

Lessons Learned

by Jane Jayroe

as published in “Coping with Cancer” magazine.

Nov./Dec. 2009

The sound of my doctor’s voice on the telephone put life on pause. I didn’t want to hear another word. With my eyes closed, I received the message that transported me into the world of cancer.

I cowered in fear and begged God, “Not me!”

My diagnosis was uterine cancer. The symptoms had been around for three months but through medical and personal mistakes the disease had gone undetected. I didn’t want to tell anyone other than my husband—saying the word out loud made it too real. I preferred to curl up in a ball with the news. Maybe it would evaporate with the dawn.

That first night, my husband and I watched mindless television. *Desperate Housewives* was on, and Lynnette Scavo was battling breast cancer. I switched channels.

We started watching a movie. The mother in the show was dying of----you guessed it----cancer. *Click*. I turned the television off and resigned myself to sleep.

Eventually, I called my sister and best friends. They kicked into gear taking charge of the details. Their action was comforting. I began making the necessary appointments. In medical waiting rooms, I picked up slick brochures full of information

no one wants to learn. In 2008 over 40,000 women were diagnosed with uterine cancer and 7,470 had died. Those numbers compared well with other cancers.

My surgery wasn't as tough as I expected. Afterwards, my support team double-checked my medicine, made sure I ate enough, fielded my phone calls, smiled, patted, and prayed. Good news followed my lab report. Now it was just a matter of time, healing and maintenance---or so I thought.

Truth be told, my recovery took a long time and was complicated by many issues. But in the process, I learned many important lessons:

***Faith is my core strength.** Putting my trust in God didn't make life easy, but it provided resources for hope and meaning. Prayer and scripture were essential to my well-being. Every morning, I turned my eyes to the emerging light and sent up prayers for love and guidance.

***Exercise encourages healing.** I loved the feel of the spring air on my face as I walked the yard with a determined gait in my fuzzy houseshoes.

***Friends and family are healing graces.** My Sunday School class and friends brought meals to my home. It was so comforting to go to our front porch in the evening and find a home cooked meal that had been delivered by loving friends to be a blessing to me. I also gave friends specific tasks like bringing me lunch and sharing that noonday hour with me.

***It's important to choose grateful and joyfulness!** To combat the tough triplets of fear, worry and depression, I armed myself with stories of survivors. It was crucial to hear from people who came out on the other side with wisdom and strength. I developed habits of gratitude and tried to experience joy regardless of the circumstances.

Sometimes I repeated aloud, “I *am* grateful and happy.” I wrote it down in my journal, gave thanks for my blessings, and played uplifting tunes.

***Accepting death is a reminder to live.** Choosing a positive perspective doesn’t mean we ignore our emotions. Since my illness, I’ve lost good friends to cancer. It hurts my heart and wrings tears from my eyes. There are times when it’s okay to fall into the well of grief. We all know that our time is limited, but who believes that until we’re facing it dead on? What matters most is valuing the time we do have and making the most of it.

I’ve been blessed with a wonderful life. I’ve won awards, worn some crowns, stood on big stages, dressed in marvelous gowns, and carried impressive titles next to my name. I’m grateful for all of that, but cancer puts it in perspective. Loving God, loving people and being present to each day are the real miracles of life.

Editor’s Note: *Jane Jayroe was crowned Miss America in 1967. She is also a former television news anchor and Cabinet Secretary for Oklahoma. For more information about Jane, go to janejayroe.com.*