

Collective Care



That June day was hot, the fifty mile trip seemed endless, the silence was deafening, and fear rode with us. The news a week earlier was devastating—my wife Pam was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. She was sixty-one, full of life, and we had spent the last several years planning our future. Expand the ranch, spend time with grandchildren, travel, and finally a new house—the picture was perfect. One doctor’s appointment changed everything. Options were few, but quitting was never a thought, so that day was the first of many we faced on the infusion floor as Pam began chemotherapy at Billings Clinic.

Arriving at the clinic, I honestly didn’t know what to expect—a beautiful building, nicely landscaped, people everywhere, busy. Then we saw her, **Joan**. She was one of many parking attendants for valet parking, and as I opened the door for Pam, Joan took her hand. She knew while Pam looked strong physically that day, she saw the fear in Pam’s face and knew that the situation was serious. They were a lot alike: outwardly beautiful, flawless complexions, infectious smiles, captivating eyes, but it was the hair—perfect, shiny, well-groomed—Joan’s was blonde and Pam’s brunette. I tried to imagine Pam’s struggle as she admired Joan’s hair, for she knew within a week her own would be gone. She found comfort in Joan, who kept repeating to her, “Today will be a GOOD day” as she walked her to the elevator. The gift of compassion, confidence, and indeed courage that Joan gave Pam was invaluable. Her heart transcended her body, and we were the beneficiary. As the months and treatments continued, we saw Joan many times. Was she unique? Hardly. I have often told others that Billings Clinic is a “collection of care.” Joan, as well as her co-workers, was merely our first impression. The staff from custodians to specialists carried that same common denominator—they take great pride in the clinic, and regardless of their skillset, care and compassion for their fellow man is palpable. Blessings are everywhere. On that day in June, the angel that carried them was Joan, and her wings were the Billings Clinic. JP

