

## Sally Rudy

Always an educator, Sally Rudy began researching invasive ductal carcinoma the day a diagnostic mammogram found her breast cancer.

“Right away, I went home and did research. I just feel it is very important to be educated about your health, so I learned as much as I could about it. I’ve always been that way,” said Rudy.

After 30 years of teaching at Covington Elementary School, she retired in 2007.

The cancer was found in January 2009 following screening and diagnostic mammograms.

“I thought that maybe that was meant to be, so I didn’t have to miss school to deal with the cancer,” Rudy said of her diagnosis following retirement.

After undergoing a biopsy and then surgery in March 2009, she made daily trips to the UVMC Cancer Care Center for 37 radiation treatments.

As Rudy recently discussed her journey through diagnosis, surgery and treatment, she flipped through a pink camouflage journal, a gift to her from her son, Brian, following her diagnosis.

Not one to write faithfully in a journal, the pink book became Rudy’s “catch all” for important information. Among its contents are physicians and appointments, names of who brought her food during treatment, a prayer list and details of what happened and when.

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### ADVICE from Sally Rudy

- Stay positive, knowing that it is treatable.
  - Take one day at a time with your decision-making.
  - Surround yourself with people who can be supportive in a positive way.
  - Educate yourself.
  - Take notes when you go see the doctor.
  - Bring questions when you go to your doctor’s appointment. Ask questions if you don’t understand something.
  - Realize you are not alone in this journey.
  - Take care of yourself: get plenty of rest, eat well.
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For mother and son, the cancer journey was not a new road. They’d traveled together 11 years before as Brian dealt with testicular cancer while a college student.

With Brian’s diagnosis, Rudy also had hit the computer for research.

“With Internet research I know you have to be careful,” she said. “I just tried to put two and two together to figure out maybe what was wrong ... But, I never second-guessed any of the professionals.”

During her care, Rudy said she asked many questions in deciding to undergo radiation treatment. She praised Dr. Ronald Setzkorn, radiation oncologist and Director of the Cancer Care Center, for his guidance. “He really laid my fears to rest, (assured me) that I was doing the right thing,” she said.

Her son’s experience helped Rudy deal with her own cancer. “You meet each step head on, one step at a time. That is what I’ve learned to do with things like this, and it has worked out well,” she said.

Having supportive family, friends and caregivers also is important. Her husband of 36 years, Bob, was always nearby and daughter, Jill, a nurse in California, was there after surgery to help her mother, including organizing paper work in an accordion file for easy access and updating.

“It is a family disease,” Rudy said of cancer. “I know that first-hand because when I wasn’t the patient, and my son was, it affected the whole family. When you are the patient, you tend to focus on yourself.”

To help keep family and friends informed of what was going on Rudy, shortly after diagnosis, created on e-mail a “cancer list” of people she was going to tell.

“I kept them updated because I knew, first of all, it eliminated my husband from the painful process of having to tell all of our friends and family,” she said. “It also created this huge support from people who lived far away because I got e-mails back saying ‘We are praying for you.’ It was pretty neat ... It helped us all out.”

For Rudy, the cancer journey helped create more appreciation of life. “You certainly don’t sweat the small stuff anymore. It is important to embrace life and live each day to its fullest ... It has made me more serene and calm about anything, really.”