It began as a dream vacation – a week at Disney World with my husband, Doug, and our four-year old son, Cooper. A week earlier, I had had an apparently harmless growth removed from my upper thigh and, although still a little sore, I was thoroughly enjoying the Magic Kingdom experience. Then, while at Hollywood Studios, I received a call from my surgeon that changed my life – I had cancer.

What a surreal experience, strolling in Paradise and hearing the surgeon explain that my diagnosis was leiomyosarcoma, a rare and dangerous form of cancer. To

make matters worse, the pathology report did not show clear margins so there was

a chance that they did not get all of the cancer out of me. No longer could I hear the children’s gleeful laughter, nor Cooper’s pleas for me to get off the phone so he could

get to the next ride.

My mind was racing. I am healthy, active thirty nine year old. How can this happen to me? I have played sports my entire life and taken good care of myself. I eat right, exercise regularly, and play golf and tennis. Why do I have cancer? What about my future? I recently gave up a successful sales career to focus on being a full time mom and to give back to my community. I am deeply involved in mission work, active in Johns Creek United Methodist Church, President of my son’s preschool board, board member of an active homeowners association, and am deeply devoted to my family. I don’t have time to deal with this! My life was suddenly spinning out of control.

Can you imagine how hard it is to have a smile on your face for your child and family at this time? I did the only thing I know I could do -- I committed to myself that I was going to fight this battle with everything I had. My first step was to learn everything I could about this disease. That night, I learned that in a typical year, only 1200 people are diagnosed with leiomyosarcoma (LMS), a soft-tissue cancer, and that LMS in generally unresponsive to traditional radiation and chemotherapies. To make matters worse, there is precious little annual funding for LMS research. In fact, the percentage of funding for LMS research is 10 times less than the percentage of LMS occurrences when compared to all cancers. My next steps were clear. I had to find a medical center that specialized in LMS.

The MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston comes to the top of the list for cancer research including LMS. But how could I get in quickly? I knew I needed more surgery and perhaps other treatments as well. One morning, my prayers were answered. My church ladies’ group had sent out an email letting others know about my condition. One member happened to know Tina Fowler and asked her if LMS was the type of cancer her mother, Sharon Knight, had been battling. That glorious morning, I woke up to emails from two total strangers – Tina Fowler and her mother Sharon Knight. After listening to my diagnosis, Sharon called her surgeon’s secretary at MD Anderson. Within two weeks, I had an appointment with Dr. Pollock, a Sarcoma specialist and surgeon. A few days later, I had a second surgery to get clear margins and no further treatment was required at that time. I will need to be screened every three months for five years, and then twice yearly thereafter.

Thanks to the skill and expertise of Dr. Pollock, I can look forward to remaining active for many years to come. LMS is likely to recur, but I can count on prayer, the expertise of Doctors such as Dr. Pollock, and sarcoma research to ensure a bright future. Not only was Dr. Pollock the appropriate surgeon for me, he is also deeply involved in sarcoma research. He, along with his wife, Dr. Lev, the head of Sarcoma Research, founded their own research lab at MD Anderson. This is one dedicated pair. But their research has financial limitations. There is limited governmental funding for this lab. The more funding they receive, the more lives they will save. Won’t you consider being a supporter of this most important endeavor?

