

Henri Frederic Amiel: *"To repel one's cross is to make it heavier."*

Luke 9:23: *Then he [Jesus] said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."*

Sally and I became friends in the late 1990's/ early 2000's through the Ocean Running Club. We both enjoyed running and racing, and the fun times after the hard work was done where we would get together for her homemade limoncello. She is an easy person to befriend: beautiful, funny, friendly, smart and always upbeat. She had plenty of friends, three great kids, and a husband who shared her love of sports and fun. It seemed she had the perfect life and every reason to be as positive and cheerful as she was.

But that was not the case at all. Her first child was born premature. Her second birth was a set of twins who spent months in the hospital as infants with various health problems. Sally was told her daughter would have cerebral palsy and may not survive. All this was going on while her first born was still needing care and her husband was diagnosed with cancer.

In 2008, Sally started to fall and catch colds that she couldn't shake. In 2008, she was diagnosed with multiple myeloma. Her husband's cancer took his life in 2009. Pete's cancer was genetic, and she soon learned that two of her three kids indeed had their father's genetic mutation. She found herself as a single mother of 3 teenagers, battling a stubborn cancer. (The doctors were wrong about her twins, though. Both grew up healthy and inherited their parent's talent in sports)

Where many would have wallowed in self pity and cursed God for their many crosses to bear, Sally stayed tough. She battled with multiple myeloma for years, including chemo and a very risky stem cell transplant that forced her into isolation at UPenn for 3 weeks. She became an active spokesperson and fundraiser for the Multiple Myeloma Foundation and for her husband's cancer. When she was healthy enough to work out, she started competitive stair climbing for charity, and eventually climbed the Empire State building and Eiffel tower to raise money for cancer research. She added "author" to her list of accomplishments, writing her life story in her 2021 book "Life Gets in the Way."

While carrying her heavy crosses, she found ways to use her suffering to help others. Rather than repel her cross, she made limoncello from the lemons life handed her. I admire her resilience. I think of her whenever I am tempted to whine about my misfortunes, which through God's grace alone, have not been as many as hers.

Lord God, give us the strength and courage to take up our own cross. Help us to recognize the burdens others may carry, even when they seem free from adversity. Bless doctors and researchers working to cure cancer. Be with those who fear for their children's health. Thank you for sparing Sally's life and for her friendship and life lessons. Amen