

Master Sgt. John 'Mike' Summers of the Charlotte Military Entrance Processing Station and his wife, Cindy, at 2d Brigade's annual marriage retreat in Myrtle Beach, S.C.,



VERNETTA GARCIA, COLUMBIA BATTALION

# Sharing the Gift of Hope

## Soldier's Wife Survives Cancer, Gives Back

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**"I**'ve got to wake up and face death every day," said Cindy Summers. "The thought of helping others keeps my mind occupied, they are helping me."

Cindy, wife of Master Sgt. John 'Mike' Summers of the Charlotte Military Entrance Processing Station, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008. Six months later she endured a double mastectomy. This all happened at a time when her family was looking forward to marking 20 years in the Army. It was a life-changing experience.

"Getting hit with the diagnosis of breast cancer was not in our plan," she said. "Initially I was crushed and angry. Why me? I asked. Why did I have to be the first one on either side of the family?"

The cancer survivor has found the answers to her questions and begun healing by encouraging and helping others.

Summers operates Cindy's Hope Chest, a non-profit organization that emotionally and financially supports women who are battling cancer. She and other volunteers prepare gift baskets with nonallergenic and organic items, socks, wigs, hats, journals/diaries, inspirational materials and hard candy to give to the women. They also provide services such as house cleaning, transportation, grocery/drug store errands, hair styling, visits and preschool service.

Summers also uses blogging to help families affected by cancer and has found it beneficial in healing herself. Although the blog, [www.armygirlsx4.blogspot.com](http://www.armygirlsx4.blogspot.com), was originally started to stay in touch with people she met along the Army pathway, Summers said after the diagnosis she blogged daily. Now, she realizes that sharing her experience is helping people all over the country.

Her family has been a major source of support. During the many visits to doctors and specialists, her husband was her rock, her ears and her rationale.

"You're not really processing anything," she said. "All you're thinking is I'm going to die."

But her husband and three children would not allow her to think that way. "I'm not going to let you lay here and feel sorry for yourself," Mike told her.

While Summers said it was very difficult explaining her illness to the her daughters, Alexa, 13, Madison, 11, and Savannah, 9, she said, "They inspired me to wake up every day."

Alexa crafted a bracelet with the word BELIEVE in the center. Summers says she has not taken it off since putting it on in 2008. Alexa's hope was to have someone in every state wear a bracelet and pray for her mother.

With her immune system not being as strong as it once was, she decided to home school as a way to fight the germs spread among children.

Summers' hope and commitment to help others battling the disease seems to be helping. Her cancer is currently in remission.

As she put it, she is, "fighting like a girl — I've become a much better person. I'm stronger and more compassionate." Though she adds, "I am scared, I won't lie, but I'm much more at peace now and I know my purpose."

Summers was recently featured on Lifetime's "Army Wives Give Back," a special series honoring Army wives. The show presented her a donation of \$5,000 to Cindy's Hope Chest and an all-expense paid trip to Hawaii for the family.

For more information about Cindy's story, visit [www.cindyshopechest.org](http://www.cindyshopechest.org) or [www.armygirlsx4.blogspot.com](http://www.armygirlsx4.blogspot.com).