

# Smoke and Twitches

## *Life with Cancer*

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It can't happen again! Not so soon. I just don't know if I have the strength to go through this again.

If you were living in Los Alamos in 2001, you'll now know what every cancer survivor goes through time and time again when there is a chance that their cancer is back. When the town was in danger of being devastated by fire again recently, you didn't have to be a cancer survivor to understand the fear of recurrence.



Whether it's a high tumor marker, or a spot on a CAT scan, the fear can be debilitating and exhausting. Flashbacks, anxiety, not being able to concentrate, heart constantly racing. Sound familiar? Welcome to our world.

As a cancer survivor there are many bumps in the road. If you've been following my journey at all, you'll know that cancer survivors don't finish treatment and skip off happily into the sunset. There are the side-effects of treatment or surgery, the fatigue, the insecurity. But whatever the bump, what binds us all together is the fear of our cancer coming back, of having to go through chemo again, of losing our hair again, but most of all that the chemo or radiation won't work next time.

I bet if you came close to losing your home in 2001, or even worse lost everything, that the smell of smoke, even if it's only the neighbor's barbecue, sends a shiver up your spine. For us it's a twinge that hasn't been there before, a tingling finger, a headache that won't seem to go away. The slightest things will bring back the sights, the sounds, the trauma. The vivid memories come flooding back, the sleepless nights come in, and the anxiety takes over. So not only was the town thrown back into a fog recently, I'm sure many of you were also.

Whether you've been through tens of false alarms, or just the one, we both have to do the same thing after a possible recurrence. Breathe a huge sigh of relief, pick ourselves up and start again. Tell ourselves that we were lucky this time. We've done it once, we can do it again. Because attitude is everything.

I love the story my dear friend tells about how she coped after the 2001 fire. She lost her house of forty odd years and all her possessions. The only thing she could save, since they were in her car when the evacuation call came, was her tap dance shoes. When she walked back into class again after the fire, there was a silence and a lot of awkward looks. I mean, what do you say to someone who's just lost everything? And while the tears were welling and everyone was starting to choke, someone saved the day by saying "Just put on your shoes and dance." And that's what she's been doing ever since.

Isn't that what we all have to do? Whether you luckily dodged the bullet this time, or have to go get it dug out, we all have to put on our shoes and dance. Thank God that Los Alamos was saved this time by all the men and women who gave everything of themselves to avoid a recurrence of 2001. And thank God for all of you who support cancer survivors, time and time again, over each and every hill. And maybe, just maybe, you'll know a little more now about what it's like to dance in our shoes.

*Kay Kerbyson is an Associate 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](http://www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org) and [www.ovariancancertogether.org](http://www.ovariancancertogether.org)*