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## Someone you should know

### Healing Arts



PHOTO BY ALEX CLANEY, ALEX CLANEY PHOTOGRAPHY

by Peggy Capper

When Kate Collins was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma in 2009, she felt like her life had been turned upside down. She was just weeks from graduating from college and was not expecting the life-altering news. "It started with a huge lump behind my left ear. I had three biopsies and one came back positive. I felt like the rug had been pulled out from under me," says Kate.

One of the things that helped Kate during her battle with cancer was the opportunity to participate in several of the art programs offered through the LivingWell Cancer Resource Center in Geneva. LivingWell is the one place in the Fox Valley where people living with cancer, as well as their families and friends, can go for information and encouragement. The facility offers 55 programs and services free of charge to all impacted by cancer. As Nancy Vance, Executive Director of LivingWell says, "It is our privilege to walk beside them during their journey with cancer."

Kate was able to take classes that helped heal her mind, body and spirit during this difficult time. "I started going to LivingWell to do yoga. It was something to get me moving and get me out of the house which was a big thing because I could have probably spent the entire eight months sequestered in my house except for my doctors' appointments. I walked in and there were all these women wearing their caps or they were bald and they didn't care. To be able to be in a room with people who were that comfortable with themselves, and know that they all had experienced cancer, was kind of liberating."

Along with yoga, Kate has participated in other art

classes through the center, which have been equally therapeutic. The classes are geared specifically to those undergoing cancer treatments. Through the Look Good Feel Better class, Kate was able to learn tips in applying makeup, such as how to make her skin appear healthier, and how to draw in eyebrows if she experienced hair loss. The Culinary Comforts Class taught her different food preparation techniques tailored to the palate of someone undergoing cancer treatments. "Your taste buds are different or sometimes you don't have any taste buds. The class taught us how to season food in different ways to make it taste better depending on how my taste buds were working." She has also especially enjoyed taking the Reflections of Expressions art classes with Sherrie Hunt. "It was amazing! Sherrie gets us excited about her projects but she doesn't tell you how to do your work, she just lets you do it and lets you be the creative one which is so cool."

One of the difficult aspects in dealing with her illness is that it has been difficult for Kate to explain her situation to those who have never experienced cancer. The people Kate met at LivingWell were able to provide a type of support others could not. "The people at LivingWell understand what I went through better. It gave me people who had at least had similar treatment experiences to talk to." Often, simply having friends she could look forward to seeing at class was a source of comfort during her treatment. "When I was well enough to go to class it was great, because then I had people who looked forward to seeing me and hearing how things were going. That helped me so much to know that there was someone else out there besides my family who was curious to know how I was doing."

Kate credits the arts with helping her in her battle with cancer. "To me, art is more therapeutic than talking about something because it calms me down." The center is a lifeline for people like Kate who are undergoing cancer treatments. "LivingWell gave me a place to go where I didn't have to talk about cancer, but if I wanted to there were other people there who knew exactly what I was talking about. It kept me sane. There are no words to express it. It's like a safe haven for me. There isn't another group of people whom I've met who know about cancer and who are willing to talk about cancer, but at the same time, not talk about cancer if that is what you need. They are just really there to support you and want nothing more than to make you feel better."

Happily, Kate has been in remission for two years and was able to complete her college degree in technical theater with an emphasis in stage management. She currently works at Fox Valley Repertory at Pheasant Run in St. Charles and the Janus Theatre Company in Elgin. She continues to utilize the many services through LivingWell Cancer Resource Center. Their new 15,500 square foot facility will open next spring which will allow them to better serve the thousands of cancer patients and their families in the area. ●

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