

# Hawks for Hope

Local resident fighting cancer one day at a time



■ Photos by Afton Fairchild

By Afton Fairchild  
Advocate staff writer

"He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart."—Psalms 91:4

When Roger Samples was diagnosed with lung cancer in late 2010, he needed a sign—a sign that would show him that God was with him. And when he asked for it, just at that very moment, a large hawk flew into the oak tree that sat in his front yard. He looked at the bird, and the bird gazed down back at him before gracefully flying away back into the sky. And that's when he knew.

"It was just like, OK, I've got it," Roger said. "You're sending me a hawk."

After that day, hawks became noticeable to Roger and his wife, Tammy, nearly every day. Even when the couple traveled to the University of Kentucky Markey Cancer Center for Roger's treatments, hawks seemed to follow them, so much so the hospital employees even began to notice.

"They would land right outside the window!" Tammy exclaimed.

"The girls would start calling me the hawk guy," Roger said.

Since his original diagnosis, Roger has been watched over by the hawks. And at one point last summer, Roger was told he was in

**HAWKS FOR HOPE**—Roger and Tammy Samples, pictured in photo above, have been dealing on and off with a battle against cancer since 2010. Roger was diagnosed with lung cancer and has fought the disease ever since. Hawks have been a sign of hope for the family, and Tammy's students at Christian Traditional School showed their support by coloring several paper hawks to fly in the couple's yard in front of their home, photo pictured below.



remission and stopped his chemotherapy and radiation treatments. But months after stopping treatment, he noticed that something still wasn't right.

"I just didn't feel good," he said. "I kept telling them I didn't feel good."

After doing a PET Scan, doctors discovered some lymph nodes that appeared to be affected. They told Roger they believed it to be an infec-

tion, and up until March during a bronchoscopy, that's what the family believed it was too.

"The same day they called me and said, well we were wrong. It's cancer," Roger said. "It's back, and it's back in a bad way."

Upon asking what they could expect and what could be done to fight it, the Samples were told some rather unfortunate news. Roger was told

that even if he underwent more chemotherapy, he would have just six months to live.

"That was a big deal," he said. "The day before I don't have cancer, the next day they tell me the most I can get is six months if I take chemo."

But Roger wasn't prepared for that diagnosis; he wasn't ready to give up. So after much discussion and prayer

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between he and Tammy, he woke up the next morning with hope in his heart and called Cancer Treatment Centers of America (CTCA), a treatment center he had seen advertisements about on television.

"I called them at noon, and by 3 o'clock, it was all set up. I'm telling you it was like another world."

After arranging a trip out west to the organization's cancer treatment facility in Tulsa, Okla., which CTCA ultimately paid for, Roger and Tammy set off to find a new type of hawk.

"We thought, we need to surround ourselves with some positive people who have hope, and they do," Tammy said. "They said to us, 'we're not here to say how many days you have left. That's not our call, that's God's call.'"

"Even though we have to go all the way to Tulsa, you know that's a long way, but we're surrounded by tons of encouragement," she added.

Upon arrival at the facility, Roger began to find a lot of people who were in similar situations to the one he had found himself in.

"Just everybody we saw, it was their second try because somebody had given up on them," he said.

The staff at CTCA view can-

cer treatment differently, the Samples agreed. They are kind, caring and positive. They inform and explain and work with patients to get their ideas and opinions, and they even sit down with you to pray, Roger said.

"Nobody does that, you know, anywhere," he said. "Even the cleaning ladies would pray with us."

"Like they told us, we don't just treat cancer, we treat the whole person," Tammy said. "The whole body has to be treated or you won't get well. It's not just what's wrong with you, it has to be your mind, body and spirit. It all works together."

After returning home from a Tulsa trip recently, the couple were once again visited by a hawk. This time, though, it wasn't just one hawk, but nearly 50, all brightly colored.

"I just burst into tears, I didn't know what to do," Roger said of discovering the hawks on his front lawn.

These hawks were of a different kind, however. They were not of flesh and blood, but of paper and crayon. But, that didn't diminish their meaning.

Tammy is a teacher at Christian Traditional School, and upon her leave of absence to be with her husband during his time of need, the students and teachers of the school decided they should do some-

thing for Roger, whom they had come to know during his frequent visits. That's when Megan Tibbs, art teacher at CTS, came up with the idea to have the students color paper hawks to hang up in the couple's front yard. The hawks, all suspended as if they were flying, were accompanied by cards and a sign that read, "We Love You!"

"It cheered me up more than anything anybody could have done," Roger said. "It made a big impact on me seeing all of that; I never thought the kids even thought about me."

"They got the hawk fever too, the kids did," Tammy said. "They understand that the hawk is our 'God is with you' symbol. They wanted to be a part of it."

The hawk has become synonymous with hope for the Samples, and Roger has even kept his Facebook friends up-to-date with their sightings. He said friends would often talk about seeing hawks themselves and saying a prayer for him. Now, Roger said, the symbol's meaning has grown.

"The other day, I finally told them the hawk is not for me, the hawk is God's symbol of hope for all of us," Roger said. "We just pass it on. It's the symbol of hope now for all of us who are fighting this battle, and there's a lot more than you think."

The couple said they have

met people in bouts with cancer who had been "given up on" years ago but are still fighting their fight today, and others along their journey who had been given as little as one day to live who are now cancer free.

The one thing that all of those survivors had in common, the couple said, was that no matter what anyone said, they weren't going to give up. Roger said he wasn't either.

"You can't let somebody tell you that it's the end," Roger said. "It's not the end until God tells you it's the end. And sometimes I think if you believe what they tell you, then it will end. I do believe that."

For those who may find themselves labeled with an expiration date or at death's front door, Roger advises them to persevere.

"There's always hope, and I think that's the bottom line," he said. "Not doctors, not us, not anybody can control when you die. God's in control of that. My advice is to pray, seek God's answers and find some place that gives you hope like we did."

And as each day passes and each hawk flies overhead, millions among us fight to live another day.

"I still may only have six months, we don't know that," Roger said. "But six months with hope is better than six months without it."