



Staying connected through crisis

cheering from the sidelines

By Jennifer McClure

The brunette, 13-year-old cheerleader spent the 100-mile trips home from the hospital nauseous; the radiation always had that effect on Carly Hiers.

Carly dreamed of life in high school, turning 16 and getting her driver's license. More than anything, she wanted to be a cheerleader for Peru (Ind.) High School — just like her older sister Elise.

But unlike most of her friends, these dreams wouldn't come true for her.

During seventh grade, seizures, severe headaches and vision problems began to plague Carly; early in the spring semester, an MRI revealed a brain tumor encompassed her left optic nerve.

Carly's diagnosis came just a little more than a year after her dad, Randall Hiers, became a Christian and her mom, Valerie, renewed her relationship with Christ.

"Being a new Christian, it was all kind of new to me, but I knew we had to have faith," Randall says. "From the beginning I just pretty much told Val, 'However this goes, this has to be a God-thing. God has to be lifted up in this, no matter what.'"

Carly underwent radiation treatments during the first year, but nearly two years after the initial diagnosis she could no longer bear living with the pain — which she rarely rated below 8 on a 10-degree scale.

Though the doctors would

most certainly have to sever her left optic nerve in order to remove the tumor, blinding her left eye, Carly chose to have the tumor removed.

"The night before we left for Boston," Valerie says, "I stood on our back deck by myself looking at the stars. As I prayed and cried, I told the Lord that she was His child first, and I knew He loved her even more than we did and that we were continuing to stand on His promises."

Carly's tumor was removed during an 11-hour surgery March 7, 2006, at Children's Hospital in Boston. Though the doctors did have to sever her left optic nerve, the surgery went well. Carly remained stable

throughout the procedure and lost minimal blood.

It seemed Carly was in the clear. But on June 7 an MRI scan revealed a second tumor, this time encompassing Carly's right optic nerve.

"We were crushed," Randall says. "We just thought we were going to have to go through it all again."

By December the doctors began to strongly encourage Carly to start radiation treatments, treatments that just two years before had made life miserable. She was still suffering after-effects of those first treatments, including hypothyroidism and adrenal insufficiency. Carly was

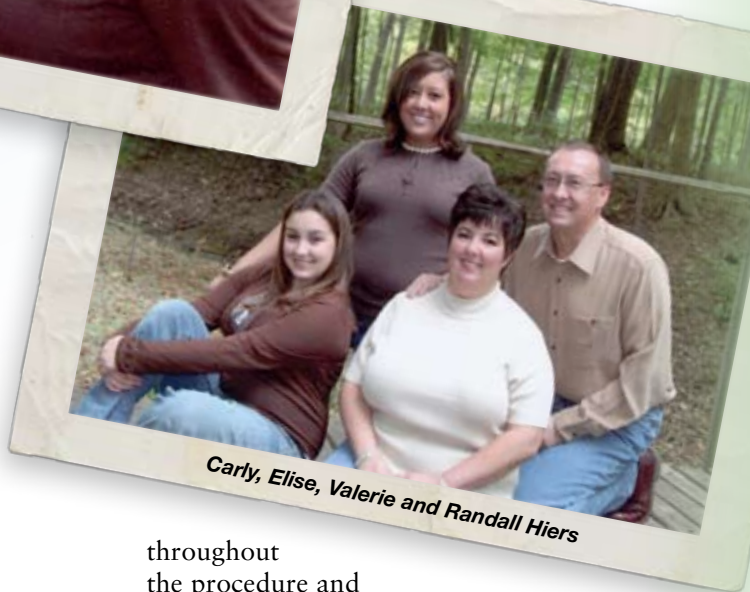
Valerie Hiers wanted to keep family and friends abreast of new developments in Carly's condition, but traditional ways of doing so soon proved emotionally taxing.

"I knew people were calling because they cared and were concerned," Valerie says. "But when the phone's ringing through dinner, it is overwhelming."

More than a year after Carly's first diagnosis, Valerie discovered an alternative to phone calls: free Web sites, such as those provided by CaringBridge and CarePages. The sites, she learned, were for people facing serious health conditions. They included a journal where family members could post updates, a guestbook where visitors could leave comments for the patient, and a place to upload pictures.

"The first thing people understand is they don't have to make emotional, time-consuming phone calls," says Sona Mehning, founder and executive director of CaringBridge, touting the benefits of such sites. "They can tell the story once."

Mehning says Internet access is becoming more common in the hospital. This service allowed the Hiers to keep people updated when Carly was undergoing surgery.



Carly, Elise, Valerie and Randall Hiers

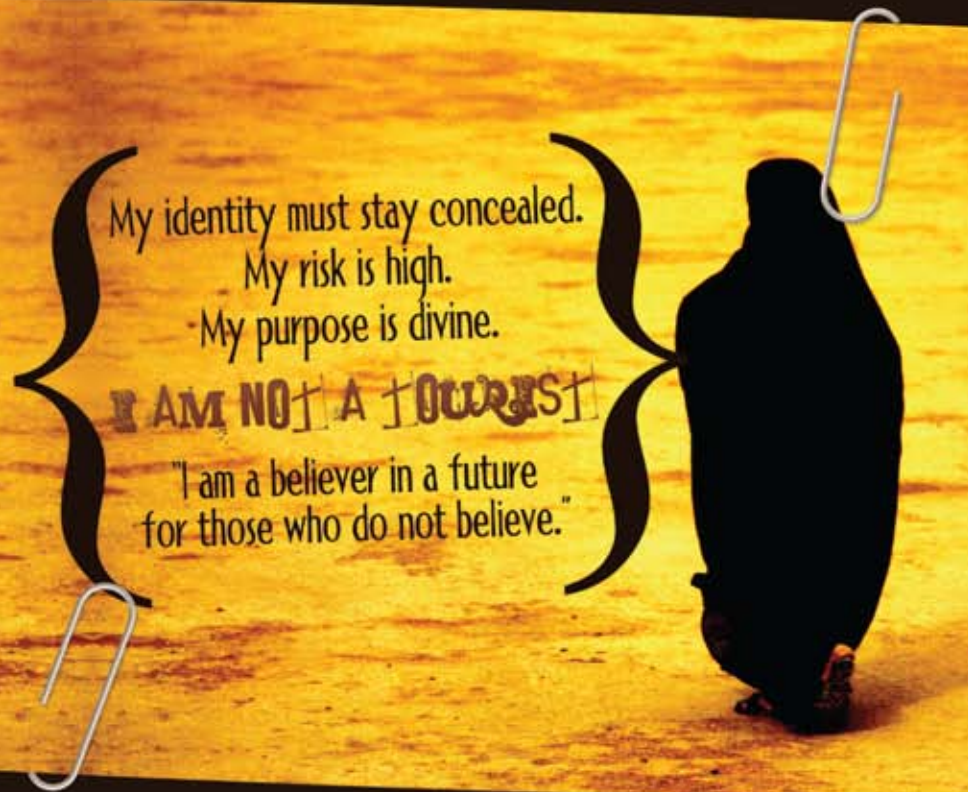
Beth Barker, a friend of Valerie's, was thankful Valerie began posting regular updates on Carly's condition because it gave her a way to check up on the family and send messages of support without intruding on the family's downtime.

"I always felt like, *Should I call or not? How many other people have called today?*" Barker says. "When Valerie created Carly's CaringBridge Web site, I could just go there and know what was going on and know what to pray for."

Such Web sites not only provide a means to keep people informed but also provide an outlet for the expression and processing of thoughts and emotions, which Dr. Jeffery Fulks, chair of Evangel University's Behavioral Sciences Department, says is a very good thing.

"When they don't articulate their thoughts and feelings, those thoughts and feelings are just churning," says Fulks. "When they share them, they're able to see them, review them and attempt to find meaning."

— Jennifer McClure



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cheering from the sidelines

set against undergoing any treatment for the second tumor, a decision her parents supported.

"When we decided we weren't going to go through any radiation, we just left it in God's hands," Randall says. "It was faith from that point on and trying to have a positive attitude."

Every three months Carly went in for an MRI scan, each time confirming the tumor's presence. Until last summer.

"When we decided we weren't going to go through any radiation, we just left it in God's hands. It was faith from that point on and trying to have a positive attitude."

Carly was unable to regularly attend church during her illness, but May 27, 2007, she went with her parents to their home church, Calvary Temple (AG) in Peru. At the end of the service, Pastor Kevin Palmer asked Carly, her parents and church elders to come forward for special prayer for Carly.

Carly personalized God's promise to exiled Israel in Jeremiah 29:11 — to prosper, not to harm, those who trust Him. She remembered God is the Great Physician. Carly says she believed God would heal her.

On June 7, 2007, exactly a year after its discovery, the MRI scans no longer showed any evidence of a second tumor.

"With all of our hearts we expected God to heal Carly," Valerie says. "But we knew Carly's healing might not be this side of heaven, and that truly was the hardest thing to turn over to Him."

To date, there have been no signs of tumors.

Carly continues to battle headaches, mostly due to eyestrain. She deals with fatigue from the adrenal insufficiency. Though life in high school didn't turn out as she had expected, some dreams have been easier than others to let go.

"I got over not being able to drive really quick — especially with gas prices the way they are," Carly says. "Plus, now I get chauffeured around by my friends."

Now 17 and a junior at Peru High School, Carly watches the cheerleading squad from the sidelines. She says she can't help sometimes but think she was supposed to be down there. She wonders how different her life would be if she had never had cancer, if she were not blind in one eye, if she had energy to live life at the same fast pace as her friends.

But regardless of how different her life is now from what she had once expected, she is grateful to be back in school full time — and alive.

"I don't take life for granted, that is for sure," Carly says. "And I have a much closer relationship with the Lord. I'm not afraid to share with my friends what He means to me." **tpe**

JENNIFER McCLURE is assistant editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel* and blogs at Going Up? (jmccclure.blogspot.com).

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

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