



Georgia Shaffer



Chapter 24 Eliminating the “Someday...” and “If only...”

“It’s about the size of a grapefruit,” the doctor said after my ultrasound test. He was referring to an ovarian tumor that had been discovered during my annual exam. Given my history with breast cancer, the doctor did not paint a pretty picture. We scheduled surgery and I cancelled a speaking engagement in California.

My head throbbed as I drove home that day. I hadn’t seen this coming. The only possible hints were that my jeans fit more snugly and I was experiencing more fatigue.

In spite of the report, though, I felt a peace that came from knowing I had tried my best to focus on the things that mattered most to me. My relationships, especially with Jesus and my son, had grown deeper and richer over the years.

I could not have always made that statement. Eight years earlier I had a stack of unfinished business that reached the ceiling. It was a pile of “somedays.”

“Someday I want to see the cherry blossoms in Washington DC. Someday I’m going to sit down and write my son a “Did I ever tell you” letter. Someday I’ll . . .”

With the recurrence of breast cancer my “somedays” had turned into “if onlys”. “If only I wouldn’t have taken my job so seriously. If only I would have spent more time with my family. If only I wouldn’t have felt the need to get straight A’s in my graduate studies. If only . . .”

When I arrived home from the doctor’s office I pulled into the garage, propped my arms on the steering wheel, buried my head, and prayed for strength and wisdom.

As was true years earlier, I knew I needed to plan for the worst but continue praying for the best.

Almost immediately, I felt an urgent need to write a letter to Kyle. Rather than a “cold” will I wanted him to have something “warm and caring”—a handwritten note containing a permanent record of my love, faith, and values. It would be something that he could read over and over again, in case I wasn’t around to tell him myself.

But first, I had to share the devastating news with him. Since he was still at swim practice, I had some time to gather my courage. My vision blurred with tears thinking what we had gone through over the last several years. How I dreaded what I had to do.

I had just finished dinner when I heard the garage door open. Immediately Kyle leaped up the steps to the living room.

“What’s going on?” he barked loudly, his eyes were filled with concern. “This afternoon a doctor kept calling here every 15 minutes asking for you? What did he want?”

I sighed, evading eye contact, and motioned for us to sit down. The tears I had been determined to hold back gushed down my cheeks.

“Kyle, I had a routine checkup, and they discovered another tumor. I’m scheduled for surgery in a few days.”

“How serious is it?” Kyle asked, visibly cringing.

“Only God knows the answer to that.”

I paused to gather more strength, blew my nose, and whispered, “Kyle, I won’t be able go to your state swim meet,”

“But you have to,” he pleaded.

“Believe me, I want to but I’ll still be in the hospital.”

I blew my nose again. Taking another deep sigh I asked, “Kyle, will you pray with me?”

He jumped to his feet.

“I’m not praying with you,” he raged. “You picked the worst time for this to happen. Now I don’t even know if I can swim at states, let alone win.”

He stomped off to his room and slammed the door.

Stunned, hurt, and all alone I wept. Then I got up, stumbled to my room, and tucked myself into bed. Reaching over to my nightstand, I grabbed my journal and wrote what Kyle wouldn’t allow me to say.

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Kyle, I love you. I thank God for you. If I’m not with you much longer, we’ll make the time we do have count. Don’t give up on your faith. It’s OK to be angry with God. But just remember, life without our Lord isn’t worth living. But with faith in Jesus, we can touch the lives of others; we can know we will make a difference—no matter how long we live!

That’s all I had written when the phone started ringing. Friends, who had heard the news, called to say they were praying for me.

My heart broke again that evening when I stopped outside Kyle’s closed bedroom door to say goodnight and overheard him talking on the phone.

“My mom can’t go to states. I’m afraid she’s dying.”

The next morning Kyle and I were able to pray together. Two days later, I left for the hospital and Kyle prepared for his upcoming event. Among his competitors, he was seeded second in the 100 yard butterfly and third in the 500 freestyle.

Kyle not only managed to swim—he won the 100 butterfly and came in second in the 500 freestyle!

When a reporter interviewed Kyle about his state title and the inability of his mother to be there to share in the triumph he said, “I told her I’d do this for her—win states.”

I’ve never asked but I’ve often wondered if Kyle, like me, was trying hard to eliminate the “somedays” and “if onlys”.

Such life-disrupting events force us to reexamine our lives. They make us stop and think about what is important. They cause us to readjust our priorities.

Although I never got to California that year to speak, I did send two questions to the women in the audience. One was, “If you found out tomorrow that your life was threatened, what would you change?” The other was, “What matters most to you, and are you taking the time to do it?”

That second question haunted me both before and after my surgery, even after I was miraculously handed a new lease on life. “Well, Georgia, I have good news,” my doctor said as he stood at the end of my bed. “We were able to completely remove the tumor, you don’t need any further treatment.”

“Thank you, God!” I sighed with relief.

I still had some unfinished business. It was a dream God had tucked in my heart years earlier, during my recovery from the transplant: Someday I want to write a book to help others rebuild their lives after loss, a book that will encourage them to move beyond existing or merely surviving to a brand new life. It was time to turn that dream into a reality.

Sydney Harris wrote, “Regret for the things we did can be tempered by time; it is regret for the things we did not do that is inconsolable.”¹

I needed to get writing; I didn’t want to die with any “if onlys....”

Note: This chapter is from:
A Gift of Mourning Glories:
Restoring Your Life After Loss.





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¹ Sydney J. Harris, King features, Reader's Digest, pg. 75.