

THE ULTIMATE FACE OFF

Reprinted by permission from the Grand Traverse Womans Magazine Oct 08 issue

I have always had a wicked sense of humor. I get that from my dad. On Sept 18, 2007, when I was told, "It's cancer," I didn't know how my sense of humor and my favorite game, hockey, would get me through perhaps the greatest challenge of my life. Immediately I saw the irony in my breast cancer. I had just participated in the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life a couple of months before and now I was a cancer survivor.

My primary care physician broke the news and, since I had basically just met her, it was dubious at best. I remember she told me and then her voice sounded like the adults in the Peanuts cartoon. After that she made an appointment for me to see a surgeon, Dr. Brown. I immediately pictured Doc Brown from Back to the Future. If he starts talking flux capacitors and screams 1.21 jigawatts I am so out of there, I thought.

Fortunately he is nothing like that. We discussed my options and decided I would get a lumpectomy. "You could get a mastectomy so you can be sure the cancer doesn't go into the other breast" he said. Well I am all for preventative medicine but let's not get carried away. To quote one of my favorite TV shows, Seinfeld: "They are real and they are spectacular." I decided to keep both of them. Dr. Brown did two surgeries, one to remove the lump and one for the port. He told me the surgery would only take about a half hour.

I got to the hospital around 10 a.m. Surgery was scheduled for around noon. I couldn't have anything to eat or to drink after midnight. I was waiting in a private room, watching the video about my port. The time ticked by and soon it was 2 o'clock and I was still waiting. I happened to spy the doc walking by my room and yelled out, "So what did you do, forget about me?" He had some kind of cardiac emergency to take care of and told me I was next in line. He said "You must be pretty hungry, huh?" I was and said, "Yeah you owe me a pizza." He said OK. As I was being wheeled into the OR the surgical nurse said, "OK now the doctor will be right in. He is just ordering your pizza." "Haha," I thought, "Funny joke to play on someone who is just about to be put under." Sure enough when I woke up from surgery a Jet's pizza was waiting for me.

Having cancer is not easy, and telling people is just as difficult. Some people I could tell right away, while others would have to wait. It is exhausting enough just having the disease, let alone rewinding and replaying the story for my friends and family. So how do you tell people? "Hey!! Haven't seen you in a while, how ya doin'? I have cancer. How are the kids?" I never thought I wouldn't be OK, even after I lost weight. People who didn't know that I had cancer said, "Wow, you look great!!" "Yeah," I said. "That cancer is the best diet ever!"

Even after my first chemo treatment made me so dizzy and nauseous for three hours, I still knew I was going to be OK. No wonder I don't drink. Chemo gave me the worst hangover I ever had. Even after I had my stylist shave my head because the chemo was making my hair fall out I had to laugh. My mom wanted a current picture of me and, as it turned out, I got my head shaved on her birthday. Happy Birthday Mom!! My hair is growing back, and she is still waiting for that picture. I really didn't have the side-effects that many people do, with the exception of the first chemo hangover bedspins.

I am convinced that working out to get ready to hit the ice really helped me battle this disease. All this was going on around the beginning of hockey season, something I look forward to. I am the captain of the Petoskey women's hockey team and I always work out my hardest to get ready for that, and, because of my job at WMKT, I was able to go to the Red Wings Training Camp. I was diagnosed on the last day of training camp. The Wings save their best game for the last day. Unfortunately I did not make it to that game. Since I am a huge hockey fan, it really meant something special to me when the Red Wings won the Stanley Cup. The Wings will hoist the Stanley Cup banner on Oct. 9. One year to the day of my lumpectomy surgery. I use hockey as an analogy to fighting cancer. If you are on the ice and someone knocks you down, you don't stay down. You get up and keep skating. That is what I will do. I will keep skating.

Red Wings Training camp photo copyright 2007 by Melinda Majoros taken during the 2007 training camp, that's right, a few days before my diagnosis.