

## HONORED HERO (MAY 2015): LINDY

I began volunteering with the Omaha Chapter of the Lymphoma & Leukemia society during the summer of 2014, after I found out the local chapter was in my neighborhood!

In January of 2014, I started attending a Cancer Rehab program at a local CHI hospital in Omaha. Upon completion in the spring started, I began volunteering in Cardiac Rehab at Lakeside Hospital. I had met many wonderful people through CHI Health! I also had a hospitalization for pneumonia/legionella in October of 2013, after moving back to Nebraska in October of 2013, to be near my 4 boys.

I had lost my ability to walk and was extremely weak due to my cancer treatment/stem cell transplant and then heart failure as a result of the chemo. I had spent much time in bed fighting for my life while in Arkansas at the Multiple Myeloma Research Institute (MIRT) clinic in Little Rock, where we were living 2.5 hours away, at the time. I was diagnosed in June of 2012, 6 weeks after a knee replacement.



I loved working with patients in my volunteer work, since I knew the problems they were going through. Helping them regain their strength after illness gave me incentive to continue on my own health plan and kept me accountable! My background in teaching special education for 35 years did **not** prepare me for the struggles of living with a chronic disability and the impact it can have on the family.

A system of support became critical for my health. My family, scattered all over the country, came to be my caregivers at times. We had to occasionally hire a caregiver so my husband could hold my health insurance and raise our 15 year old at home in Fayetteville during this time. In all, we had 8 different caregivers during my treatment. Occasionally driving back home for 2-3 weeks, then returning for my treatment at the MIRT clinic was the most difficult time, as housing was so costly. Finally we heard about free housing for cancer patients in Little Rock which was a relief, as our bank accounts were constantly being drained! The best resource we found was the **co-pay assistance support from LLS**. They were able to come alongside us, and help us “float” during those early and most difficult months.

As many of you know the stress of living with a blood disorder can be overwhelming at times. We never know until our daily blood test is read, what will happen next?! At one minute you think you will be released to go home and the next moment your “numbers” are not good enough to release you, or you’ve caught an infection, again! Being a planner, which **was** my job as a teacher, was my biggest challenge! Learning to “let go” and “Let God” determine my next move helped me to decrease the stress and anxiety I felt for many weeks. Learning how to cope with a *compromised immune system* was another challenge. I had been such a social person and particularly in working families and children. Kids are so “full of germs!”

To keep from getting lonely, I began to correspond with others on the computer, learned meditation and relaxation techniques, which helped me during those frequent MRIs and other body scans. Listening to uplifting music and focusing on my love of nature helped me learn how to “live in the moment” and slow myself down. (This had always been a problem for me to do)!

Now as I start a new spring season in 2015 (3 years from diagnosis), my life is full of new possibilities. My exercise program has helped me gain strength & stamina as I walk with volunteers from the hospital for the Heart Association here in Omaha in May. I also love working a couple of times a week with the Patient Access Manager (Julia) at the Omaha LLS office where I contact other patients who may need a First Connection or just help Julia with other chapter projects. I thank LLS for being there for me and also my family. My father was diagnosed with Leukemia in May of 2000 in Bella Vista, Arkansas and nine months later of passed on. What a wonderful organization for supporting my family members, during difficult times of illness!