

Testimony of Stephanie Gray:

On March 21, 2024, I had my post-op visit after unexpectedly having had my appendix removed nearly 2 weeks earlier. I spent the morning shopping with my son and was looking forward to a relaxing evening at home. I was just going to run into my appointment, get checked out and get my paperwork signed so that I could return to work the next week.

After an initial assessment by the nurse, the PA walked into the room and asked how I was doing and looked at the small surgical sites which were nearly healed. He then sat down and opened his computer. He asked me if I had seen the pathology report in MyChart. I told him that I didn't realize there was a pathology report (having forgotten that my appendix was sent away per protocol). He then proceeded to tell me that a cancerous tumor had been found. I was in shock. Cancer, what? He then said some other stuff which I don't rightly remember and that the doctor would be in to talk with me in about 10-15 minutes. He then left. As I was sitting there waiting for the doctor, I asked myself a few times if he had just told me I had cancer. I couldn't wrap my mind around this. To this point, I had always been healthy and never had any concerns other than an occasional sinus infection or seasonal allergies. I couldn't imagine having cancer. Not to mention having cancer in an organ that no one even knows why we have. I got out my phone and tried to google it, but I couldn't process what I was reading. I'm a nurse and had worked in Oncology for years. I knew about cancer. Yet suddenly I could barely comprehend the word much less anything related to it.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the PA returned with the doctor. After an exchange of pleasantries, the doctor began to explain that I had what is referred to as a LAMN (low-grade appendiceal mucinous neoplasm) and the pathology revealed a well differentiated tumor with clean margins that was contained in the appendix and that when the appendix was removed, the cancer went with it. The surgery was considered curative. It is a very rare cancer, less than 1% incidence. He went on to say "I know we agonized about whether to remove your appendix, but we 100% did the right thing. I don't know if you believe in divine intervention or not, but this was yours." I told him that I absolutely believe in divine intervention and pointed to a silver bracelet in the shape of a cross that I have worn for many years.

Now, I need to share a little background. Two weeks prior to having surgery, I had not been feeling well. I was having upper abdominal pain and some bothersome GI symptoms. At first, I thought I might have Covid again (I had all GI symptoms, not respiratory) or Norovirus or whatever stomach bug was going around at the time. However, after 2 weeks, I should have been feeling better and wasn't. But my solution was to keep taking Tums and Pepto. I even started eating a bland diet and drinking Keifer hoping this would help me to feel better. Going to the doctor was not part of my plan. As I said earlier, I'm a nurse and I think this by default makes me a terrible patient. I was going to have to get way sicker before I would even consider going to the doctor. Needless to say, I got way sicker! And of course, it was around midnight. So, this meant the Emergency department. I wanted to go to the main hospital in Morgantown which is about 30 minutes from my home but felt too bad and instead went to an ancillary ED about 15 minutes away.

Once there, I got the workup to include an abdominal CT. I was feeling much better after fluids and IV pain and nausea meds. I was waiting for the doctor to come in and tell me I could go home. Instead, the doctor came in and said "you're not going to believe this, I don't believe it but it's your appendix. You have an early appendicitis. I'm just waiting for the surgeon to call back." Surgeon, that means surgery,

what? A few minutes later the doctor returned and said that the surgeon wanted to admit me overnight for fluids and IV antibiotics and would see me in the morning for possible surgery. However, I was going to have to be transferred by ambulance to the main hospital in Morgantown. I immediately asked if I could go home and shower and get a few things and then take myself to the hospital. The doctor said that would not be advisable as I would have to have my IV removed and the doctor in Morgantown would not accept me unless I went back through the ED. So, I decided to go by ambulance. I had never been in an ambulance before and riding facing backwards was not something I wanted to do as I suffer from motion sickness. It was dark and pouring the rain, so what should have been about a 25-minute ride took about 40 minutes.

The next morning, the surgeon met with my husband and I. After examining me, he said that my case was not clear cut. I had no symptoms of an appendicitis. I had no fever, my labs including my WBC count were normal and I wasn't having pain in my right lower abdomen. But the CT showed a dilated, engorged appendix suggestive of an early appendicitis. He said that we could treat it conservatively and send me home on antibiotics and see how things go. If I got sick again, I could come back, and we could reevaluate. This is the option I was leaning toward. I wanted to go home. I had plans. It was my 3-day weekend that I didn't have to work. I was going to the Lady's Tea at church with my friend and it was my husband's birthday. I asked the usual questions and finally asked the surgeon what he would advise if I was his family member. He said he would tell them to remove it. I didn't want to be sick again, I was already in the hospital, and he could remove it later that afternoon and I could go home the same evening. So, I agreed. I had surgery around 4PM, was discharged around 10pm and was running the dustmop on my floors around midnight. I couldn't sleep and was up walking around anyway so I figured I might as well be doing something productive. I felt great!

It was at this time that I realized I had not prayed or talked to God since my ordeal began. I had asked for prayer on the prayer line but that's it. This for me is unheard of. I talk to God all the time. I have an on-going conversation with God that never ends. I have formal prayer time but more than anything else, I'm always talking to God. Yet on the one day that I should have been talking and praying, I was not. It then occurred to me that I had been at peace all day. For those of you who don't know me, I am not a peaceful person. I am always wrought up about something, anxious, contemplating the worst possible outcome. My family gave me the nickname of *Grim* many years ago for my uncanny ability to see the potential disastrous outcome in any situation. However, on this day, my worst traits should have been at their peak. But they weren't. And not only were they not at their peak, they were not even present. What is this all about? Then...Philippians 4:7 came to me - "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." I was immediately excited because I knew that I had experienced this type of peace for the first time in my life! After 50+ years, I had finally experienced it! Then Psalm 46:10 - "Be still, and know that I am God." Then Mark 4:39 when Jesus rebuked the wind and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. Scripture had come alive for me on this day! I was so grateful! Now, I realize a naysayer or nonbeliever might say, "you were medicated, of course you were at peace. But, I didn't get any of the "good stuff" as people would say. My mind was not altered by drugs.

Now, a little more background. About a year or so ago, I asked God to make me a better Christian, to make me the person he intended me to be. I wanted to have absolute trust and faith no matter what circumstance came my way. I was so tired of always worrying and being anxious and always trying to figure out stuff on my own and make my own way. I trusted God to a certain extent, but I always felt like I

had to be right there helping Him along the way so that things would be just right. Now, I was born and raised in church and have always been a Christian, although I have not always been a faithful Christian. But no matter how many times I have strayed, God has only ever let me go so far before He reined me back in. My knowledge of scripture and God was always more cerebral than anything else, despite having had many experiences in my lifetime when I believe God revealed Himself to me. But they were never enough to truly change me. I needed more, something different. I needed something that would take God from my brain and put Him into my spirit.

Now that you have a little more background, fast forward to my post-op visit when the doctor said, “this is your divine intervention.” I knew at that very moment that my life would never be the same. Everything that had happened from the 2 weeks that I was sick, to surgery to sitting in the post-op appointment, was God answering my prayer.

I believe that God allowed me to be sick so that I would go to the doctor. When I didn’t go to the doctor, He upped the ante and allowed me to get a bit sicker. Just enough to get me to the Emergency Department. He spared me the agonizing pain of a true appendicitis but allowed there to be enough of a problem that it showed up on a CT scan (the tumor had gotten big enough that it was causing acute on chronic inflammatory changes). He placed people along the way that I knew and had worked with over the years. He placed a most excellent surgeon on call the night I needed a consult. God didn’t allow me to go home and try a more conservative approach, which was an option. If my appendix had ruptured, the cancer would have seeded my entire abdominal cavity and all my organs which would have resulted in a very poor prognosis rather than a cure. I had virtually no pain and was dust mopping my floors 8 hours after surgery! When people asked me how I was doing, I said “great!” God gave me that. I have never described myself as great. I might say I’m ok or alright but never great. I believe that God did not reveal the pathology report to me until I was with the doctor who could review it with me. If I would have seen that report a few days after surgery, I would have been inconsolable. I would have had to wait over a week before reviewing it with the doctor. That I didn’t see it, is an additional blessing from God because I’m always looking around in my chart. I learned that I had cancer and was also cured in the same sentence! God healed me before I even knew I needed healed! He healed me and I didn’t even have to ask! He just did it! That’s how good God is!

Prior to my getting sick, I had been on the fence about a situation. Was I going to be my usual busybody self and try to handle and fix and steer things the way I wanted or was I going to trust God and do what I knew was right? I prayed and prayed over this situation. And much to my dismay, I still had to tell God that I was undecided, that I wasn’t willing to choose His way. No need to lie to God...He knows. But once I was able to see how God had worked in my life over the course of just 1 month in conjunction with all the countless times over a lifetime, I was no longer on the fence. It was as if a switch had been flipped. Suddenly there was no gray area. It was black and white. Nothing had ever been clearer to me. I would do what I know is right and trust Him with the rest.

God knows us so well! He made us! If we ask Him with a sincere heart to change us and to work in our lives, He will. But it’s not going to be easy and situations likely will not come to us in a way that we might expect or prefer. And it might take a long time. But we can be certain that the change will be perfect and in God’s perfect timing! I believe that when I prayed for God to make me a better Christian, He said “Okay, here’s your first cancer cell.” I believe God allowed me to have a rare cancer as opposed to a more commonly occurring one just so that it would stand out to me. I usually need the bells and whistles to

catch my attention. This qualifies! To a non-believer, all of this might sound crazy. I was sick, my weekend plans were ruined, I ended up in the hospital, had surgery and cancer. Yet, every part of it was a blessing in disguise! Romans 8:28 – “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

I got all the blessings and God got all the glory! Amen!