Cancer Health™

All the Feels

February 2, 2018 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

So I have been diligent and dedicated to doing all that I can to hopefully make my body as inhospitable to cancer as possible. I do know that it does not mean I am in the "clear" and that I am still very close to being that me who had cancer in my body. As fast as time goes, it goes slow, you know?

Last year at this time I had just completed my second of eight chemotherapy treatments. I was lucky in that I was able to "bounce back" and work and avoid infection and basically did all of my chemos on time (except for a 5-day delay to up my platelet count which, at the time, felt like the end of the freaking world but in retrospect was really not a big deal).

I see now as I am super involved with the community of women (and some men) who go through this plot twist that I was super lucky. There are folks who cannot tolerate chemo (like literally their bodies break down and they wind up in the hospital for days) and there are folks who had infections from their surgeries and there are folks who went in for a simple procedure but found out the cancer had spread and a surgery would not be enough to help them…

At the time, of course, I did not know about these other alternate realities as I was so damn busy hiding from my actual reality. Yes, hiding. I did put on my smile and joke and get through the whole soup to nuts of cancer but I did it as though it was a bad dream that I would wake up from … of course I realize now that it was not a bad dream BUT that it could always be "worse".

Now, I am in "fighting form" down to my high school weight and I deal with people consistently approaching me with that look. That look that says, "Oh, you are dying." And they ask me, "Are you okay? You look really bony." To which I go, "I am fine, thanks. I weigh what I did in high school and no one ever called me bony then, so thanks." Then I will hear, "But are you sure you're okay because you are so thin." To which, again, "Thanks—no one ever told me that before as I still have my tummy and my curves (though just one I guess with the other breast gone… but yes I am ok as far as I know."

It never stops really. People just often do not know what to say or do around cancer survivors in training. It happens to me quite a lot and I chose to let it flow off my back now. I take the pitying looks and think about how much instead I pity THEM. They do not know yet that life is for the living. That nothing is worth getting stressed over. That they are beautiful no matter their shape or size. That even if things really suck right now it is nothing compared to dealing with a life-threatening illness for themselves of their loved ones (God forbid). They do not have people who love them unconditionally and who they can IG chat with or call at 2 a.m. to share the new world, these new words and experiences we know and go through as cancer soon to be survivors.

I want to take a minute and take my hat off to the women I follow, who I have come to know and love, who are trying to do all that they can to take back their lives from this beast called cancer. I was lucky to have had my children before I was diagnosed with cancer. The type of breast cancer I had is one that makes any future children impossible, which at times, even though I am “older” at 41 is something that makes me think about what my third child might have been like if I had been able to have another. I know I probably would not have had another but I had the choice before. Now, I do not.

My body has been in menopause for a year this month. I take a shot to suppress my ovaries every three months and I take a daily hormone inhibitor pill. Still, if I am you know with my husband, I have to use another form of protection JUST IN CASE. As my husband looked at me and I fell pregnant in the past (though struggled with some miscarriages), I have to be very careful as I do not want to be in the position where I fall pregnant and it’s my life or theirs.

I follow women who were not lucky enough to have had their children already but still want to start a family. I think they are true heroes. It is not easy to plan and grow your family under normal circumstances and to do it after cancer (or the women who were diagnosed during pregnancy). WOW I want to say God bless and good luck to all of you who are out there building your families for the first or third time behind this wall of “cancer patient.”

I spent my son’s pregnancy worried and stressed after my miscarriages only for fear he would not make it, but to worry also about your OWN health and if you can do it without waking the beast is even scarier. Of course, not all breast cancer is the same. Not all people have hormone positive breast cancer, as I do/did. My cancer was fed from ER/PR (estrogen and progesterone).

So this post is to all the soon-to-be mamas out there who know what it is like to be bald, to lose a boob, to lose their sense of constancy in this life—may your have tons of baby dust, be fertile and have uneventful pregnancies. May you all hear from your daughter as I did recently from mine that, “MOM, the world does not revolve around you and your ONE BOOB!”—I mean, I had no idea of that until she told me. May you all hear your son say to you, “Mom, you are boring. Dad is more fun.” (Yes, it is true but I am also an adult and my husband is a large child—in the best of ways, I love him dearly but he is just a big kid...)

So here is to us—the parents who know what battle scars look like, who know when to get stressed and when to just let it go. We have been to hell and back and we have no clue that once we have teenagers, it is ALL OVER. Can’t wait to get there together!

This is what I do in the time between …
