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Co-Survivor Essays

**Mary Brooks [Co-survivor: Her husband, Joe]
— Winterport, Maine**

We were to be married in December 1999. While completing arrangements in October I found out I had breast cancer. Joe got the news from my doctor and he was the one to tell me. It looked bad—stage 3. He was there for my first chemo and for every treatment after that, all nine months. When we had to cancel our honeymoon to Hawaii we were both disappointed, but we still got married in December and he said loudly, “I will certainly take this woman in sickness and in health.” He was the one who shaved my head for me when the time came. We both just celebrated five years as a survivor because he went through every step I did. We also just got back from our honeymoon in Hawaii.



Photo courtesy of Mary Brooks.

Winning essay from Quilted Northern Time for Thanks contest. Printed with permission.

**Jan Wilson Kessler [Co-survivors: her students]
— Fort Smith, Arkansas**

Two and a half years ago, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Telling family and friends the news was tough. However, the toughest decision I had to make was what exactly to tell my elementary students. I discussed this with the school counselor as I was not exactly sure what to tell them. She suggested I tell them the truth. So, I gathered them around me and began explaining that I would have to be gone for a while and why. One brave soul raised his hand and said, “Are you gonna die?” I answered that honestly, too. They were so supportive during those days of treatment. They were what kept me going. On the first anniversary of being a survivor, my class decorated the cars in the faculty parking lot with pink ribbons. They also proudly wore pink ribbons—even the sixth-grade boys! Today, I can still look into their faces and see hope and the future.



Photo by Zena Featherstone/ Fort Smith Public Schools

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Monica Ridenhower [Co-survivor: her daughter, Monika]
— Indianapolis, Indiana

My daughter was only 15 at the time of my cancer and chemo. She put her whole life on hold for me and became the caregiver. She would come home from school and make sure I was eating instead of going to after-school programs. I would encourage her to go out with her friends and she would bring them home instead to watch a movie. She became the parent to me. As I recovered I had to remind her that she was the child again and let her know it was OK to be a teenager. Even today, as she has her own son, she still keeps a close eye on me, and I love her very much. She still calls every day and checks on me. She is my hero and the stronger one.



Photo courtesy of Monica Ridenhower.

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Marcia Wilson [Co-survivor: her husband, Larry]
— Leesburg, Florida

He never let me give up, not offering sympathy but rather encouragement. Through all the treatment he staunchly stood by me in the wings, letting me gain strength by facing breast cancer head on. Whenever I would start to flounder and weaken, he stepped into the coach role, reminding me that I could beat this monster. He never failed to tell me how wonderful I was, how strong I had become and how much he loved me. Without him I know the journey would have been much scarier and maybe not nearly as successful. I am going right now to thank him again for all his love and support.



Photo courtesy of Marcia Wilson.

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