



Renee Smith could be embittered by a series of hardships: a stillborn daughter, her 5-year-old daughter's leukemia diagnosis and treatment, another daughter's blood clot in her brain from an injury from a falling piece of ice, her oldest daughter's emergency surgery to place a coil in her kidney after a biopsy hit an artery, and then—breast cancer.

Instead, Renee considers herself blessed by her strong Christian faith and the sustaining embrace of Mercy's Women's Center.

Life was just settling down for Renee and her husband, Jeff, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 41 in November 2007, shortly after

their daughter, Rylie, had come through leukemia treatment. Renee's annual mammogram detected a lump in her right breast. She had been proactive in prevention and screening, starting annual mammograms at age 35, with no family history of breast cancer.

"I felt like I had been slapped in the face," Renee recalls.

That's when Renee discovered the Women's Center's wonderful support as she moved from diagnosis through treatment and recovery. Immediately, Sallie Buelow, breast health specialist with the Women's Center, was there for her.

"She literally took my hand and led me through it all," Renee explains. "It's important to move forward and get the ball rolling."

Renee's appreciation for the center's efficiency and understanding was deepened by her unique perspective gained by making countless, tough medical decisions for her daughter.

"I had had to do a lot of that myself," Renee says. "But with Mercy,

Tamoxifen therapy, which helps prevent breast cancer recurrence. She now has check-ups every four months.

Today, Renee has reconnected with friends and returned to recreational hobbies, like tennis and kickboxing.

She also is giving back to her community in partnership with Mercy. She is the Iowa Branch Coordinator of Basket of Hope, a Christian ministry providing hope to children newly diagnosed with cancer and their families by delivering baskets filled with Bibles, books, CDs, journals and other inspirational materials.

Renee dedicated herself to establishing Basket of Hope in Iowa in 2004 after her own

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*Renee Smith,
Breast Cancer Survivor*

Kicking Cancer

they really do take care of you. They treated me like I was really special. It was very personalized."

Sallie was available at any time by cell phone for Renee's questions and concerns as her treatment plans began to take shape. Although cancer had been found in one breast, Renee chose to undergo a double mastectomy so she wouldn't ever have to face it again. She reached her decision with full confidence, feeling well-informed and secure, thanks to coordinated care from Mercy and her oncologist.

"It's a process of treatment and healing," Renee explains. "All these professionals come alongside you, all the way through. You just feel like you have a team supporting you."

After surgery at Mercy, Renee completed chemotherapy and, in April 2008, began

family's experiences with her daughter's illness. The need for hope in these situations is very real, she explains.

She asked childhood friend Brenda Warner, wife of professional football player Kurt Warner, to help by headlining a dinner and auction to kick off establishing Basket of Hope in Iowa. Today, fundraisers, grants and donations have made the Iowa chapter self-sufficient.

In 2009, Renee partnered with Mercy to expand the ministry to include women diagnosed with breast cancer. Mercy Medical Center is the first in the nation to pilot this program.

Mercy and Basket of Hope, Renee says, "help me to get through and reach out to people. I feel like I've had enough to contend with. But that's where your faith comes in."

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