

The Rose Project

"Doses"(22" x 30") watercolor by Monica Bishara

The Story behind "Doses"

In the summer of 2014, I was diagnosed with uterine and ovarian cancer. I had surgery at Woman's Hospital in August and went home to recuperate for a month before starting radiation and a weekly regime of chemo that lasted until the end of January.

Faced with so many months of treatment, I really needed a visual indicator of progress. I have been painting watercolors for over 30 years. It seemed only natural to count down to the finish line with a painting. I decided to paint roses. Why roses? The roses were in every bouquet given to me by friends and family after the surgery. I like to paint them, which is important, since I had to paint so many. The beauty of it was that I could do just a little at a time which was good when my energy level was low, but the effect would be cumulative just like chemo.

Each rose represents a treatment for cancer, starting with the red rose in the middle for surgery. There was no plan. I just jumped in and started in the middle because that was where it all began in me. Note that the darkness is in the middle because that was the worst time for me. Cancer isn't something that you plan for. When it happens, it rearranges your whole life and you just have to deal with it. What I've learned from painting watercolors is to just go with the flow and to look for the light--it's always there.

It's all too daunting when you first start out and are facing so many treatments, but the roses made progress visible, week by week. Roses are rich in symbolism. They have thorns, but I preferred not to dwell on the pain. As my blood counts dropped, the roses reminded me of red and white blood cells. While teal is the color of ovarian cancer, I just couldn't bring myself to put it in the painting. Finally I realized that the hesitation was because I wanted it to go away. The only teal that you see in the painting is trapped in the baby's breath. If you look at it closely, you will see that it is actually the chemical formula for Taxol and Carboplatin, my two chemo meds.

Cancer is a devastating diagnosis, but if it happens, there are so many people who want to help you through it. Friends dropped off everything from chocolate chip cookies to hot, home cooked meals. I can't begin to count all the people from California to the Virginia who were praying for my recovery. The medal given to me by a friend made its way into the painting. It represents all the prayers said on my behalf. No matter what happens, your life is in God's hands and everyday can be beautiful. So I paint roses.

To view the painting, visit <http://monicabisharaart.weebly.com/>

Symptoms of Ovarian Cancer: Bloating
Eating less and feeling fuller
Abdominal pain
Trouble with your bladder