
Inspiration & Poetry after a Bilateral Mastectomy

Friday, 22 February 2008

A woman, a poet with a PhD in molecular genetics, has a recurrence of breast cancer and finds out she carries the "breast cancer gene", the BRCA2 mutation, and, after much deliberation, opts for a bilateral mastectomy, plus removal of her ovaries and Fallopian tubes. We don't have the space here to tell the whole story of her amazing, courageous, bumpy ride, but we can publish her wonderful poem and her thank you letter to friends, family and caregivers after her surgery. You can learn more about **Margaret Dubay Mikus** and enjoy her inspiring poetry and photography [here](#).

Dear Family and Dear Friends:

Time to break out the bubbles! Cancer treatment is over and I am healing phenomenally fast and well from the three surgeries. There are times I even forget I had all that done! Amazing! I have full range of motion and no significant pain. (I have not even taken Tylenol since the first week or so.) Almost all sensation has returned. Given the number of nerves that were severed, this is quite rare I believe. I am sleeping well and deeply, taking naps as needed (except when I get too involved in doing things, which is my personal Achilles heel).

Every day I do my part to continue healing: massaging cream (calming essence, self-heal or arnica gel) into the skin and gently stretching the two eight-inch chest scars, which are much thinner and much less taut. I do energy work twice daily, including Reiki, acupressure and healing touch. I continue stress management. With my surgeon's approval, I returned to yoga class a month ago.. at first very warily and gingerly, then adding more poses. The meditation and focus on breathing is particularly helpful.

One fun thing has been to get cotton tank tops in a rainbow of bright colors for undershirts. I am just as glad to get rid of bras, but needed something soft to prevent chafing and to feel feminine. Some are even trimmed with lace.

I am becoming more and more comfortable as I am, not needing to wear scarves

to disguise my flat chest. It's OK. I feel fine with who I am in this skin. We'll see what I feel like in the summer with more exposure. Yes, there have been tears and dark days. I continue working with my therapist and energy healer and massage therapist to support health in my body, mind, emotions and spirit.

Whatever is coming will be easier than before.. Thank you so much for all the prayers, good thoughts, emails, cards, e-cards, flowers, gifts, love, encouragement, support, kindness and generosity. And now we begin again. Below is a recent poem, kind of a summing up, I think.

Love, Margaret

2/19/08

Unexpected Time for Contemplation

Why is it I did what I did
and did not do what I did not do,
what can I tell you?

So much is mystery
even to me.
I can trace my steps

up to a point,
analyze my thinking,
remember what I forgot,

but there are those blank spots
that remain unfilled—
so much isn't rational.

What I felt was real
is barely recorded—
the letters that were saved

from those misty days—
the memories stored in cells,

muscles, bones, scar tissue—

that last a surprise, but true.
Why did I choose one direction
over the others equally brave?

Let us just say
I was guided by something else,
some magnetic force

like the birds navigating
long unlikely distances,
and that I have arrived

at home base
mostly unscathed and
surprisingly cheerful...

considering.

Margaret Dubay Mikus
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