

Surviving New Year and Cancer

Life with Cancer

January 9th, 2010 Tri-Cities Herald

I hate New Year. I know bad stuff can happen at any time, but for me it always seems to happen around then. Fact is, I'm not even doing New Year this time. I'm skipping straight through to February. So that's it for now. Bye.



What? You want to know why? Oh, OK I suppose so, but this can't take long I've got to go hide.

It started with just the usual anticlimax feeling every year. You have such great expectations that New Year is going to be fun: parties to go to, friends to see, the exciting 10 second count down and flowing champagne. Duh, not exactly. It's more like who can keep their eyes open long enough in front of the TV to give that cursory "Happy New Year" and then collapse into bed.

Then about seven years ago bad stuff starting happening. In 2004 our cat died on New Year's Eve. In 2005, just after New Year, my husband was diagnosed with cancer. In 2006, we tried to celebrate New Year with a mini-vacation and ended up spending 3 days, but mostly long nights, in a hotel room with two toddlers with stomach flu. In 2007, I spent New Year throwing up after my first chemo. In 2008, my tumor marker shot up (undoubtedly leading to sleepless nights and panic.) and was later confirmed as a recurrence. In 2009, one of the girls was ill again, and in 2010 a gum infection, which turned into a tooth extraction, which turned into an excruciating dry socket, put a huge damper on the New Year. It's hard to be inspirational when bad stuff happens. Everyone expects to hear from me: "Live Love Laugh." "Every day is a new day." "There's always hope." But boy, when it feels like someone is constantly driving a drill into your jaw, it's hard to do anything but grump.

Is there a moral to this dampening tale? Well, I hope so, or else this column really sucks! What I realized last year is that people can easily give up hope when they're in constant pain, from cancer, or any other illness. Yes, stories of people who've beat a particular disease, and now climb mountains, are great but when you're the one that's suffering, when you're the one with the disease that can't be stabilized, it doesn't make you feel any better.

So what do you say? Maybe you don't have to say anything. Maybe you're mission is to bring joy into that person's life which, for however short, will make them forget the pain. Making someone who's close to giving up hope smile or laugh, or find some kind of inner peace, may be the greatest gift you could ever give. Of course none of us want to go; of course we should all cling to hope; but sometimes hope isn't a lecture about how beautiful life can be, it's about how much we're loved today.

Kay Kerbyson and her family live in West Richland, Wash. She is a local and national Cancer Advocate, an Inspirational Speaker and President/Founder of Ovarian Cancer Together! Inc., a non-profit 501(c)(3) state-based networking and support organization. Kay can be contacted at Kay@ovariancancertogether.org or through her website www.ovariancancertogether.org