



Carol H. had a CT scan following a gallbladder attack in 2020. Her scan revealed spots on her lung that required monitoring. A year and a half later, the spots were still there, so her doctor recommended a PET scan that confirmed the worst. On July 1, 2021, Carol was diagnosed with lung cancer. In retrospect, she realized she had risk factors for lung cancer, including exposure to secondhand smoke and radon in her home.

Initially, Carol felt denial. Since she did not have symptoms, how could this be possible? She didn't feel angry or cry, but instead felt numb. While the lung cancer diagnosis specifically was a shock, her family's history of cancer made it less surprising. "I remember sitting in my recliner thinking, what are the next steps? I had a positive attitude," Carol recalls.

At the time of diagnosis, Carol's doctors could not do a tissue biopsy of the tumor to find out the cancer's stage or biomarker as the tumor they were most concerned about was too close to Carol's aorta.

The next step for Carol was a lung wedge resection surgery. Following this procedure, the biopsy revealed an official diagnosis of Stage 1B lung cancer. Carol's surgeon recommended a wait-and-see approach, but her oncologist suggested starting chemotherapy right away. Carol decided to follow the advice of her oncologist and started chemotherapy that same week.



"As a Native American, you must choose to either use Native medicine or Western medicine, but you cannot mix them. I decided to go the western route, and while I cannot speak for what results the native medicine would have given, I am happy with my decision," Carol says. "I'm thankful to say I have been in remission since October 2021."

Today, Carol's medical team is monitoring a 31-millimeter abnormal mass in her right lung, demanding more attention than in the past. "I remain hopeful and positive," Carol says. "Cancer has made me think about life more deeply and consider how I want to live my life. I believe the Creator gives us what is intended for each of us."

Carol says her most significant challenge so far has been having honest conversations with her children about the future. While initially difficult, Carol's family is more comfortable talking about cancer and the future now, a significant step in case her cancer progresses. She is very thankful for the support system around her as she credits the support with significantly improving her mental health.

"I am just so thankful that they caught my cancer when it was in an early stage and more treatable. I can't speak enough about how important early detection is," Carol says. "My daughter went in to get screened for lung cancer, and she has since quit smoking. I hope to set an example for others about the importance of screening and early detection."