

## Her sister had already lost a battle with cancer. Now the highly competitive college coach and former LPGA Tour player was faced with a battle of her own—one much tougher than she'd figured.

BY CLARISSA CHILDS

**M**ore than anything, I love to play a round of golf. Most days I can. When my body lets me.

My diagnosis came on one of those days that are supposed to be special. It was Thanksgiving 2012. I had gone into the hospital with abdominal pains. Simple enough, you hope. But at 8 AM that holiday morning, the doctor came into my room and told me straight up, “You have ovarian cancer.”

The initial fear was significant. I'd lost my sister to cancer just a couple of years before this. But when the doctor assured me that the cancer had not spread, I told myself, “It's OK. They've caught this in time.”

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, the medical teams ran their tests. I didn't have one kind of cancer, but two: ovarian and endometrial cancer in the uterus. This wasn't going to be so easy.

When you have spent your whole life enjoying the physical gifts God has given you, you don't want to be told that things aren't working well. I had grown up in Southern California playing as much golf as I could. Morning to night I'd be at the course. When it came time to go to college, I chose the University of South Carolina, and my career there was marked with the success of being chosen four times as an all-conference player.

When I was done with college, I moved into the professional ranks, competing on the Futures Tour, looking for a chance to play at the highest level. That opportunity came in 2001, when I qualified for the LPGA Tour, and I was able to compete there off and on for the next six seasons. Tour life places a lot of demands on your body—the practice, the weekly rounds, the travel. You have to be in good physical shape all the time.

I wasn't so good, though, at taking it easy. When I was on the course, I wanted to pull off the toughest shots

under the most challenging conditions. Sometimes I overplayed the game, but that's just who I was. And when I was away from Tour competition, I added to the demands on my life by helping coach the team at South Carolina.

**N**one of this made any difference in my cancer, of course. Cancer usually finds you without caring what kind of shape you're in. This is just to say that when the diagnosis came, I wasn't ready to become the kind of person who slows down.

Chemotherapy had something to say about that. I started the chemo treatments in early January 2013, right around the time of my first anniversary as the women's head coach at Newberry College. I'd do chemo on Monday, and by the time Wednesday came around, just like clockwork, I was in tremendous pain. It wouldn't go away until at least the weekend. I'd travel with the team and do my best to coach, but I wasn't doing any of the driving. I was much too tired for that!

Through all this, the girls on my team were terrific. I have an open door policy with them, where they can come and talk to me about anything—dating, classes, their life after college. This time I had to be the one to talk to them, to tell them what was happening to me and what I felt about it. I was honest. What else can you be? But they were great, always coming around to help me: “Coach, let me carry that. You get some rest; we've got this.” It was great.

By April, my treatments were done. I was cancer-free. As I have always believed, God was watching out for me. Yes, the results may have been different. But he had enabled the doctor to find the cancer early, so he had taken care of that even before I could worry.

**T**hey say of cancer that even when you win the battle, you lose something. For one, I lost my hair,

## Praying to survive



**Winners.** Clarissa Childs (second from right) stands with her Newberry College team at the trophy presentation at the 2014 Etowah Intercollegiate Tournament. The Wolves are a perennial contender in the NCAA Division II South Region.

which had always been a source of pride for me. It was long, falling down my back. But when it was gone, I thought, *This is kind of nice. I don't have to think about this anymore.* Now I'm happy to wear it short!

But bigger for me is that I've lost my strength. Almost two years later, I still can't walk 18 holes two days in a row. For someone who has spent as many days as possible on the golf course since I was a kid, that's a big concession. I want to play with the same energy as the young ladies on my team, and that just isn't happening.

One question I never asked, not even right after the diagnosis, was *Why?* There's no point. It's a question

you can never get an answer to. But I know God has his reasons. Maybe it's to make me stronger. But maybe it's his way of telling me it's time for me to do something different with my life. I don't know. For now, I'll do what he has me doing, limitations and all.

With cancer, I have seen the love of family and the caring of friends. Those are hard things to trade away, even when the price seems so high. I've cried tears telling this story, and I'll probably cry more along the way. I'm not the same person I was, but I do hope I'm willing to become the person God wants me to be after all that I've gone through. )