

Watching her baby sleep, Laurice Strausser drew a jagged breath. She'd fought so hard to be strong, to believe the comforting words her family had said to her.

"You're going to beat this!" her parents had insisted.

"Everything's going to be okay," her husband, Tom, had soothed.

But now, her doctor's dire words came roaring back, bringing a tidal wave of fear with them. And though she wanted to be strong...

How? Her body trembled with sobs. How will I get through this?

But the Rochester, Michigan, mom was about to discover a source of strength greater than she ever could have imagined...

How did I get so lucky? Laurice, 29, had asked herself two months earlier when Leah was born. She'd been blessed with a loving husband, caring friends and family, and now a baby...

At first, Laurice told herself it was just another flare-up of chronic tendonitis making her left arm hurt. But when she went to see an orthopedist, X-rays revealed a mass—and after a biopsy... "You have Ewing's sarcoma," the doctor said. "It's a rare, aggressive form of bone cancer."

Laurice needed chemotherapy and surgery to remove the cancer and replace the bone in her upper arm with a steel rod. Even then, there was no guarantee they could save her arm—or her life. "But I'm only 29!" she reeled. "I'm a new mom!"

Laurice's family tried to lift her spirits. "People beat cancer every day," her mother said.

"You're going to make it!" Tom insisted.

Their words did help at the time. But now, as Laurice watched her daughter sleep, fear tore through her. My baby, she wept. Will you grow

They say it takes a village to raise a child. And when new mom Laurice Strausser needed them most, her friends, family, neighbors—some of whom she'd never met—did even more. They helped save her life



A sweet beginning

"The day Tom and I married, we looked forward to a long, happy life together," recalls Laurice. "And soon, we were expecting a baby!"

"The first time I held Leah, I felt blessed. But a few weeks later, tragedy struck: doctors discovered I had a deadly form of bone cancer."



Laurice's fleet of

up never knowing your mommy? I have to get through this! Laurice fought panic. But how?

The doctor had said that for the next nine months, battling cancer would take all her energy. But so did caring for a new baby! Will Leah even know I'm her mommy when all my hair falls out? Or when my arm's in a sling and I can't even lift her out of her crib? Laurice sobbed.

And she wasn't the only one crying that night...

If it were me, she'd be there for me! her friend, Maureen, thought when

Laurice called her. "We have to find a way to help her," Maureen telephoned mutual friends.

"Oh, Leslie," Barb Fitzpatrick, Laurice's mom's best friend, choked. "I know you'll be looking after the baby," Barb told Leslie. "But I can drive Laurice to the doctor or sit with her during chemotherapy or..."

Over the next few days, everyone who knew Laurice reacted the same way. "If someone she knew was sick, she'd be right there to help," they all agreed.

Still, Laurice wasn't prepared for the outpouring of love she was about to receive. "I never knew so many people cared," she blinked back tears as cards and flowers began pouring in. And as word of her illness spread from Rochester to the neighboring town of Troy, where Laurice had grown up, even more people were touched by her plight.

Teachers she had in high school dropped by with meals. A friend hired a housekeeper for a day. And countless folks—many of whom she'd never met—wrote or called to say, "We're praying for you."

But even with all the support, the

days ahead were brutal. Wracked with nausea from the chemotherapy, Laurice's weight—and her spirits—plummeted. "I'm so scared," she wept the day of her surgery. "What if

I don't make it through the surgery? If I die now, Leah will never even know her mommy!"

But when they wheeled her past the waiting room, Laurice's breath caught in her throat. There, filling the room, were her family, her friends, co-workers, neighbors—each of them wearing a sparkling angel pin on their left shoulder.

"Thank you!" she wept as she realized, I've got a whole fleet of angels praying for me! And five hours later...

"It was a success!" Tom whispered. "They were able to save your arm, and they got all the cancer!"

"Thank everyone for me," Laurice smiled as she drifted back to sleep.

Still, with four rounds of chemotherapy remaining, her battle was far from over. And as the weeks turned to months, her circle of love grew even stronger.

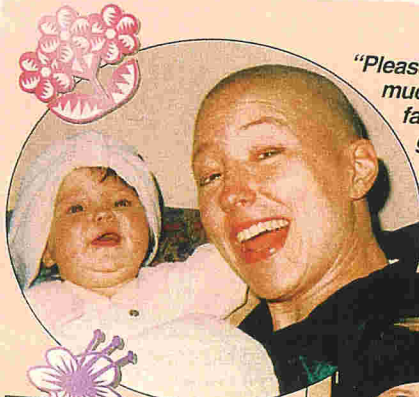
Her mom took a leave of absence from work to look after Leah. And while it was hard not being able to

"Everyone is giving from their hearts," her mom smiled



"I had so many angels helping me," beams Laurice, here with just some of the friends and family members who helped make her well.

"Please, I prayed, I have so much to live for! Friends and family rallied around me, giving me strength. Here I am with Leah after starting chemotherapy."



"The months that followed were brutal, but I never forgot what I was fighting for."

A new life

"And finally, I was cancer-free! And though doctors said I'd never conceive again, I surprised everyone!"



"Everyone was thrilled—including my mom [center], here with her best friend, Barb, and Leah."



angels

take care of her own baby, knowing Leah was in loving hands made it easier for Laurice to concentrate on getting well again.

And so did having a nurse living across the street. When Laurice needed her daily shots, her neighbor, Cindy, rearranged her schedule so she could give them to her.

And then, there were all the wonderful little things people did. Like when Laurice's shoulder pain grew unbearable and another friend hired a masseuse. Or when she couldn't keep anything down and someone would drop by with "a casserole for the family—and chicken soup for you!"

"It's too much to ask!" Laurice told her mom. "But you didn't ask," her mom smiled. "Everyone's giving from their hearts."

And nine months after she was diagnosed, the doctor called . . . "Mom!" she burst into tears of joy. "I'm cancer-free!"

"I'm so proud of you," Tom hugged

her that night. "You're a fighter!" But Laurice shook her head. "I didn't do it alone," her heart swelled with gratitude. "I had so many people fighting with me."

With her cancer finally behind her, Laurice and Tom began dreaming of giving Leah a sibling. But sadly, tests showed chemotherapy had damaged Laurice's ovaries. "Your only chance is with a donor egg and in vitro fertilization," a specialist advised.

But a few weeks later, Laurice began feeling odd. Could it be? she wondered. A pregnancy test confirmed it. "I'm going to be a mommy again!" she rejoiced.

"Welcome to the world," Laurice kissed baby Lilly nine months later.

And thank You, God, she prayed, for sending us this miracle!

Three years later, Laurice remains cancer-free—and free to be mommy to seven-year-old

Leah and three-year-old Lilly. "When I first heard I had cancer, I never imagined how much help I'd have battling it," Laurice says. "They say it takes a village to raise a child. But I believe it took a village to make me well!"

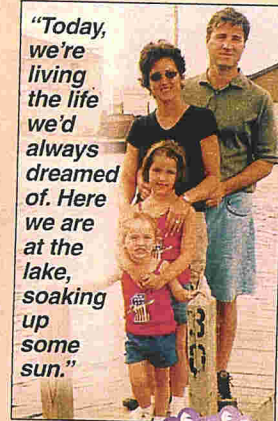
—Elizabeth Holzemer

A strong, positive attitude will create more miracles than any wonder drug.

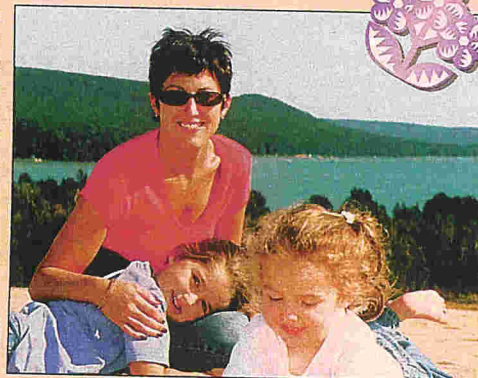
Patricia Neal

Happily ever after

"Today, we're living the life we'd always dreamed of. Here we are at the lake, soaking up some sun."



"But it's watching Leah and her little sister Lilly grow up that I'm most grateful for. Every day feels like a gift!"



Has a group of neighbors or strangers made something wonderful happen in your life? Please send the details along with your name, address and phone number to: Helping Each Other, Woman's World, 270 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. If we print your story, we'll pay you \$250. Submissions may be edited for style.