

IN EVERY ISSUE

## The Last Tenth

BY JEN HOFFMANN

*A trek to the finish line.*

I remember when Greg and I ran my first half marathon. We had just crossed over the Mill Avenue Bridge in Tempe, Arizona, and I saw the 12-mile marker. That distance may have been the farthest I had run at that point, and I let out a triumphant yell.

Greg, who was running in front of me, whirled around to see whether I had fallen or met some other untimely demise. With an enormous smile on my face, I shook my head and told him I just realized how far I had come, and that I knew I could finish.

And then I remember getting so tired. It was as if I started to celebrate too soon when I still had more to dig deep and find. I remember him telling me, “I only need 10 more minutes from you, and then we’re done. Not even 10 minutes. You have got this ... .”

I ran on, and although the last one-tenth mile seemed endless, the finish line was finally in sight. Just before we crossed the sensors, Greg reached over and grabbed my hand. Exultant, we finished together, and I looked up at the clock. I had beaten my goal time by nearly seven minutes. Mission accomplished, over and above my expectations.

I can see a different 12-mile marker ahead of me now. Or, at least, I think I can, although it still seems so far away. The difference is that the distance equals two more weeks of treatment for a recurrence of breast cancer. I must lace my shoes tighter, dig deeper than I think I can, take the deepest breath I can muster, smile through it all, and battle on to the morning of December 19, 2007—the last day of chemo and my 13-mile finish line.

I’m not quite ready for the triumphant yell, and perhaps I don’t quite realize how far I’ve actually come. Maybe the dark circles around my eyes and the alien I see in the mirror cloud my vision. Maybe I should remember that I have an incredible husband who has sat with me through every week of treatment, always treating me like a person instead of a patient. Maybe I need to remember that six months

is a small period of time in the big picture. Maybe I simply need to suck it up when I feel ugly and tired and fat and so ready for my life back that I can taste it.

I can't understand why it's become agonizingly hard when I'm so close to the end of this chapter. I desperately need the break from treatment, but I know there is the likelihood that I will need more chemo after the January surgery has removed all offending masses from my system. For now, the respite is my finish line, my final peak to summit. I just need to get there.

Between now and then, I must find as much laughter and love whenever and wherever I can. I must focus on the fact that these treatments are working and that I'm steps closer to being reacquainted with my elusive friend NED (No Evidence of Disease). I must remember that I'm alive and strong, and that the poisons they are pumping into me, although they have taken a toll on my physical and emotional self, will enable me to live for many years after this one.

I may need a little extra push at times, and I don't always know how to ask for that, which comes with the territory of being stubborn and wanting to be self-sufficient. It's times like these that I must remember the promise to myself and those who love me that I will not attempt to battle alone.

"... only need 10 more minutes from you, and then we're done. ... You have got this ... ."

*Jen Hoffmann, 37, lives with her husband, Greg, in Phoenix. A scan on April 23, 2008, four days before their first wedding anniversary, showed no evidence of disease and she continues to do well following another scan in August.*

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