

WHAT I BELIEVE
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Until September 9, 2001 my life progressed much as I hoped it would. I graduated cum laude from St. Olaf College in 1972, with a major in German. I eventually received a Master of Science in Library Science and a law degree. I worked for many years as a law librarian.

I married a fellow Ole soon after graduation. My husband and I had two children. I directed or sang in church and community choirs, I was a Girl Scout leader, I helped teach confirmation, and I attended my kids' sporting events. I was blessed with good health and a great family.

In early 2001, I found out I had breast cancer. It was an aggressive cancer, and required surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. That spring, my mother died. Despite all of this, I continued to work as the Idaho State Law Librarian.

On the evening of September 8, 2001, my husband and I attended a Boise State football game. When we came home from the game, I began to feel "weird." When I became listless, my husband called 911. I'd had a hemorrhagic stroke, a bleed in the left basal ganglia of my brain. I've since learned that 60 to 80 percent of hemorrhagic stroke victims die from the bleed. I was lucky. I was in the hospital for two months, and in a nursing home for one month. Finally, just before Christmas in 2001, I came home.

Over the next few years, I had speech, physical, occupational, aquatic and constraint-induced movement therapy. My brain recovered enough so that, today, my thinking is fairly clear. I cannot feel on my right side, nor can I use my right arm or leg for most things. Fortunately, I am left-handed! I no longer work, although I volunteer, and I sing tenor, poorly, in the church choir. Nevertheless, I feel fortunate.

Because I move so slowly, I pay more attention to who and what is around me. Because I can only do one thing at a time, I relish the fact that I can do that thing. Because I almost lost everything, I don't take anything for granted.

I used to be afraid of death. I am no longer afraid. Since I came so close to dying, I am now grateful to be alive. In the years since my stroke, I've realized that the joy in living is to be fully engaged in the great adventure of life. I've had to reinvent myself professionally and socially, but in many ways that is a blessing rather than just a challenge. Working and singing aren't exclusively what makes life rewarding. I believe it isn't so much what I do in life as my attitude toward life that counts.