

Excerpt from Chapter 8

I hated being at the hospital; the stench of sickness was everywhere. The bathrooms smelled of dirty diapers. Eventually, we got used to it—just like you get used to anything, however awful, when you're exposed to it day after day.

Still, it took me weeks before I was able to eat at the hospital—but not Karla. Almost from the start, she enjoyed being able to order off the hospital menu any time—she had saved her first hospital menu as a memento of her hospital stay. She even ate while she was getting chemo. If she ate, I tried to eat with her, even if I wasn't hungry. But if she didn't want to eat, I wouldn't eat, either—regardless of how hungry I was.

Karla hated getting chemo, but she never complained while we were there. Radiation was another story. The mouthpiece she had to wear was so uncomfortable that it made her dread the process, even though the actual radiation was only about 10 minutes. A special pillow was molded to her head so the radiation could be precise. Even though she hated the process, she loved Dr. Lavey. He always gave Karla hope and made her feel as if she were his only patient.

In fact, many of the nurses spoiled Karla. From the start, she had greeted everyone with an infectious smile and a bubbly "Hi!"—and nurses would greet her with a big "Karla!" when we arrived. We had girl-gabbing sessions, ice cream parties, movie reviews, and came to think of many of the nurses as friends. One of them, Allison, told me once, "I feel selfish saying this, but we love it when Karla comes into chemo." I thanked her for loving my baby.

One of the things I loved during this time was walking arm-in-arm with Karla. I felt we were becoming best friends again—a feeling I hadn't had in awhile.

Two weeks after her surgery, Karla announced her goals: to maintain her grades in school—which were back to straight A's—and to stay active. Karla was always a top student, and she was determined not to let cancer get in the way of that. She accepted that she would not return to school for the rest of her freshman year and that she would be on the home/hospital school program. We were all hopeful that she would be able to return to school in the fall.

"As far as school goes, I have no stress whatsoever because I have a home tutor now and I feel confident that everything will be fine. I am homeschooling for the rest of the year only taking geometry and English. And I get PE credit for doing anything physical, like cleaning my room! Before, I was really freaked out about homeschooling because I was scared about becoming antisocial, but now I'm totally cool with it because I know that won't happen, and plus for the next 6 months I don't have to deal with dumb, immature high school drama!"