

Cancer Together

Life with Cancer

October 18th, 2010 Los Alamos Monitor

Cancer is a lonely business. You need friends and loved ones to see you through, but in the end, there's nothing like having someone who completely understands what you're going through, from the inside out. A Cancer Buddy. Because peace, from friendship, is one of the greatest ways of finding relief from the anxiety the disease brings.



So, in this month of ovarian cancer awareness, I'd like to tell you about a very special person, my Buddy. Someone, who is the epitome of why this potentially curable disease, if caught early, needs to be stopped in its tracks. Someone who's love of life and life to love is being taken away from all of us.

After I was diagnosed, I kept hearing her name, for a whole year. "Oh you have ovarian cancer, well there's this lady.... ." I used to think "who is this woman. Is there anyone she doesn't know? I'd love to meet her but she obviously has so many friends already, it's not like she's desperate for another! Why should I bother her?"

Well, I guess my needs finally outweighed the fear of rejection. I was aching to talk to someone who was going through exactly the same thing, the same cancer. So I eventually plucked up the courage and sent her a note, "Hi I'm Kay, I have your disease too. Please contact me." I shouldn't have worried.

The Divine Miss M, as I fondly call her, is one of those people who lights up a room as soon as she walks in. She's cheeky, funny, elegant and intelligent. She always has a smile, even when in dire pain, and to my frustration, always puts others first above her own needs. She's insightful, broadminded and a realist, which is why so many of our conversations have been the inspiration for this column. She probably doesn't know how much of my strength has come from her, and how much she means to me, but for 3 short years she's been the big sister I never had, my role model, my guiding star.

I think, if I had I met her in different circumstances, I would have loved her anyway. But what makes our friendship so special is that she understands the language I speak. She can finish my sentences. She understands the direness of the disease without having to feel uncomfortable

talking about it. We can compare lymph node sizes, surgery scars, and tumor markers. If one of us hears of a new treatment it's immediately sent on. If there's a political injustice with regards to care, we link our arms and shout our voices all the way to Washington. We are there for each other.

My husband says the problem with having cancer survivors as friends is that odds are there's going to pain. But that's like not putting your hand in the candy jar in case you get toothache and who does that? I guess I'm just going to end up toothless, because when you reach out to the cancer community you meet the most remarkable people. Men and women who have looked the big 'C' in the eye. And because of it, they live a better life, a humble, dignified, courageous one.

I feel as though I have known Miss M my whole life. My only regret is that I haven't. Ovarian cancer brought us together and ovarian cancer will tear us apart. Barring a miracle, I will lose her. That's why I'd like to celebrate her life now. She was the inspiration for Ovarian Cancer Together, and she's been an inspiration to me every day I have known her. If you want to know what it's like to face cancer with dignity and graceful determination, even in the face of tragedy, she's your gal.

So Miss M, thank you for the laughs, and for the tears. Maybe we'll be wrong and we really will meet on the other side. I hope so, because as that other more gregarious Divine Miss M would say "You are the wind beneath my wings."

Kay Kerbyson and her family recently moved to Richland, Wash. She is an Associate Member of the Los Alamos Council on Cancer and President/Founder of Ovarian Cancer Together! Inc. (New Mexico). Local support and resources for those touched by cancer can be found at www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org and at www.ovariancancertogether.org.