

This intimate story tells of the Hagas' love of God as well as their devotion to each other, depicts the bravery of the cancer journey, the hope for a cure, and demonstrates what faith really is. Words can't express how deeply affected I was by reading *His Love Carries Me*. Following along on this remarkable quest, I could feel the moments with them, and I witnessed their love of God in every account. The author shares heartfelt, raw emotions that are known only to people experiencing a health crisis such as cancer. This should be a required read for all healthcare providers.

—ANNE M., RN, BSN, SENIOR RESEARCH NURSE  
THORACIC HEAD & NECK MEDICAL ONCOLOGY  
MD ANDERSON CANCER CENTER

*His Love Carries Me* is a unique perspective on health, sickness, love, and God through the eyes of a loving caregiver. The Hagas' journey with God captures the limitations of modern medicine, describes the day-to-day fight for healing, and provides a powerful example of one family's struggle to fight a menacing disease. After more than a decade in oncology, I learned a new aspect to my work with each chapter. Reading this captivating book helped me understand unwavering faith and will give encouragement to patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers alike. A must-read for everyone.

—MARTIN FREDERIK DIETRICH, MD, PhD  
FLORIDA HOSPITAL CANCER INSTITUTE  
ORLANDO, FL

*His Love Carries Me* is an exceptional testimony of not only one family's faith, but of God's unwavering, steadfast faithfulness and grace. DeLayne Haga nails what it feels like to struggle through every step of a devastating diagnosis and bears her heart in this very personal and detailed account. This book will prove to be an invaluable resource for caregivers of persons with any illness. I highly recommend this boldly honest read along with its companion book of her late husband's spiritual journey, *Cancer on Two Wheels*. You won't be disappointed.

—KRISTI BRASHIER

Written for caregivers of terminally ill patients, *His Love Carries Me* has a broader appeal as a gripping love story between a man, a woman, and God. DeLayne Haga takes readers on a roller coaster ride of emotions through sickness and health that will inspire readers to hang tightly to their faith. If anyone ever needed a good reason to hug her husband—and God—this book has that, and more.

—LEE ANN BANDY

DeLayne Haga's *His Love Carries Me* is a powerful story of her family's journey through lung cancer. God used her husband's diagnosis and treatment path, as well as DeLayne's caregiving experiences, to reach people and shape lives in sometimes surprising ways. I was encouraged to see how God provided and carried them through, shining His love in darkness and in light. I'd recommend this book not only to those who face a similar path, but also to anyone who hungers to see the ways God works in the lives of His people.

—BETH MULL

HIS  
*Love*  
CARRIES ME

A CAREGIVER'S STORY OF  
FAITH, HOPE, & LOVE

DELAYNE HAGA



Carpenter's Son Publishing

His Love Carries Me

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*To my husband, Chris, who lived for me*

*To my Lord, Jesus Christ, who died for me*

*Your love carries me*

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the love of my life was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer that had metastasized to his brain. I was stunned—*he had never smoked.*

The mass in my husband’s lung almost tripled in size within three months of diagnosis to 13 centimeters—almost half the length of a ruler—before we found a successful regimen to shrink the cancer. The doctor originally gave Chris a prognosis of six months. Instead, he lived six *years*. Because he was officially declared to have “no evidence of disease” on three separate occasions, I still refer to him as “My Miracle Man.” I witnessed God’s glory multiple times.

Amazingly, he worked full time throughout most of his treatment. He was even able to continue riding his bicycle for several years with a collapsed lung.

When asked to share what we had learned about living with this horrible disease, we became mentors to other lung cancer patients and their caregivers. We never turned down a request. God dealt us this hand for a reason, and we intended to make the best of a dreadful situation.

Our lives began reflecting the following scripture:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*

—2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4 NIV

My husband chronicled his spiritual journey in an inspirational blog. After his death in 2016, I decided to publish his works in *Cancer on Two Wheels—A Spiritual Journey with Stage IV Lung Cancer* as a tribute to his memory and to carry on his legacy of faith through trials. Because of the challenges I tackled head-on as Chris's advocate, others suggested I write a companion book to help patients as well as their caregivers, family, and friends affected by a devastating diagnosis. It helps to know you're not alone with what you're going through.

While getting ready for bed one night several months after Chris passed away, I thought of reasons why I couldn't write a book.

*I'm not a writer and have never had a desire to write a book. I don't have a clue how to get a book published. I wouldn't even know what to title a book.*

By the time I pulled down the bed covers, I had dismissed the idea of becoming an author. But as soon as my head hit the pillow, I heard a voice softly whisper, *His Love Carries Me*.

I sat straight up in bed. Tears filled my eyes as I realized God had just clearly spoken to me. The title was perfect. That's exactly how I coped with Chris's disease and how I was getting through my grief.

Over the next few weeks, it was challenging to focus on anything else. The Lord was nudging me to do something out of my realm of experience, and it was exciting. With Him leading the way, it appeared I would be writing a book after all.

My grief was still fairly raw, but I found myself smiling a lot as I wrote—much more than the crying you might expect. Reminiscing about times shared with the love of my life, both happy and poignant memories, keeps Chris close to my heart.

This book shares our experiences through my eyes as Chris's caregiver and advocate, filling in the blanks in his story along the way. It chronicles our spiritual and emotional journey, the search for an effective treatment, the problems we encountered

along the way, our plans for the ominous what-if scenarios, and how God worked through a seemingly impossible situation.

Each cancer journey is unique and has its own issues and challenges to face. Hopefully, our experiences will help you advocate in any medical situation and encourage you to be proactive when facing life's adversities. Faith, hope, and love play an important role in winning the battle in any crisis. I pray you'll find strength through your faith as you experience trials of your own.

As you read this book, keep in mind this isn't just our story—it's God's story. We didn't walk this road alone, and you don't have to either.

*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*

—PHILIPPIANS 4:13

## *Chapter 1*

# MY FAITH TESTED

I had a relatively easy life up to the age of forty-nine, while so many people around me had major problems. I knew God allows adversity in people's lives for a number of reasons, but not because He doesn't love them. I also knew that when times are the toughest is when it takes the greatest faith. Untested faith requires no faith at all. I occasionally wondered, *When will the inevitable rock my world? Is my faith genuine? If my faith is tested, will I praise the Lord in both good times and bad?*

Chris, our sons, and I spent Christmas 2009 at my parents' home in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. After we went to bed, I heard my dad coughing extremely hard in the bedroom across the hallway. He had been diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis four years earlier, and I could see and hear his health rapidly declining. I feared he had just seen his last Christmas.

Worrying about my dad, I sobbed inconsolably.

Dad's health took a turn for the worse in March. The doctors gave him less than two weeks to live.

While Dad was in the hospital, my family grew fond of his nurses. We discussed who was our favorite, but we all picked someone different because they were all good. I decided to ask Dad his opinion.

“Who’s *your* favorite nurse, Dad?”

Without hesitation, he turned his head, opened his eyes, and smiled at me. “You are.” My heart melted. I’m glad he immediately closed his eyes again so he couldn’t see me weeping.

My father died on March 30, 2010. It was an answer to prayers because of his poor quality of life. Both my family and I thought I would fall apart when Dad died because I was a “Daddy’s girl.” But knowing there’s no more pain or suffering in heaven gave me unimaginable peace.

*“There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*

—REVELATION 21:4 NIV

At that time, Chris was riding his bike about eighty miles per week for exercise, trying to lose 5 pounds from his 195-pound frame. After several months of trying with no success, the weight was finally coming off fast. He lost 10 pounds. In late April, he developed a little cough with a tickle in his throat and chest while he was on a twenty-mile bike ride out in the country. He assumed it was just allergies.

The cough worsened, so Chris went to a doctor on May 10. He was diagnosed with an upper respiratory infection and given an antibiotic. His cough still didn’t improve, so he saw our family physician on May 24. An x-ray showed pneumonia. The doctor prescribed a different antibiotic and an inhaler. Chris went back ten days later, still coughing.

The doctor listened to his lungs. “A lingering cough is normal after pneumonia,” he said, “but your lungs sound clear.”

I noticed Chris napped a lot, falling asleep just a few minutes after sitting down to watch television. That wasn’t his norm. Unable to fall asleep one night, I went over his symptoms in my head. *A cough that doesn’t go away, persistent pneumonia, constant fatigue, and sudden weight loss. Those are all symptoms*

*of lung cancer. Nah, it couldn't be that—he's never smoked.* I dismissed the thought because our family doctor didn't suspect the disease.

On July 5, Chris felt better than he had in a long time and went on an eighteen-mile bike ride. He thought he was finally getting over the pneumonia, even though coughing harder. At my insistence, he reluctantly called his doctor that morning and saw him the same day. Another x-ray showed the pneumonia was actually worse. Baffled, his general practitioner referred him to a local pulmonologist. A week later, the pulmonologist ordered a third set of x-rays, which showed the pneumonia continued to worsen. He ordered a CT scan to see if he could determine the cause.

On July 15, 2010, I walked in the door from work, and my world changed in an instant. Chris stood in the kitchen at the edge of the counter.

“The doctor called me on the way home from work with the results of the CT scan.”

“What did it show?” I asked, not at all suspecting what I was about to hear.

His chin quivered. “I have two tumors in my right lung.”

I immediately thought of actress Dana Reeve, the widow of *Superman* actor Christopher Reeve. She was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer in 2005 and died seven months later. She claimed she had never smoked, but I didn't believe her. Everyone “knows” that only smokers get lung cancer. I believed her now.

My legs felt weak and started to shake. I held Chris in my arms, embracing him silently for a long time as I let him cry. Reeling from the painful news, I was momentarily frozen in shock. I didn't shed a tear.

“We'll get through this,” was all I could mutter, trying to be strong for him.

Then I wobbled into the bathroom on rubbery legs, closed the door, and bawled. As reality set in and my emotions thawed,

terror seized me. *I don't want to be a widow! I'm too young to be a widow! I'm not ready to be a widow!* I silently screamed to God. In my anguish, I couldn't form a prayer.

I never heard of anyone surviving stage IV lung cancer for long, and I had no hope that the love of my life would. But God had a plan for the trial we faced.

*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

—1 PETER 1:6–7 NIV