



## **Anna M. Thompson, 2021 Wheeling & Heeling Co-Chair**

In April 2019, I was diagnosed with advanced stage squamous cell carcinoma. It appeared in my lymph nodes rather than any specific organ and was of indeterminate origin. Doug and I sat in shock as Dr. Alqwasmi went through my prognosis. It wasn't good. He and his nurse were so patient and helped us process the information and options-but I didn't hear much after he said cancer. Later that evening I felt overwhelmed. It became real when I said it out loud as we told our family members. Support, prayers and love received from family and friends sustained us these past two years but especially at the beginning when we were overcome by so many emotions.

From June to September I was on chemotherapy. In October I started immunotherapy. The Cancer Center staff became extended family—they were so caring and thoughtful. My team of nurses so encouraging- many of them choosing to serve in oncology due to their own experiences with cancer. Froedtert offered so much beyond physical treatment: counseling, art therapy, dance therapy and support groups. All of these provided essential encouragement as I met others who were going through the same challenges.

Cancer completely altered my perspective on life. Prior to my diagnosis I worked non-stop and was used to being the caregiver. Cancer forced me to a full stop and to allow others to care for me. I took stock of what was truly important. Now I look at life and the future through a different lens. Every day is a gift and I appreciate how precious life is.

Last summer I remember thinking I wasn't up to Wheeling and Healing as my energy was still low. However, I wanted to contribute to the Foundation and support the amazing caregivers at the Cancer Center. I thought even if I could only walk around the block-I could raise money for this worthwhile organization. This year I can participate with renewed energy.

For those that are just starting their journey through cancer, utilize all the resources available through Froedtert's Cancer Center. It can provide the emotional and mental support you and your caregiver need. Find a support group, talk to other survivors. We have all been there and you are part of our survivors club now.

There have been many ups and downs but my loving husband, supportive family and friends have made the road bearable. It will be two years since my initial diagnosis and I have come a long way. I'm in remission! I still receive immunotherapy and regular CT scans but I move forward with tremendous gratitude and hope.

Every day I thank God for the amazing medical team who continue to care for me with compassion and empathy at the Cancer Center at Froedtert Menomonee Falls Hospital.

