



As an unpaid volunteer, Christina Brodie (middle back) came to Kansas to launch Hands Across Our Community, a pilot project for impoverished families through the Sisters of St. Joseph.

A Healing Journey

Cancer treatment offers Christina Brodie a second ... and more rewarding ... chance at life **BY JOHN BERGGREN**

Christina Brodie had come to Kansas to pursue a greater calling in life. After 35 years in advertising and becoming a vice president with a major global agency in New York City, she gave up most of her possessions to become an unpaid volunteer and start a new ministry helping impoverished families through the Sisters of St. Joseph in Concordia.

Just months after settling at the Manna House of Prayer and launching her program,

Hands Across Our Community, she felt a lump on her breast next to her chest wall.

"I'd had a complete physical before moving out here, but nothing turned up," Brodie says. "I didn't know what to do, so I searched online and came across the Tammy Walker Cancer Center and sent an email through the hospital's website."

Within an hour of sending the request she received a return email from the patient navigator at the Cancer Center, Lynn Marshall,



Brodie looks on as a young mother creates Halloween costumes for her children at Neighbor to Neighbor, a ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

who helped her get an appointment for a mammogram at Salina Regional's Outpatient Imaging and Breast Diagnostic Center.

A mammogram, a sonogram and an eventual biopsy would confirm Brodie indeed had stage 3 breast cancer. She elected to have a double mastectomy performed by Salina Regional Surgical Associates surgeon Dwane Beckenhauer, MD.

Online

GET THE BEST TREATMENT

Visit tammywalkercenter.com for more information. If you have a new cancer diagnosis or are in need of assistance, call patient navigator Lynn Marshall, at [785-452-7335](tel:785-452-7335).

Throughout the diagnosis and initial treatment Marshall kept close tabs on Brodie and informed her that she might be a candidate for a clinical trial that was open to patients with her specific type of breast cancer.

LEADING-EDGE CARE

The Tammy Walker Cancer Center's affiliation with the University of Kansas (KU) Cancer Center through the Midwest Cancer Alliance gives local patients access to many of the latest clinical trials available at KU.

Clinical trials are available to treat many forms of the disease, including lung, gastrointestinal, genitourinary, breast and other cancers. The trials use some of the newest drugs on the market to combat the disease and often use standard-of-care drugs in different combinations and doses than nontrial patients might receive. Trials are also available for screening and prevention of varying forms of cancer.

"Many people and some physicians have a misconception that clinical trials are something you turn to as a last-ditch effort," says Melanie Leepers, clinical trials nurse and cancer services director at the Tammy Walker Cancer Center. "Clinical trials really offer some of the most promising options for a cure. Since these treatments are experimental, there are more sets of eyes watching a patient's care. Many people on clinical trials find they're really receiving the best care."

Brodie's trial used an experimental combination of drugs, one of which was known to cause potential side effects to the heart.

"I knew that my heart was in good shape and I knew there would be careful monitoring throughout my chemo, so I didn't feel that there was a need to be overly concerned,"

Brodie says. "Melanie was real authentic and compassionate when explaining the options. I came to the conclusion that it was a logical choice for me. If I could help others down the road through participating in this research, I would do it."

EXTRAORDINARY COMPASSION

Six months of chemo were followed by two months of radiation. Brodie experienced minimal side effects throughout treatment and was able to launch her pilot project helping at-risk families in Concordia. Hands Across Our Community provides families with life- and work-skill information and then pairs them with one-on-one coaches to teach them how to set and achieve goals and become financially self-sufficient.

"I lost my hair and felt fatigued and nauseated, but my symptoms were very mild compared to what others experience," Brodie says. "I was very fortunate. The support of the Sisters and the staff at Tammy Walker, and my work with families in our program allowed me to keep a positive attitude.

"I feel like I was led to Kansas for a lot of reasons," Brodie says. "Watching families make gradual improvements in the right direction and seeing the twinkle in their eyes when they see the right path is gratifying. Coming from back east, I can't believe I would have gotten the kind of care and compassion I found from all the staff at Tammy Walker." ■



COMPREHENSIVE CARE

In addition to state-of-the-art medical and radiation oncology services, the staff at the Tammy Walker Cancer Center uses a team approach from multiple specialties to help patients through every aspect of care. Support services include:

- Patient navigation
- Nutrition counseling
- Physical therapy
- Appearance center
- Financial counseling
- Cancer registry
- Spiritual support
- Guest housing
- Clinical trials
- Cancer outreach
- Cancer support groups

Christina Brodie, Concordia, prepares for radiation treatment as part of her breast cancer treatment.

