My Name Is Lisa and I am Pathetically Positive

January 9, 2018 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

I am pathetically positive. What does this mean? It means that despite my life experiences and recent foray into the world of BREAST CANCER, I am still really really sure I will NOT die of cancer. If this isn't positive thinking, I do not know what is. I was always on the outside a positive person but on the inside, I was the person who prepared for the worst and hoped for the best. This is not positive. This is planning for the inevitable BAD thing and maybe, just maybe manifesting said bad thing with all of the posturing, worrying and planning.

Now, I find myself to more often than not be on the side of expecting the best and planning for the best. This is a radical change for me. I was the person who got straight A's in college but still knew I failed every test as soon as I put down my pen and handed it in. I was pathetic period.

At this point in my life, I am more informed and more well read on all things "cancer" related and adjacent. I understand, in some ways, my risk for becoming dead from cancer and yet I am incredulous thinking of it. In my heart of hearts, I am convinced that I will not die of cancer. It is quite shocking for me to be in this mindset after a lifetime of being convinced of doom and gloom without even a scratch on my health record. I am the person who got a million-dollar life insurance policy for $69/month after all. Health has been my currency, it has been who I am inside. Just always healthy BUT not always happy.

Every night, I pray for me and my children to be "happy, healthy and safe" and I have been doing this for over a decade now. It is funny how I always prayed for health but never appreciated it. Despite my glowing health, I was a bundle of anxiety and nerves on a daily basis—nah, on a minute to minute basis. Now my health is (I guess) "shit" but yet I am more confident, more comfortable and more focused than ever in my life on the GOOD.

Does this mean I do not worry? Ha, no not at all. I do still worry and it creeps up behind my shoulders whenever I am not looking, this fear, this panic, this feeling of "why does my side hurt—is it cancer?" but when it does show up and hit me, I hit back with this sense of peace, this internal calmness that I have never had before in my life. I credit my faith for this feeling of peace as well as my ability to numb myself with meditation, hypnosis, prayer and good thoughts.

I am treated at the number 2 cancer hospital in the world. I am surrounded by a support system that rocks. My children appear to be "normal" despite the fact that I was at one point not quite

sure I would live, however briefly I thought that a child picks up on these thoughts more than you can know. I am back to fighting form and feel (knock on wood) OK. I mean, I am not perfect and never was but all things considered especially when you think about and read the side effects of just a handful of the medication I am currently on NOT to mention the surgery, chemotherapy and radiation I did just this past year, well, I am really lucky.

Being put into menopause and given tons of steroids and chemotherapy led to an immense weight gain. Having a radical mastectomy means that my right side is always a little off and sensitive to pain and pressure as when my son accidentally bumps into my right chest area and I see stars for hours (sometimes days).

The chemotherapy I started a year ago this month leads to tons of side effects that I deal with as best I can. There is chemobrain (this is so real; there are times I feel so off but then times I feel so "normal" but all in all, I lost a bunch of brain cells and it is what it is) and neuropathy (pain and tingling in hands, feet, legs, etc) but it is all manageable because I am still alive.

Every 3 months, I get an injection to stop my ovaries from working as I had a hormone driven type of breast cancer. I have been in medically induced menopause though since after my second chemotherapy in February 2017 so almost one full year without having that monthly reminder of being a woman. My mom did not go into menopause until she was late 50s and I abruptly changed over at 40. I take a daily anti-hormone pill that also strips my body of hormones. There are so many side effects to these things on their own and together and yet, knock on wood, I am surviving it.

When I go in for checkups and mammograms or other medical tests, I get PTSD and worry hard. But I survive it. When I hear about my friends losing their battles, I get a feeling of the flu over my body, pain in my extremities and more. My ability to feel emotions and sadness now impact me from my head to my toes whereas before it stayed in my chest and my brain. I worry for my friends who are still dealing with scans and spots and nodules with the overarching fear that the goal of all of our treatment is really not to cure us but to stop disease progression. Cancer wants to progress, it wants to kill, it is its function. Stopping it is what I focus on doing for me and to hopefully help others figure out their plan to do the same.

Despite all of that, I am still sure in my body's ability to heal. Confident in my own jagged, broken down body that it is inherently curing itself along with the doctors' help. I cannot live any other way. To me, this makes me a new and improved version of me but also, deep down, I like to call myself "pathetically positive" or "stupid positive". As a former financial services professional who worked during the subprime mortgage explosion, I derided the big push of all financial services firms hiring "risk managers" or "risk compliance officers" or "chief risk officers" because I knew that people cannot adequately quantify or understand risk. If we did, none of us would get married or have kids. I feel I hired myself to be my own "chief risk officer" with the blinders on to navigate me through this world of broken down health, to get me back to fighting form—like a government bailout but for my own cells and shit.

This is what I do in the time between.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/name-lisa-pathetically-positive