Oh Marie...

January 8, 2018 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

I have lost people to breast cancer a few times already since being diagnosed myself. Most of the folks I have lost, despite never having met in person, are still mourned by me—I wrote about it here. Unfortunately, since Beth's death, a few more women in my social network sphere have died from this beast of breast cancer.

And now, I lost someone I knew in real life, too. I have known Marie D for years. She was the woman who always answered the phone at my mom's job and when she picked up, we would chat for 5-10 minutes about life and stuff. She was always so sweet and really interested in how I was doing, in general, with life, work, kids and stuff. Whenever she saw me, she hugged me and was genuinely happy to see me. She loved seeing my kids and how they grew and grew.

She was diagnosed right before I was or right after—my memory is murky. My mom was so sad because Marie was diagnosed with Stage 4 de novo and we knew already that was not good.

Life circumstances can really suck sometimes and Marie had a tough time dealing with the diagnosis and managing her treatment. She stayed local due to reasons that suck—financial and other. You see, even for me, with my husband and family all helping, getting to Sloan multiple times a month for treatment and appointments costs a lot of money. Plus, there are other bills and requirements to get the "best treatment." It is not a level playing field at all and really even with the "best treatment," stage 4 sucks balls and kills left and right.

The last time I spoke to Marie, she called me to talk about her upcoming mastectomy. She had done chemotherapy for months and then was going to go in for the surgery despite the doctors knowing she had spots all over her liver, bones and a few other spots. She and I spoke and I cried and told her I loved her. She was afraid of the surgery and I told her that she already had done the hard part—chemotherapy is so harsh and she had been doing it continually for months and months. I told her all about my surgery and what it was like during and after.

Shortly after her surgery, she took a turn for the worse and then just this week, she died. I feel gutted and also unable to help. I mean, I could not even see her in the hospital—I just could not do it. My mom went and visited and sent her my love but I just could not physically see her so ill and not freak out.

I did freak out anyway. Today was the wake and I just could not go. I woke up feeling off and confused. I dreamt that I was at work again and someone was trying to kill me with a person-

hunting dragon and I was climbing high up to get away from it. Subtle, huh? I guess the dragon was cancer and the job thing was due to the issues I had at work before I was terminated...

I am not proud of myself but this is how I had to exercise self care. I get that breast cancer kills. I have seen it from a distance and now more closely, though with a self imposed distance. I am still trying to squint at it from afar and deal with it as a (God forbid) potential outcome for me, my friends, and others who have walked this road as the 1 in 8 but it sucks balls. It really does. I am forever hopeful that it will not end in my untimely demise and that even more so a cure will be developed and work for the 1/3 of us who become stage 4 after having breast cancer.

Bravery is only possible in the face of this because I truly try to stay as positive as possible. I pray for Marie D and her family and friends and I hope they understand why I had to stay away. Cancer sucks.

This is what I do in the time between. Rest in peace, Marie D.

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