

ML:1975: Melinda, a 48-year-old woman has been diagnosed with stage IV ovarian cancer. She will be meeting with her health care team in the coming weeks to discuss possible treatment options/next steps etc.

Melinda describes feeling like her diagnosis “has been a tsunami” of emotions, appointments, reactions from others and overwhelming thoughts of “what is to come”. Melinda is married (24 years) to a husband with Primary Progressive MS and they share two teenage children. They also share a home with her widowed, elderly father who has a variety of underlying medical conditions and depression since his wife died a few years back. Melinda feels she is the one who tends to the needs of her family and often acts as the “glue” that keeps her household together (emotional needs of the children, appointments and organizing for her dad and husband etc.). She worries that her kids, father and husband may be without a good support system if her illness progresses or she dies, and that they’ll not be able to cope well with their own advancing physical/emotional challenges. She fears her children will lose what “are meant to be the best, most free times of their lives” feeling obligated to act as caregivers to her, their dad or their grandfather. She is tremendously saddened and fearful when she “allows herself to think that she may not be there for her kids over the long run”. Melinda has a very small family, but a large, trusted friend group who have always been supportive.

Melinda’s diagnosis came as a shock and she doesn’t have all of the facts yet, but she is aware that her cancer’s prognosis is generally poor, which scares her a great deal. She considers herself a “Type A” personality, who likes all the facts so she can make a solid plan of action. She is an executive but also volunteered for years at a local hospice, so she is comfortable talking about death and dying. She has often thought about what might be important to her when “it’s her time” but concedes in the newness and current unknowns of her diagnosis, she’s unable to “wrap her head around the fact that this time may be so close” for her.

Melinda says what’s most important to her is the well-being of her family and the memories they make together. She is spiritual (Buddhist) and meditative, and always curious to learn new things. She describes herself as a lifelong reader and writer with a big heart. She loves animals (particularly the family dog), houseplants and cooking for those she loves. She is open to any and all treatments that may prolong or improve her life but has witnessed how devastating these traditional interventions may be. She notes she is equally open to alternative medical options, and that “being close to nature has always felt like instant medicine”. The one thing she is sure of is that “it’s the quality of her life, not the quantity, that matters most”. She is adamant that she not become a burden to her family.