

no time to waste

A two-time ovarian cancer survivor, Eleadrea Hayes is on an awareness mission.

Sometimes when you don't pay attention to what someone is telling you, they have to say it louder. That's what Eleadrea Hayes, 37, says God was doing when she was diagnosed with and beat ovarian cancer not once, but twice!

Hayes, who moved to Middle Tennessee in June 2001, was life-long dancer, and she says that being in tune with her body was what led her to the doctor when something just "wasn't right" in October of that same year. A pelvic exam revealed a mass, which she had surgically removed. But the morning after the surgery, the doctor called to tell Hayes that the cells on the mass were malignant — it was ovarian cancer.

A woman of strong faith, Hayes braced for her battle against cancer armed with prayer, hope, a supportive husband, and a fantastic medical staff. She saw Laura Williams, M.D., a Baptist Hospital oncologist, who removed Hayes's right ovary and fallopian tube the following month and ordered four months of chemotherapy to eradicate any remaining cancer cells. When her hair began to fall out in clumps from the chemo, she asked her husband to shave her head. "With every swipe of the clippers he stopped and kissed my tears," remembers Hayes, "and that was the first time it hit me that I could possibly die."

Hayes's ovarian cancer was stage IIc. American Cancer Society statistics show that only one percent of women with ovarian cancer find out in stage I, while a whopping 70 percent find out in stage III, a point at which survival rates plummet significantly. Hayes credits her survival with listening to her body. "As women, we

get so busy that we often don't pay attention to what our bodies are saying."

In December 2002, Hayes was in remission and someone said to her, "You know you're one of the very few who survive ovarian cancer, right?" She realized then that she survived for a purpose. "I didn't even know the color for ovarian cancer awareness, which is teal," says Hayes. "I knew I needed to do something."

Hayes began researching and forming a plan for how to use her experience to raise awareness. That's when she found the Blue Hydrangea Tea Party, a national campaign to encour-

age greater awareness of ovarian cancer. Hayes joined the Blue Hydrangea network in 2008, but she eventually got sidetracked from her mission; she and her husband were trying to conceive a child — something Dr. Williams assured her she could do even with only one ovary. At the same time, she had begun exercising again because "I could not get rid of the pudge," Hayes says.

In July 2008, Hayes went for her annual follow-up appointment with Williams, but when she showed up, she was told she wasn't on the schedule — that her post-remission follow ups were finished as of 2007. Since she was there, though, Hayes saw Williams, who performed the basic follow-up regimen, which includes a pelvic exam. During the pelvic exam, she asked Hayes to relax her stomach. "I told her it *was* relaxed," recalls Hayes, "and she immediately said, 'You need a CAT scan right away.'"

Further tests confirmed that ovarian cancer had returned, this time on the left side, and the mass was what was causing the "pudge." Just as shocked as Hayes, Williams ordered immediate surgery to remove the mass as well as a full hysterectomy. And just like that, Hayes's hopes of giving birth to her own children were shattered ... another blow to the already gut-wrenching situation she was facing for a second time. "That's when my faith was tested. I didn't want to pray, I didn't want to do anything."

Hayes beat ovarian cancer a second time. Still devastated because she couldn't bear children, though, Hayes hit her low point in September 2008. "I drove out to Percy Priest Lake, and I parked and just bawled," recalls Hayes. "I was just thinking about how there are so many people out there who don't want kids, and I did. My heart was broken. And then it just felt like something covered my heart, and I felt peace." Hayes says God used the second cancer battle as a wake-up call to get moving on her mission to raise awareness for the cause.

On May 8, 2010, Hayes hosted her very first Blue Hydrangea Tea Party. In front of approximately 50 guests, she and three others shared their personal testimonies on how they were diagnosed with, beat, or were still fighting ovarian cancer. Next year, Hayes hopes to draw an even bigger crowd and that the world will know the significance of teal. "Women need to listen to their bodies, take care of themselves, and go to the doctor." And if you have to battle ovarian cancer, Hayes can attest, you're not alone. Find comfort and companionship at the Blue Hydrangea website, bhttp.org. And learn more about ovarian cancer and the many available resources at sths.com/womenshealth. ☞

— Ashley Haugen

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