

IN EVERY ISSUE

Now What? Understanding Cancer Survivorship

BY KATHY LATOUR

In 1986, I was a 37-year-old mother to a 13-month-old daughter and four stepchildren. All I could think on the day I was diagnosed with breast cancer was, "I am going to die and my daughter won't even remember me."

One of the most important things I have learned since then is that a cancer diagnosis brings with it a series of life-changing moments and, ultimately, an understanding that when the treatment for cancer ends, there remains work to be done to find true healing.

I had excellent medical care, but not once did anyone mention that when treatment was over I would be terrified of recurrence, sleep deprived, and angry. I was far from unique in my issues of trying to find the "new normal" that is life after cancer, but not until I joined a support group three years after treatment ended did I find the community who could help me understand that cancer is a dual journey—medical and emotional. I had done all the right things to be cured, which is about the body, but I had done nothing to be healed, which is the heart-and-soul work to accept that I had faced mortality and what that would mean for my life.

Luckily, at the time I was diagnosed, cancer survivors from across the country were gathering to share information with each other—and looking for ways to gain attention and research dollars for survivorship.

Ironically, the week I had my mastectomy in Dallas, a group of survivors met in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and became the nucleus for the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS). Since that day, NCCS and other organizations committed to issues of cancer survivorship have funded research and kept the spotlight focused on the needs of cancer patients after treatment ends.

Their work resulted in the creation of the Office of Cancer Survivorship at the National Cancer Institute.

At the same time, breakthroughs in treatment have seen increasing numbers of "chronic" cancer patients, who are living longer with ongoing issues, such as metastasis and repeated recurrences.

In this supplement you will find the facts and hear the voices of cancer survivorship. In some cases, this information will offer calming affirmation for your journey; in other instances, this information should prompt you to take action in some way to ensure good health not only for you but also for your

family.

We hope you will find whatever answers you need in these pages to live the life you aspire to—as a person and a cancer survivor.

Since my diagnosis I have raised my child, become an advocate for women with breast cancer, and dealt with a second diagnosis of breast cancer, which was found early. I have also gained a greater understanding of life and its treasures.

Kathy LaTour

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