

*“This experience has made me really appreciate every single day I have ... and realize how truly fortunate we are to have an incredible institution like St. Helena Hospital in our community.”*

- Leslie Mansfield, cookbook author, scuba diver and grateful patient



“I’ve had the most incredible life with so many blessings, but you don’t always know how fortunate you are when you are ‘skipping through the tulips.’” Sometimes, life throws you a curveball. Leslie had worked as an apparel designer for Nike in South Korea, attended cooking school in Paris, authored 18 cookbooks, and traveled the world to scuba dive. **But in June 2013, Leslie embarked on a multi-year journey she never asked for, and faced trials more difficult than she’d ever imagined.**

During an annual exam with James Peters, MD, Leslie mentioned an uncomfortable lump in her breast Leslie trusted Dr. Peters implicitly when he recommended she visit general surgeon Dr. Mark Potter as soon as possible for a biopsy.

It was a good thing she did. Even though she felt healthy, Leslie had Stage IV inflammatory breast cancer. Over the next year, Leslie underwent chemotherapy, radiation, a double mastectomy, and an ovariectomy. Then, in October 2014, she received yet another devastating blow: a blood test revealed Leslie had leukemia.

In partnership with UCSF, Leslie underwent a three-stage process to eradicate the cancerous blood cells from her body by destroying her bone marrow each time. Due to the aggressive treatment, her intestines became inflamed and she experienced a high fever and hallucinations. She was placed in a coma for 18 days and remained in the Intensive Care Unit, where she had a series of adverse reactions and eventually needed a tracheotomy to breathe.

One late night, Leslie's husband Richard received a call from SHH to discuss an emergency procedure. Richard asked them to, "just make her comfortable." But Leslie had other plans. Within the next few hours, she began to fight her way back. Her fever broke and her body began to function as it should.

When Leslie awoke after nearly three weeks in a coma, she was too weak to even sit up in bed. And because of the tracheotomy, Leslie was not able to speak—nor did she have the strength to write. "It was really difficult," she recalls, "but my wonderful nurse Chris just kept encouraging me. I practiced taking one step ... then five ... then ten. It took all the strength I had, but I had to do it if I wanted to walk again."

By the time Leslie was released from her 58-day hospital stay, she could walk with a walker for up to 15 minutes and speak audible words. True to Leslie's can-do spirit, within three weeks, she was able to walk two miles and was strong enough to undergo the next intense round of treatment, including a bone marrow transplant. Leslie's brother turned out to be a perfect match and agreed to donate—the ultimate act of love for his sister.

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—Leslie Mansfield, grateful patient

Leslie was released from the hospital in time for Thanksgiving, but she required Richard's care around the clock. She'd lost 30 pounds and all of her hair. Despite her weakened state, Leslie forced herself to begin walking again, starting with making laps around her house with her walker.

As Leslie reflects upon all she's been through, she gives thanks for the many ways her doctors, nurses, and staff members went above and beyond to demonstrate an extraordinary level of kindness and compassion. "Words just can't express how meaningful their kindness was to me."

With the advanced care Leslie received at St. Helena Hospital— and her positivity, strength, and determination to persevere—Leslie is working her way back to the active, adventurous life she's always enjoyed. Though her journey to fully-restored health continues, Leslie is confident she is in the right place with the right people by her side. **"I wouldn't go anywhere else for my care," says Leslie. "To have such excellent medical care this close to home at St. Helena Hospital is an incredible gift."**