

IN EVERY ISSUE

The Good with the Bad

BY REGINA L. BUCHHOFER

How a paddle replaced anger with joy.

Shortly after being diagnosed , I remember reading survivor stories where breast cancer survivors would state, “Breast cancer was the best thing that happened to me.” This statement truly perplexed and angered me. There I was, 32 years old, having just lost a breast to cancer.

For the life of me I could not fathom that the hell I found myself forced into would ever be a good thing. Was there something I was missing? What was wrong with me that I didn't feel this way? During this confusion, I resigned myself to the notion that since I didn't feel anything positive about my experience with breast cancer, everything would always be negative. I was angry at the world, life, and my own body for letting me down. I refused to allow myself to see anything good arise from having breast cancer because in doing so I felt that would mean I accepted it.

My own internal misery continued for more than two years. I wasn't looking for anything positive to arise from the ashes of my cancer diagnosis, so my life remained a fog of powerful emotions ranging from grief and anxiety to terror and rage. I tried my best to fit back into my pre-cancer life and pick up where my life left off before I had breast cancer.

But I wasn't the same person, so how could I expect my life to pick up again where it left off? I felt like a wounded bird that had fallen from her nest without knowing how to get back up again. So who was I now? Such questions I pondered.

Then one day, when I wasn't looking, my life took another abrupt change. The change this time wasn't dark and mysterious with a threat to my life like cancer had been, but a bright and beautiful movement toward realizing what had happened to me.

A slow transformation into creating something positive from breast cancer began when I was presented with the opportunity to see things differently. I now realize that acceptance of breast cancer does not mean I like it or agree with it, but that I have come to terms with the fact that yes, this has happened to me. I need to stop fighting it and fit it into my life somehow.

I fit breast cancer into my life when I joined Hope Afloat USA, a dragon boat racing team for breast cancer survivors. Once I allowed the change to take place, opportunities of endless goodness arose when I joined this extraordinary group of women. I learned to transform my anger about what I had no control over into

what I could control: pounding my paddle into the water with all the strength I could muster.

The anger that once nearly crippled me could be used in a positive direction to help get our boat across that finish line of life. When the 20 of us paddle in unison and the boat glides across the river, I am reminded that I too need to keep moving forward. With each exhaustive breath that I grab from deep within my lungs, with every drop of sweat that rolls down my back, and as my muscles cry out, I am aware that I am alive.

Even after the tremendous healing that has taken place within me since joining Hope Afloat USA, I would not say breast cancer was the best thing that happened to me. But what I have learned is that good things can come from bad experiences. I could even almost thank the disease for bringing Hope Afloat USA into my life.

To learn more about Hope Afloat USA, visit www.hopeafloatusa.org.