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Be Here Now

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"Be here now."

In the face of adversity, one alumna rises to meet the challenge.

By Sarah (Zeller) Julian '07



Laura (Harding) Koppenhoefer '83

Even in the most difficult of situations, Laura (Harding) Koppenhoefer '83 is working to make a difference.

The Rock Island, Ill., mother of two was diagnosed in 2011 with stage four sclerosing epitheloid fibrosarcoma, a subtype of an incredibly rare cancer. She's had a softball-sized tumor removed from her hip, and doctors found numerous tumors on her lungs — too many to remove surgically.

Laura found that writing about her experience on CarePages.com helped her deal with the situation and eventually helped secure funding for more research on the disease.

"I have written at CarePages.com most days over the last three years as I went through surgeries on my hip and lungs, and through chemotherapies — writing about life and faith, grieving and hope, gardening and quilting, asking for help and coping with fear," she wrote.

Discussions with her oncologist revealed that research funding was desperately needed for sarcoma. "I decided to publish selected posts of my CarePages and donate all of the proceeds to sarcoma research at the University of Iowa Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center, where I receive care," she wrote. "To do so, I also had to start a not-for-profit, the Living in Hope Foundation."

The book, *Notes on the Journey: Living with Sarcoma and Hope*, was published in October, and by December had already raised \$10,000 for the cancer center. "We sold more than 500 books, and people are generous. They donate in addition to what the cost of the book is," she told the *Pontiac Daily Leader*. "That money will fund one clinical research trial for sarcoma. One has been funded already, and it looks like, if we keep going this way, we'll be able to get more than \$10,000 by the time we're done selling it."

Before her diagnosis, Laura had worked as an associate pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Moline, Ill., and her congregation continues to follow her journey closely — as do her daughters, Erica and Sarah. The family lost their father, Laura's late husband Rod, after he was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2003.

Laura continues to move forward with treatments, including chemotherapy and pain medications. "I think some of the words that have helped me focus are the words 'Be here now.' There's an awful lot of stress and anticipatory grieving that I can do," she told the *Daily Leader*. "It's not surprising to go down that path, but that's not a destination that honors the great stuff that could be happening right in front of and around me."