

June 5, 2006, is a day that will always remain in my mind as the day that my life changed forever. I was told that I had breast cancer, which was a shock as I was only 37 and felt fine. I didn't even have a lump.

Ever since I was a young girl, I said I hoped never to have breast cancer. My fear now was reality. It was not long before I was taken down the hall and directed to Hope & Cope at the Jewish General Hospital where I came across some of the most caring, understanding people. I was so blessed to have been given the best doctors, nurses and volunteers.

As my Mom and I looked around, we saw not one or two, but so many people, young, middle aged and older, all facing the same news as I had just been given.

The next few weeks before I was scheduled for surgery, I experienced so many difficult feelings. I couldn't understand why this had happened to me; I was angry at God and didn't understand what I had done to get cancer. I felt I was sinking. I knew that I needed help. I was guided to two wonderful doctors in Oncology and was started on medication. Before long, I was put back on the road of facing this monster, this life changing dread I had been given.

Next came surgery, complications, chemo, and radiation, loss of weight, appetite and hair - difficult days, weeks and months. Seeing so many beside me going through all stages of cancer, at all ages, I then accepted this detour and changes to my body- physically and emotionally. I charged full steam ahead, wanting to get this over and done with. The good and bad days were cushioned by my family and friends. Some friends I had lost because they couldn't understand or face the fact I had cancer.

My surgeon, oncologist, chemo nurses, psychologist and psychiatrist were there for me all through this journey and are still my greatest help. Through Hope & Cope, I was introduced to a mentor, who herself had had breast cancer. We still are good friends today.

The new Wellness Centre has been a big comfort to so many, including myself. I attend lectures, exercise classes, yoga, art and much more. This is a place where everyone has a story, a personal experience. I have gained strength being with other survivors, listening and learning about other people's journeys.

I believe that we are tested in life and given trials that we must sort out and face. We need more wonderful people like those I have met along this road.

From this experience, I have become stronger, wiser, happier and more understanding. It has also brought to me a very special person, the love of my life who also experienced cancer and travelled the same road.

After this journey, my message to others is never to take life for granted, to enjoy each moment and always to count your blessings. Remember that this journey begins with one small step and day by day you get one step closer to the end of your treatments.