

I will survive

Posted At : February 28, 2010 4:44 PM | Posted By : Guest Blogger

Related Categories: Survivorship, General

CURE invited Suzanne Harp, a recently diagnosed breast cancer survivor, to serve as a guest blogger during the 10th Annual Conference for Young Women Affected by Breast Cancer in Atlanta, February 26-28.

There comes a moment during every party, at the end of the evening, where you hear that arpeggio on the keyboard then Gloria Gaynor's voice singing ... "At first I was afraid, I was petrified."

At most weddings and proms the playing of "I Will Survive," is a moment of musical camp, eliciting a mix of groans and "I love this song!" But at the Young Survivor's Conference, the golden oldie is more than a moment of disco nostalgia. It is a defiant anthem.

For the hundreds of breast cancer women singing along to the lyrics, it was a musical "line in the sand" stating:

We will be young--
We will still dance--
We will still enjoy ourselves.

When I was first diagnosed, I wondered if I would ever feel free again. Would cancer would cast a shadow over everything? So there is nothing superficial about discovering this disease does not have to take away your ability to have a good time. In fact, that was the "take-home" message of many of the speakers.

If you really want to learn how to live well with cancer, talk to someone who has a lot of practice. Paula Verna has been living with breast cancer for six years, and liver mets for three. But Saturday night, in a room of women with early-stage disease, her sense of acceptance stood out.

As we raided the VIP lounge's stash of snacks, the Folsom, California survivor shared some of her hard-won wisdom with us.

"If you live in fear that it's going to come back, you stop living."

Another of her sayings: "By just being here today, you beat it."

Verna says she comes to the YSC conference for a feeling of family and unity.

Of course, not every woman with advanced breast cancer wants to spend her energy comforting shaken early-stage sisters. It can be an awkward divide. One participant posted on Twitter, "each time I hear 'when your treatment is done' I wince a little. For some of us, treatment will never be 'done'."

But Verna, a former basketball coach, believes her advice is meaningful no matter what position we are playing.

"If you dwell on what's wrong with you ... you miss so much."



Suzanne Harp spent 10 years as a television news anchor in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Maine, and New York. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in September. She lives in New York City with her husband Ethan, and blogs at www.joinourloop.blogspot.com