

# Moving On

## *Life with Cancer*

Moving house is tough. When you have a dog, a cat and 300 boxes it's even tougher. What's surprising, though, is that it's a lot like having cancer. Why? Because both take you into unfamiliar territory.

For instance, when I heard the word "cancer" come out of my doctor's mouth I burst into tears, and then cried for another two months. The same thing happened when my husband told me he wanted us to leave New Mexico.



With cancer, I was thrust into a totally unfamiliar world: new clinics; doctors I didn't know existed and a world of chemicals I couldn't even pronounce. In the same way, a new town has meant new people, new physicians and, yes, even new chemicals: Trichloro-s-triazinetrione, and Hydroxyethylidane-1 to name but a few - just to keep my pool running!

During treatment, I'd been around for a while, I got recognized in the clinic, I met friends at support groups, I knew the medical terms that once used to be gobbledygook. I started to feel comfortable in my new surroundings.

In the same way, I'm now waving to my new neighbors, not having to use the sun to navigate back home, and learning how to pronounce all the new Native American names. My new life is starting to feel familiar.

But then comes survivorship - the hardest part. It's the start of a long grieving process involving denial, anger, depression and finally acceptance.

When my hair grew back I could act as if I'd never had cancer. When we were packing, I just pretended we were having a gigantic spring clean. Denial doesn't help for very long though. Finally, reality sets in and you head for the closet with a box of tissues.

Then anger and depression take over. Did I get angry at my cancer, at life, for throwing me the cancer challenge? You betcha! Did I ask why, why, why should I be taken away from my family at such a young age? Sure. Did I feel so sad that at times I saw no future? Yes.

Was I angry with my husband for wanting us to move, from the place I loved, to a place I thought I would hate? Yes, but let's not tell him that! Was I depressed about leaving my friends, not being able to look out at the beautiful snow capped mountains, not being able to get around the grocery store without several hugs? Definitely.

But while I know I will adjust to life in Richland, with cancer it's a much longer journey. I'm still grieving four years later: for not being the mom I want to be (the one that doesn't have to take naps, and who can play soccer and roller skate for hours on end) and for the physical changes it

has brought. Even though I don't look it, I'm still living with cancer and still working at being happy with it.

But here's what cancer taught me that made moving easier. Grief is inevitable and it's OK. It's the walk across the hall that opens the door when the one behind closes. What counts is making sure that you don't hover in the hallway.

In my new town, I could glare at my husband every evening, not explore, just sit fondly reminiscing about New Mexico. Or instead, I could call back the neighbor who put herself out to bring cookies, call the Tri-City Tappers and see if they'll adopt me like the Los Alamos senior tap group did, or play tennis with my children for as long as I can.

Some people say that grieving allows us to forget the sadness. I'd rather say that grieving allows us to accept the sadness and move on. Maybe I don't see snow-capped mountains out of my window any more, but two mules and a hill can be pretty beautiful, too.

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