

I was 32 years old, happily married, and had a much loved 23-month-old daughter. Then I found a lump in my breast. I went to see my doctor and she started me on the round of tests. After a mammogram, an ultrasound, and a needle biopsy I was told that I had a large, cancerous tumour in my breast. The following day—a Friday—I went to the surgeon with my husband, Casey. We thought we were going to discuss how much of my breast I was going to lose. When the surgeon found the large mass in my lymph node we ended up discussing what my chances for survival were. When he told me that I had a 40-60% chance of surviving 5 years the room started to spin and I nearly fainted. He set up an appointment for me with the cancer clinic for the following Wednesday and sent us home.

I spent the weekend in shock. I remember beating Casey on the chest and yelling at God about how unfair this all was. One of my friends came over and I cried on her shoulder about leaving Beth so soon. I stood over Beth's crib as she slept with silent tears running down my cheeks. I didn't know how I was going to get through this.

I am happy to report that I did survive chemotherapy and the loss of my hair; radiation and severe radiation burns on my chest; a mastectomy and immediate reconstruction with the life-threatening infection that required almost 4 months of home-care nursing; and the rehabilitation of my arm, my body and my soul. I am now nearly 5 years cancer free and I celebrate my life everyday. My 40<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2 years will be a victory celebration.

How did I get from that Friday in 1997 to today? I had excellent medical care. My family doctor is an amazing woman who cares deeply about her patients. My medical oncologist is excellent at what she does--she knows to take time to talk to her patients. The chemo nurses all deserve medals of honour for the work they do everyday. I am also fortunate to have an uncle who is a medical physicist at the cancer agency in Calgary. He kept me informed about what was happening to me, and kept all of my doctors on their toes.

I couldn't have done it without these people, but I also couldn't have done it without the support I had from so very many other people. The BC cancer agency offers wonderful support for its patients. I took advantage of the counselling services, the weekly relaxation group, and the courses on therapeutic touch. I had a wonderful friend who regularly came over to perform reiki on me. It was she who first helped me to see that I could fight the cancer. Two days after I was diagnosed I was feeling totally helpless and very afraid. Elizabeth came over and did reiki on me for the first time, and when she was done I felt relaxed and at peace. She also introduced me to a shaman. Although I was very sceptical, my treatments with him helped me both physically and emotionally. I read books and listened to relaxation and healing tapes. I have many wonderful friends who listened to me, came over to help me look after Beth, cooked meals and put them in my freezer, and did my housework when I was too tired. I had hundreds of friends and perfect strangers pray for me. Through the compassion of my customers I was able to keep my home-based business going on a limited scale and feel that I was more than just a "cancer-patient". I also have a wonderfully supportive husband who let me rant and rave, convinced me that I was strong enough to do anything and loved me through it all.

I think that the Ingeborg Douwes Foundation can save women's lives. I believe that women with breast cancer need the best medical care available to us and all of the emotional support we can get. We need to be able to feel that we have control over our lives and over our bodies, and we need to be given the tools to help us with this. The Ingeborg Douwes Foundation gives women these tools. I am grateful to the AWCA for choosing to support this organization.

Darlene S. is the philanthropy chair of the AWC Amsterdam which has supported psychosocial support for women and families associated with breast cancer. Darlene is a breast cancer survivor, but recently she was diagnosed with a new tumor. She recently participated in the Walk for Women in support of the Netherlands Breast Cancer Foundation as well.