

I'm Living with it Not Dying from It

Life with Cancer

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What happens when a cheer leader loses her pom-poms, or a wall street protester loses their sign, or Tigger just loses his bounce. All of us, when pushed to the limit, lose our hope, our drive our energy. In the face of a cancer diagnosis, there can be courage, determination and cockiness in the face of adversity, but fighting cancer is no picnic, and it consumes all your strength. So what happens when it consumes your life, when you live with cancer as a chronic disease.... when you've just been diagnosed with cancer for the 3rd time in 5 years. Then life can suddenly seem as though its determined to undermine you, and the only thing to do is throw in the towel and say, "oh well, I guess I'm just screwed."



That was me, 2 months ago. I know, the cancer advocate, the inspirational writer and speaker, the mom of young children who has everything to live for. What I'm saying is that it happens to most of us in the worst of times, and recurrent cancer seems like the worst of times. Many people ask me how I do it, live knowing that my cancer will always return. Usually, I'll tell them that I'm winging it, that it's not how hard you fall it's how you get up that counts, but this time was something different. I just fell flat on my face.

Winston Churchill is quoted as saying that, whilst doubt cramps power, hope releases it. As an exasperatingly unbearable man, to both work and live with, he achieved greatness because in his mind there was no room for failure. Hope freed him to overcome enormous obstacles. So in the adversity of war, or in the face of a lifetime of fighting cancer, how do you release that hope? How do you stay on the train and reach your destination without throwing yourself off at every stop?

Well hope is the answer but, if it's gone, how do you get it back? Maybe hope is just a pigheaded way of refusing to believe that we won't make the journey; doing everything you can to remain a passenger, even when life is trying to pick you up and throw you out the window.

For me that was the aha! moment, when I realized that my family's life could go on without me. I just wanted to be damn sure that it doesn't. Maybe hope is just selfishly wanting to be here,

to have some control. I know their lives would go on, I know in the long term they would cope, and maybe even be stronger for it, but without my irritating ways, my knack of stretching out jobs, which makes my husband really mad, my zealousness for instilling in my children that we only get every day once and should make it precious – and that means not whining! That's when I realized that my doubt over whether my journey was coming to an end really was zapping all my power.

So, yes, I am looking cancer in the eye yet again. And yes I'm still winging it, but when the train lurches again, as it no doubt will do, it won't be how hard I fall that counts, it'll be how high I bounce. Because, if nothing else, as Johnna McClure's book recently reminded me, I'm Living with it, Not Dying from it.

Kay Kerbyson is a Board Member of the Los Alamos Council on Cancer, and Founder/President of Ovarian Cancer Together Inc., the only non-profit specifically supporting women in New Mexico with ovarian cancer. Resources, support and education materials, for those effected by cancer, can be found at www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org and www.ovariancancertogether.org