National Cancer Survivor Day — My Thoughts on Survivorship & Life...

June 3, 2018 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

Today is my first “Cancer Survivor Day” — last year on this day, I was still hiding out under my covers going to radiation and pretending like I did not have a story to tell and now here I am, a year later, living this day and dreading it and also focusing on the word “survivor” and despite knowing I could make this post ALL ABOUT my nonprofit initiative and what I can do to help people embrace their survivor life with work training and resume help and whatever, I won’t.

(Well, in a way I did because I am a marketing person through and through but it was just an intro — here’s the meat of the story).

Sometimes, when I am walking around perpetually smiling and thankful that I am still alive because YES I am a super smile-y happy kind of person now inside and out — before just on the outside … well while doing this, sometimes, it hits me that there are people all around me who:

A. have no clue I was ever so sick that this was in question and
B. have never experienced “cancer” or an illness that could lead to them wondering these things chief among them the knee-jerk “why me…” question.

In the beginning, I thought this way entirely TOO OFTEN to sustain life — I trained my brain to not think this way and to just change my life motto from “things happen for a reason” to “it could always be worse.” Inside, I do not think I got cancer for a reason — there is no reason for ANYONE to get cancer. Despite that fact, more and more people of all ages are being diagnosed and either embracing this day or hiding under the covers as I did last year.

Cancer is something that once you have it, you ALWAYS have it — either in the front of your mind in fear or way back in a back file cabinet ready to jump out on a moment’s notice. So, I have a headache — is it nothing or is it cancer? So I have a back ache — is it nothing or is it cancer? Cancer is one of the most insidious of diseases — you do not have a clue that it is there sometimes until BAM it is too late. For all of my times that I struggled with this diagnosis, I always was HAPPY that I found it before it had become WORSE.

That does not change the fact that despite my focus on wellness and being in the moment, sometimes, it hits me that I went from a spec on my mammogram in April 2016 to Stage 3A high grade, fast moving cancer by November 2016 with no lump, no family history and no capacity to

manage being a cancer patient. I am so lucky it did not spread to my brain, bones, or vital organs. I also know that I have to stay lucky for the rest of my life for it not to rear up and do so — 1 in 8 women are diagnosed with breast cancer and 1 in 3 of those women will become metastatic where the cancer spreads and ultimately die from it or beat the "stats" of 3 years survival rate and live 5, 10, 15, 20 or more years but always in treatment and trying to stay HERE.

I have written in the past how in the blink of an eye you go from worrying about every little thing in your life to realizing just how fucking little those things were and wondering why did you ever spend a moment thinking about them. It happens that fast. And it does not go away — and I embrace THIS as a good thing on this Survivor Sunday. I even have "do I give a f&%k test" that I will write about soon but it focuses on "does this have the capacity to kill me" Y/N if Y worry if N fuck it.

Of course, a really good thing (the best thing even) would be for cancer to be eradicated, cured and that each of us still living in this time between would know that we are GOOD CURED and not worry about the "what ifs."

I mitigate my "what ifs" in a way I never knew before — and a way I could never have done before. My old "what ifs" were the rigid constructs around which I built my life. My rules and living methods were stricter than strict and I could not draw outside of the lines.

My new way of mitigating risks is to just fucking embrace them. Who knows what tomorrow will bring — today I will do what I need to do to "survive." And if that means pouring my soul into my current day and spending it loving my kids (even my husband) and trying to build my nonprofit initiative and working on my small business on the side and NOT thinking about cancer and how fast it enveloped my life, my breast and my lymph nodes well then SO BE IT.

I wish you peace on this day of "cancer survivors" and I hope you feel it in your bones and in your heart. To those of you who have never heard the words, "You have cancer…" you also never learned that the small things are everywhere and worried about and for that I pity you. Ironic, right?

I am sure you pity me — thinking about how I had cancer and maybe you do not understand the disease and you are happy in that and you assume I beat it and why do I continually live it by sharing and talking about it and basing my life on helping others with it… Well, it is what it is. This is me, one boob and all.

I was diagnosed at 39 years old — making me not only the first in my family with cancer but also the dreaded "young" cancer moniker. I do not focus on the negative I spend each day doing:

- Writing
- Helping
- Exercising

- Meditating
- Hypnotizing
- Connecting
- Giving Back

What do you guys — my fellow survivors, previvors, thrivers and all- do to live through each day as a survivor? <Cue the song “Survivor” by Destiny’s Child or just check my dance party on my Insta…>

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http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/national-cancer-survivor-day-thoughts-survivorship-life