



Breast Cancer: My Story

Breast Cancer: My Story Meredith K. Biegel
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I was forty in September of 1997.
When my husband Steve found a lump.
And let me tell you, it wasn't a little bump!

I went to the breast surgeon
looking and feeling my best
I told the surgeon: "I'm not sick, I feel fine.
Just let me roller blade, play with my kids.
I'm telling you: this 'lump' is just a cyst."

"Lets do a mammogram and then we will see."
As they squeezed my little breast, I thought to myself:
"My gynecologist gave me a breast exam last January.
breast cancer? It just can't be!"

I sit alone, feeling cold in my gown.
My surgeon comes in wearing a frown.
"Meredith, I do not like what I see,
Let me do a biopsy."

I went home to wait for the lab's results,
Refusing to believe the worst,
praying that the mammogram was at fault.

The call came in early Monday morning.
"Meredith, come in, bring your husband, bring a friend."
My husband and I sat quietly, holding hands.
My doctor came in and told us the plan.
"You have breast cancer. It looks bad. It's all over your breast!"
I started to cry, then yelled: "Quick Doc. Schedule the operating
room, cut off my breast, get rid of this pest, I will tell my family,
you do the rest!"

So we drove home to our quiet, comforting house.
How do I tell my children? My parents?
(I can't do it)
I'm a chicken, I'm a mouse.
Called my folks, found that I couldn't tell them the truth.
Told them that I had a lump. I would know in a few days
if it was only just a bump.
My parents were shaken, right down to their core.
This isn't supposed to happen to their first-born child who they adore.
A few days later I told them all, my children, my parents, my friends.
I asked them to help me and not to let me fall.

Over the next few days my breast started changing in color and shape like an orange peel.

I thought to myself: "this just all can't be real."

I ran back to my surgeon. Who gave my breast a look?

She then canceled my surgery and opened her book.

She picked up the phone and called her friend Jane.

Please see my patient Meredith, please help to keep her sane.

So off I went to the oncology floor.

I meet my oncologist who began to tell me more.

"This might be inflammatory breast cancer, and if this is so, it's aggressive it moves quickly, we have to declare war!"

She explained to me the treatment plan.

It started off with the baddest mama of chemo:

BRIGHT RED ADRIAMYCIN!

Always the picture of health.

How could this happen to me?

Wreck my immune system?

Destroy my white blood cells!

I was scared shit of this chemotherapy!

But off I went, scared that if I didn't, I would die.

As the nurse pumped the red liquid into my vein.

I closed my eyes, and pictured soaring high in the sky.

Look at me: I can fly!

Yet this was the lowest moment in my life and that was no lie!

I went home to stand in my shower and to cry.

As clumps of hair fall from my head.

I thought: Oh G-D, please stand by me.

I am too young to die.

Bald, feeling sick, feeling ugly and alone,

I moan, and my two boys wrap themselves around me and say:

"Mommy, we are here, we'll protect you, like a dog with it's bone."

The chemo made me sick. Really sick beyond description: mouth sores, weakness, fevers of one hundred and five.

My doctor recommended that I be hospitalized.

In and out of the hospital was becoming routine for me.

They shot me up with drugs.

To boost my white blood cell activity.

In between chemo rounds.

I met some special people who kept my mind sound.

Massage, meditation, just let yourself breathe.

My therapist assured me that I'd beat this disease.

I had support groups: my family, Robert and Holly.

My greatest friends: Cheryl, Lisa and of course Eve.

They all said: "We'll help you to get through this,

It'll be a breeze."

On January 11, 1998

I can assure you

I wasn't feeling great.
The surgeon cut my breast off, took 16 nodes to see if the cancer had spread.
I went home two days later, all bandaged and tubed.
They do these operations and then release you, like a car going thru Jiffy Lube.

Oh my G-D! What's wrong with my arm? I can't lift it! It doesn't work!
You have to walk your fingers up the wall Meredith.
Come on it won't hurt!
Slowly, so slowly, I gained back the use of my arm.

Looking at myself in the mirror
Was the hardest thing of all.
My sexuality, my persona, my little child within, were all involved.

One day, I woke up, took a look at my arm.
Where are my veins. I don't see them.
Where have they gone?
I ran to Cheryl, my angel, massage therapist, my friend.
She said. "I am so sorry. It's lymphadema; you'll have it till the end.
I went to a special doctor who confirmed what Cheryl said.
"LYMPHADEMA? What's that, a new dance? A new song?
"PLEASE!" I begged the Doctor. "Tell me you're wrong!"
But no. again. my life changed forever and ever
Now every day of my life I wear compression sleeves, gloves and bandages.
Hidden by sarongs and long sleeved sweaters.

Now, you'd think after all this, my treatments would end.
But no. I am sitting in my oncologist's office again.
"Now you'll be getting three chemo drugs," she said.
"Only this time, they're combined, and their color is not red".
So for six months more I endured the chemo scene,
Found that "VISUALIZING" the chemo as "MAGIC MEDICINE"
Helped to keep me serene.

"Am I done?" "Am I finished?"
"Not quite yet." My Doctor said:
"Now you are ready for five weeks of radiation.
Get ready for your skin to become burnt and red.
So I went to get tattooed and measured.
This is one memory I surely don't treasure.
Although the technicians were two of the finest people I've ever met.
Having to lie exposed. arm in the air. head turned.
Was the most embarrassing yet.
One note on the positive side. Although my chest area was burned beyond belief, I roller bladed every day which gave me some relief.

Back to Dr. Jane. I asked her what was next.
She said: "Tamoxifen and clinical trials will help you to do your best.
So off I flew once a month times nine
To the University Hospital, for a phase-one trial.
3000 miles there, 3000 miles back.
We are going to teach your immune system if it sees a cancer cell.
GO AND GET IT THEN ATTACK!

I am hormone positive. In my mind, I am alive today

Because the Tamoxifen, took my period away.
At 42. I'm a menopausal broad.
Dealing with hot flashes.
And thanking the good Lord.

Last, but not least, I'd like to thank my husband Steve.
Who loves me and hugs me and makes me feel sexy.

Before I got cancer, after I got cancer, I was always into the natural answers.
Religiously took my vitamins, ate my veggies, read books,
Throughout chemo and radiation, I remained faithful, steady, and strong.
Still I ask: "Why I did I get this? Was it the red wine? What did I do?
that was so wrong?"

Now I look to the future and beg my body to hold on.
I know that a cure is out
there: the different vaccines are all looking strong!
I pray that there will be a day.
When all my fears of cancer returning. will all go away!

p.s. I would like to thank my mom for helping me to edit this.
My mom wanted me to end the story like this:
Quoting Martin Luther King:
"I am free at last!"
I only wish that I felt like this.

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