

*Reflections on "The Difference One Year Makes"*

It's hard to believe that one year ago, my dear wife Paula was diagnosed with stage four malignant melanoma cancer. What an amazing difference one year can make in a person's life. This one has been extremely difficult and challenging, yet spiritually transforming for me.

It was on August 5, 2009 that Paula lost her courageous three month battle with skin cancer. Her unshakable faith in the midst of sickness, pain, and death inspired our family, congregation, and friends from around the world through her Caring Bridge blog. My wife's greatest desire was to bring glory to God through her life and death, and she did it with the Lord's help.

The brass plaque on Paula's niche at the cemetery says, "I Choose Joy." The psalmist wrote, *"In Thy presence is fullness of JOY"* and I believe Paula is experiencing the *"fullness of joy"* at this moment in our Savior's presence. I share the hope that one day our entire family will be united with her for all eternity.

My four adult children and I all miss Paula so very much, but her legacy continues. When I see my kids, I am reminded of the wonderful legacy that she imparted in their lives and I know she will never be forgotten. *"The righteous will be remembered forever." (Ps.112:6)*

Paula understood the importance of life giving blood because after each chemo therapy treatment she usually required 2 units of blood. Fairhaven's blood drive program has been named after Paula because it represents a legacy that fittingly demonstrates her heart—the desire to meet the needs of others. Please review Paula's Blood Drive attachment.

I'm thankful to Dr. David Smith, our lead pastor, our pastoral staff, and the entire Fairhaven Church family for the prayers, care and concern for Paula, our kids, and for me during this past year. I am grateful for the generosity of the Governing Board in giving me precious time off to spend with my dear Paula during her last three months of life and a month afterwards to get back on my feet. Fairhaven's love for the Lithander family went above and beyond, showering us with the ineradicable love of this church family.

Many of you have asked how my kids are doing. They are doing okay in light of losing their mother who was their friend and encourager. All four of our single adult kids have been raised with a firm foundation of good morals, values, and biblical principles. Also, they have some great friends and a wonderful church family that continues to pray for them and encourage them.

Others have asked how Kirk is doing through this fiery trial. I can honestly say that Christ has been my strength, comfort, and peace. This has been the most difficult trial I have ever faced, yet God's presence has been with me each step on this journey of grief. Our small group and other close friends have demonstrated concern, care, and unconditional love that sustained us during this past year. We value your continued prayer support for our family.

We Choose Joy,

*Kirk Lithander (for Deb, Emily, Josh & Caleb)*

