

Peace Amidst the Storm: Annie Welton Lyman and Davin Lyman's Journey through Thyroid Cancer

Last March, nursing student Annie Welton and pre-med student Davin Lyman had their world rocked by two words.

Thyroid cancer.

This wasn't in the plan. They had only been engaged for two weeks. They had been told by the doctors that the tumor that they'd found in Davin's thyroid was likely not malignant. A 10 percent chance of cancer.

"So finding out was really traumatic. You hear 'cancer,' and it's just overwhelming and scary and so uncertain, and you just kind of feel like everything's rocked," says Annie Welton Lyman, now married to Davin Lyman. "But we just knew we had to go one step at a time, one day at a time."

It's been eleven months of "one day at a time."

Davin's thyroid had to be removed, along with 20 lymph nodes. This led to an ongoing battle for balance through hormone replacement therapy, weekly doctor's visits, and medication.

But how have the couple gotten through it?

How have they found peace amidst the storm?

The Gospel

Annie credits the gospel for getting her husband and herself through this time.

"We were able to go to the temple every week, and just relying on the knowledge that what we were doing was right. We knew that our education was right. We knew that our marriage was right, like Heavenly Father had just given us that assurance, and continual assurance. And that's what made it all—not only bearable, because it wasn't fun and it wasn't easy—but it was possible because of that," says Annie.

Annie says that both her and her husband's marriage and their testimonies have been strengthened through this ordeal. "It's given us such beautiful hindsight and such beautiful realization of like, what that did for our marriage, what it did for our careers, what it did for our spirits and our souls and our family."

The Scholarship

Annie also credits a scholarship given by the BYU College of Nursing for keeping them afloat.

In the midst of Davin's bout with cancer, the Lymans were struggling to pay thousands of dollars in medical bills while working and dealing with heavy course loads.

Annie went to the BYU College of Nursing to see if there were any type of scholarships available. Although it was outside of the typical scholarship period, the school was able to utilize

the C Scott & Dorothy E Watkins Charitable Foundation Scholarship. “We’re both back to school, and thanks to the scholarship, we’re able to be in school and be practicing. But I don’t know, honestly, without the scholarship what would have happened because neither of us can take on more work. And I think we would have been stuck,” says Annie.

Nursing Training

Annie’s time in the nursing program has been invaluable for providing a better understanding of the diagnosis and treatments. “Both of us are in medical professions,” Annie said. “And so I have been spending the past three years learning about the thyroid and the difference between the thyroid and the thymus and the hormones and all that, so it really helped decrease my fear because I had such a better knowledge of what they were saying. So at least when the doctor gave this diagnosis, I could understand ‘This is what that means,’ and understanding the hormones and the balancing.”

The nursing program also helped empower Annie by giving her the tools to do her own research. “I just had different avenues that the nursing program taught me, so I was able to work with the doctor and to give my input and my suggestions and thoughts and stuff like that.”

Empathy is Key

The Lymans’s months of one-on-one time with nurses and doctors have ensured that they have spent a lot of time with what Annie labels “the good examples” and “the bad examples” of nursing.

The vital difference between the two?

Empathy.

“We’ve had some bad examples with people not being empathetic or understanding, just treating it very objectively, which I understand has a time and a place,” Annie says, “But when you just tell someone they have cancer, it’s a fragile thing.”

However, even from the bad examples, Annie was able to learn an important lesson.

“And so that has taught me the importance of being empathetic and personable with every patient because even though to me . . . I may have treated someone with this condition hundreds of times, it’s still important to be empathetic. It’s their first time receiving this diagnosis.”

On the flip side, the “good examples” were the ones that were concerned for both Lymans. “I’ve learned the importance of taking care of not only the patient, but their caregivers and their family,” says Annie. “Because obviously I was not the one going through cancer, but I was just as worried. It was just as emotional. And so when they took the time to talk to me and care for me as well, it made a huge impact. And so it’s really just taught me that nursing is much more personal and every diagnosis is personal.

“And so empathy is important in every single patient and condition.”

Share the Burden

Annie encourages everyone going through a similar condition to share with friends or family members what has been going on.

“Don’t be afraid to let people in . . . Don’t be afraid to tell them about what you’ve been going through. Because I think sometimes we think we’ll feel like a burden, or we’ll feel like we’re trying to get attention, or it might make someone else uncomfortable if we tell them, but really that’s not the case.”

Annie says that sharing with others helped to quickly connect with them. “It helped them feel like they could share what they were going through, and I hope that our experience has helped others as well.”

In addition to friends and family, Annie says to share our burdens with one other vital person: the Savior.

“There were so many times where I had an assignment due, or we had bills to pay, or I was having a meltdown, and I just had to be like ‘Heavenly Father, I have to just give this portion over to you,’ or ‘I have to let go of this stress, I have to let go of this fear.’ And He let me just concentrate on one thing at a time . . . And I felt like He took most of the burden off.”

Storm Is Over

While the Lymans are still trying to navigate the winds of hormone treatments, the storm appears to have ended.

While remission has yet to officially be declared, the doctors confirm that the cancer was removed with Davin’s thyroid.

“We’re still balancing, and then we’ll still continually do biopsies to make sure that it’s still not there, but we’re pretty sure that it’s gone,” Annie says.

Taking everything that they’ve learned from this experience—the medical knowledge, the importance of empathy, the shedding of burdens, and the compassion of the Lord—the Lymans are learning how to help patients of their own in their respective medical fields.

Their ship may not be in the harbor yet, but they are looking towards the future.

Together.