that Stephanie is doing well. I hope you are getting a chance to enjoy the sunshine, spring flowers and birds chirping.

Take care,

Charisse Berner

Friday, April 6, 2007 3:18pm

Welcome back Stephanie and Paula to Whidbey Island. You brought the sun and good weather and you! I hope your trip home was uneventful and your first day(s) are relaxing and peaceful. Enjoy the good weather.

Therese Forster

Cards and Notes

During the years beginning February 9, 2007 and actually ending February 16, 2011 the notes, cards, emails, and phone calls supported my courage and gave me strength to keep trying to get well. I wasn't ready to leave all the wonderful people I am fortunate enough to know and call my friends. Yes, each of us needs to take on a struggle regarding our own bodies but each of us has a much better chance to reach our goals, to get well, to see the sun rise on new days that are coming, if our friends communicate their support. It makes all the difference.

These are samples of the notes and cards so many wonderful people sent to me. There are different events or activities that are featured. The first notes and cards are about my birthday and beyond that when we all knew I would live. The second section is about the isolate behavior required in order to survive Leukemia (APL).

I hope these examples that are read by the readers will demonstrate how important and powerful communicating is and can make a tremendous positive difference to someone you care about.

Section 1

8/25/07 - Birthday Celebration

For my birthday, we planned a celebration that I was still alive in August of 2007. About seventy people out of the hundred invited dropped by through the day and evening for the event. The fact that they came to see me and celebrate my birthday after the victory against a brain aneurysm gave me the courage I needed to keep standing up against these powerful illness challenges.

Support Examples Notes and Cards 2007

NOTES:

Steph,

I am honored to know you and feel so lucky to have you in our lives. We love you so much and are an inspiration to so many for so many reasons.

Love, Kelly, Patrick & Addie

Stephanie

As you know I'm not much with words, but I am happy with the long way you have come and wish you a happy 60th & many more. You are very special to me.

Love, Georgette

Stephanie

Always remember you are the one who has come through so much and touched so many lives to celebrate! Do all you can & desire life is short. Live, live, live!

Mike Magee

Stephanie

You are amazing I am so, so grateful to share this day with you. I can't begin to describe how much you mean to me. I am thankful for every moment.

Love, Susan T.

Stephanie

You are a miracle – happy birthday & many more. You are an inspiration to all!

Susan Buntich

CARDS 2007:

Dear Stephanie

An amazingly Happy Birthday to you, my friend. You have taught all of us so much about the power of strength, determination, courage and grace. Most importantly, you remind us about the power of love. You are indeed, a blessing and a miracle.

Pamela and Patrick

Stephanie

Congratulations on your extraordinary recovery! The hard work and courage it must take to have made (and continue making) such progress are beyond remarkable but typical of you.

Mel & Chris

Stephanie (this includes what was on the birthday card)

We're friends because we speak the same language.

And make the same hand gestures

Happy birthday

It's great to have you back!

Love, Bi Hoa

Happy birthday

We are so pleased to be able to share your birthday with you! You made it!

Love, Dori & John

Happy Birthday

Surrounded by love is a good place to be.

Enjoy this birthday – it is a real celebration of life.

Jane Johnson

Stephanie

It's been a roller coaster of a year, hasn't it? You and the people close to you are so inspiring to the rest of us! I'm glad to get to know you better.

Have a great birthday!

Love, Therese

Happy Birthday...and your hotter than ever!

We love you & pray for you every day.

Love, Gary and Ruth

The following birthday card by Maya Angelou

“Here's to the woman who knows where she's going, who knows
Not only what she wants from life but what she has to offer in return.
Here's to the woman who can be successful and confident without losing
Her ability to be understanding, and compassionate.
Here's to a remarkable woman
Here's to you!”

I am so happy to share this celebration with you.

Love, Susan ..Speech Therapist @ Whidbey General Hospital

2007 Examples - Christmas Cards

Dear Stephanie

I think of you often and hope you are doing well. We loved your place on the island! Happy New Year!

Aimee

Merry Christmas---and all good things in 2008. I hope you are continuing to recover and feeling good.

Love, Nancy

Section 2

Supportive of Meeting the Challenge of Leukemia (APL)

All of the people who were aware of my brain aneurysm continued to be supportive with communication when they found out that I had Leukemia (APL). They also knew that it is crucial that you stay away from other people when you are being treated with chemotherapy. They endorse you being an isolate. Thank heaven that the people I know are comfortable communicating via email and cards. I will give you a few samples my friends wrote in cards.

Two friends decided to help me by sending me cards to help me think and continue my struggle and win. It really made a difference. I still have all those cards they sent. They each made the cards they sent and that made them very unique and special.

2009 Example Cards

Hi Stephanie

I just wanted you to know that my thoughts and prayers have been with you as you are going through some very hard times. When you are able to have visitors, I'd love to see you sometime.
Sherrill

We pray for you every day. Please please get well. We love you both.
Gary and Ruth

My family and I are thinking of you during this rough time in your treatment. Hopefully a positive ending to this is in sight and Life can get back to normal for you!
Love you both, Angela

Just let the sun shine straight into your heart
No cloud can block the sun forever. Hang in there!
I am so glad that you are home! I continue to think about you. You will make it!
Keep Smiling
Rebecca

I just wanted to say hi- I haven't seen you in so long! I hear regular reports and this month has just sounded so hard! I hope that soon you are feeling better, that your numbers are in the normal ranges, and it won't be long until you are home!
Rest, let your body heal, and take everything one day at a time. Just keep on keeping on –
Therese

As they say in obedience school...Heal!
Our thoughts are with you and Paula. We know you are going through a very tough time! Let us know if there's anything we can do.
Take Care, Gwynne & Brian

Birthday Cards –September 4, 2009

The card was given to me from Whidbey MAC Lab Staff on my birthday in the hospital where I was receiving chemotherapy dose 5 for APL Session 3.

They wrote...

Happy Birthday Stephanie...may the angels bless you this day and always.

To a great year! Jackie

Happy Birthday – Have a great day! Renee

Happy, Happy, Day – Dee

Have a happy day. Ann

Have the best birthday ever. Love, Lisa

To a great! Year. Don

Happy b-day. We hope that your day is filled with happy thoughts that we care about and love you very much. You are such a wonderful person: sincere intelligent, ambitious, tenacious, witty, caring and beautiful, among other things. We hope to see you soon. Meantime know that we are sending BIG hugs and warm and happy wishes for your day.

Love you – Kris and my boy Riley...Riley wrote...We miss you. Love, Riley

Happy, Happy Birthday – We love you!

Love, Kelly, Patrick & Addie

Dear Stephanie

God has given you the Pauler to be a “strong warrior” These past years, which you have done so gracefully. I pray for complete healing of your body and return to health.

Love, Bev

Finally, I have examples of the cards Amy and Mike Watson, that I've gotten to know here on Whidbey Island, and Alison Wysong, who I've known since she and I got to know each other when we were in our beginning years of our education careers.

They made a tremendous difference for me in the daily battle with leukemia. The four Sessions of chemotherapy were not just a four number, but rather a series of days. So for example, for a Session they would give you a chemotherapy dose four or five separate days in sequence. Most of us dealing with this handle the chemotherapy initially, but the longer it's in your body the worse it gets, and longer it takes to once again feel closer to normal.

Mike, Amy, and Alison gave me ways to think about what I was fighting. They sent me cards often. Those cards made the difference in being successful in this challenge.

Mike and Amy Watson

Amy takes wonderful environment pictures. She has several friends who also enjoy taking pictures of flowers. She would use pictures she had taken and then use them to make a card. She would write a little note inside the card. Here are the notes from one of the cards:

Picture of Mt. Shuksan, WA. Photo by Amy Watson

We hope this week is a better one for you. You are in our thoughts.

Love, Amy & Mike

Alison Wysong

She is an amazing photographer. She is now visiting all over the world and taking pictures. I'll probably keep on encouraging her to put her pictures in a book and sell them because they are so wonderful to look at and so many people would love to see them. She would send me a card she had made every couple of weeks. I looked forward to the next one she would send and I re-read each one more than once and looked at the picture she had taken. They were a tremendous help. Here's one of them...

A beautiful picture of a daisy with this quote besides it... "Good friends, good books and a sleepy conscience: this is the ideal life." Mark Twain

Here's to feeling ferocious and feisty and ready to be getting back on your feet!
Keep on fighting to get yourself out of the hospital!

Alison

Service People Who Support You Through Your Struggle With Illness

Hairdressers

On July 3, 2009, while Paula was working most days on the hot tub, we went to Sean Nordin to get my hair cut at the Color Box. Amy Cyprian is the hairdresser that usually cuts my hair but she wasn't in on Friday. Sean and Amy are wonderful people. Before this happened to me I thought of them as nice people that trimmed my hair or colored it. They did whatever I wanted them to do. I could think of what I wanted my hair to look like and they would help me get to that. Their salon is very nice and you can tell that people love going to them. They are so open and friendly and after I've gone to them, I imagine them as people who are my friends. Sean was cutting my hair because I had lost lots of my hair. When I was in the hospital about the third week, my hair just started falling out. My hair was usually straight with the same length, by my chin, with forehead bangs. I was fond of the style I had worn since I graduated from college. It was simple, straight, a good light brown color and healthy. Sean was there that day in July after being with chemotherapy in June and he was going to neaten it up because I had different lengths and many spots on my head with no hair at all. He did a great job of trimming my hair so I didn't feel quite as ugly as I did when I walked in the door. I was relaxed about my hair, just plain and simple. In this July 3 meeting, when I have had cancer, I felt like I looked bad and stood out when people saw me. I tried to ignore those feelings because I'm told that losing your hair is just a minor result when you're dealing with cancer. Who could argue with that I suppose?

Men who genetically lose their hair, deal with it and find a way to incorporate that fact in how they dress, what they wear, and their appearance. I think the major reason men do better is that they know women won't be affected by how men look. They certainly evaluated men on their actions, the kind of work they do, and their reliability but men don't need to worry about their appearance. Women inherently worry about their hair and whether they look their best in order to be considered and judged positively. The fact is that both men and women may lose all their hair if they have cancer treated with chemotherapy illustrates the difference between men and women. I honestly believe, or at least it is worth thinking about, if men worried about their hair they would have found a way to prevent loss of hair that is not genetic but caused by so called "medicine".

Did I worry about my hair? No, because I am alive and my loss of hair wouldn't prevent me from wanting to live. However, aren't any of the people who do this work embarrassed that in over fifty years of treating people they have to poison people because they still haven't found anything that targets just the leukemia/cancer? That's amazing.

Painter and Landscaper

During those twenty days before Session 2, July of 2009, I did things around the house. We went driving and down to a south end restaurant. We stopped by Mike McGee's work project to see what he was doing. He does amazing work and people really appreciate how their house and property look wonderful when he does work for them. I got to know him when I hired him to work on my house. I had just bought the house so I hired him to paint the walls and ceiling on both the floors of the entire house. I have held a brush and painted things in my life but he is at the top of that work and the results are fabulous. Next, I had him straighten out the five acres. There were many alders. Some of us who have lived in Seattle their whole lives think of them as weeds that are dangerous and fall over. The reason there were so many alders around here is that the first people on the island used Whidbey to log and sell quality wood of firs and Douglas trees. They didn't in those times plant quality replacements so the weed alders spread everywhere.

Plumbers

We had the plumbers who take care of us and so they arrived on July 17, 2009. We arranged to meet with them. They are fantastic and Brandon, one of the top workers, came by to do some plumbing work. CPI is the company and they are located in Mount Vernon. They work hard and you can count on what they do for you. When you talk with them over the phone, they are thoughtful and listen to you. I guess if people that are reading my story wonder why I am talking about haircuts, and land work, and plumbing, it's because trying to be normal helps us get well and they support your efforts.

Prairie Center

This is a grocery store just five miles from our house. People who work in the store are wonderful. In my case I was wearing my helmet and very slow writing checks. I couldn't talk very well. I couldn't remember what a date was or how to fill out a check. They were very patient and kind and because of them I believed I could get better if I just kept trying. I often interacted with Jennifer, Jeff, Claudia, Dee, Melissa, and Cindy. I would give them an award for being so kind and warm.