Illness changes Broussard woman's life

Lisa Hurt
Staff Writer

BROUSSARD — Nov. 19, 1996, 5:38 p.m.
That was the exact moment Sandra Comeaux's life took a turn that changed her forever. Sandra, 37, now places a new importance on her family — her husband Michael, a 39-year-old computer programmer, and Wayne, her eight-year-old son.

She has aspirations and desires that never existed before. She's teaching a class. Her typically negative attitude has done an about face. Even the family's finances have improved.

And, it's all because on that November night, Sandra found out that she had leukemia — a form of cancer that affects the bones and blood cells.

By midnight that night, Sandra and Michael were at M.D. Anderson Hospital in Houston. She's in remission now, but the year has been a difficult one. It's also been an enlightening experience that has taught her some important lessons.

Sandra, 37, now places a new importance on her family — her husband Michael, a 39-year-old computer programmer, and Wayne, her eight-year-old son. Sandra has lost her hair, twice. But, she certainly hasn't lost her sense of humor. In fact, she said, she found it.

"I was a little disappointed. They told me I'd get this thick, curly hair when it grew back and that I'd get skinny. Neither one has happened yet," Sandra joked. "Michael's been so supportive, he even started losing his hair with me. Now, I don't know whose hair is in the shower," she kidded.

But, she admits, "Laughter really is the best thing, but we can't always laugh."

"I've seen how my son has had to grow up and watched him have to drop out of activities because we just can't keep up anymore. I've seen my old life and some relationships torn apart by this disease. Some people are afraid for me to be near their kids, they're afraid they can catch it (which is not possible), things like that you can't laugh about," she said.

"But, we don't focus on the bad. We think positive, keep each other going, and let God take care of the rest," Michael added.

Sandra and her son Wayne talk about the difficulties he faced after learning about his mom's disease.

Photos by P.C. PIZZA

Sandra Comeaux found out "just how many friends I had" when the cards and letters came pouring in during her hospital stays.

"They've learned to get along so well without me that part of me was afraid to let them get that close, that dependent on me again," Sandra said.

"I think twice in two years. I've been diagnosed with a disease (the first time was thyroid cancer, from which she recovered) and I wonder, 'what's next?' I try to stay positive most of the time, but when I start to get really down, I think of all I've put my family through and think 'what will I do to them next?'" she said.

She still cuts hair from a shop at her home, she still paints and sews, and she still sings at church. But none of those things means what they use to, she said.

"I met a mother at M.D. Anderson and her son was dying. He was a young man. He was letting them do clinical trials on him because he wanted to help them find a cure," Sandra said.

She's also planning on going before the state's Insurance Commission to ask that insurance rules be changed to include coverage for private, not just semi-private rooms.

"Those are the things I care about now. I want to help cancer patients. If I can make them laugh or feel good, that's what I feel like I'm being called to do," she said.

Proudly wearing a peach tunic she designed herself, Sandra will be teaching a "Look Good, Feel Good" class at our Lady of Lourdes Hospital on Nov. 5. It's a class that focuses on teaching cancer patients how to apply makeup to improve their coloring, how to apply eyelashes and eyebrows that they've lost through chemotherapy treatment, and how doing so can sometimes make them feel a little better.

"I don't want to say I'm glad I got sick, but it's made me see things a lot differently."

- Sandra Comeaux

Sandra makes lunch for her son, Wayne, as husband Michael helps out by making lemonade.