

May, 2009

Volume 9, No. 2

Prescription: Humor

By Pam Lacko.

I was diagnosed with Ovarian Cancer Stage II B in February of 2008. I had a full hysterectomy and six chemotherapy treatments of combined Taxol and Carboplatin over the course of six months. I am in remission and continue to build back my physical strength through diet and exercise. I never lost my mental strength!

A little over a year ago, I never would have dreamed that I would become a victim of Cancer, let alone be sharing the experience with the world. My illness has changed my life and the way I look at things...but surprisingly, not for the worst.

For me, my diagnosis was surreal. I was complaining of "having to go to the bathroom too often." A walk-in clinic diagnosed me with an overactive bladder. So they prescribed the "gotta go right now" pill that you see in commercials and sent me on my way. When that didn't help, I pursued my general medical doctor and eventually went to my gynecologist. After one test she called and said, "You need some attention." With a grandmother who died of Ovarian Cancer at the age of 47, I knew my doctor was serious.

Post-surgery, the oncologist that I had just met came into my room said, "We found cancer." Pretty tough stuff to hear, especially as you lie there in more pain than you experienced during childbirth. Many thoughts went through my mind over the next few days. At first I just cried, but as time went by, I decided that I would face this challenge with humor, one of my most comfortable personality traits. They don't call me Wacko Lacko for nothing.

I wanted everyone to know what had happened to me. My friends, my clients (I run my own business), my neighbors, my close and distant family. So I sent an e-mail with probably more detail than many wanted to know. The get well cards, flowers, fruit baskets, e-mails and dinners started pouring in. By the way, this is the best way to get new recipes for your kitchen and to have all of your meals prepared too.

But I needed a more efficient method of keeping everyone posted on my progress. So I started a blog. I had never created one before. (Ironically, I am a computer consultant!) So with some support from an experienced blogger I created <http://wacko-stories.blogspot.com/>.

When I started writing, the second week out of surgery, I was sharing stories of my hospital stay and the fun that my friends and I had in choosing a wig. Everything seemed funny to me. Don't

get me wrong, there were many scary things that happened, but looking back there was always something there that struck me as funny. From helping the anesthesiologist with his problem laptop before my surgery while in my "Johnny," to joking about my new and free boob job I'll get after my upcoming double mastectomy. The latter story is called "My, Aren't We Perky."

Here is one of my stories:

My Ball and Chain – dedicated to my oncologist

After surgery and time in the recovery room, they moved me to a semi-private room up on the sixth floor. I was a bit out of it but did realize that I had a roommate. Her name was Sue and I swear I must have kept her up that night whining about pain. Anyway, Sue was discharged the next morning so my stay was private from that point on.

I woke up on Friday morning to find that my "Johnny" was all wet in the front. This was odd, as I had a catheter in and I'm pretty sure you can't pee forward as a woman anyway.

I buzzed for the nurse and had her check it out. She thought that my "pain booster" or my incision might be leaking. Great I thought. I didn't even know I had a "pain booster" as the pain was pretty bad.

So they sent in a resident to check it out. A tall blonde named Dr. Sing. (I changed the name to protect the innocent.) She was really nervous and unsure of herself as she poked at my stomach. I was getting a little nervous too. I told her if she wasn't sure what was wrong that she didn't have to touch it. I didn't mind being wet.

She checked with the doctor and came back to say that my "pain booster" might be leaking a bit, but the doctor wanted to keep it in. What was this "pain booster" thing anyway? I couldn't budge my head enough to see what was on my stomach, so I had no idea what they were talking about.

That afternoon they took out the catheter and said I should get up and pee. Yeh, right! Getting up was hard enough, never mind walking over to that bathroom halfway across Connecticut to pee.

With some help I sat up and was immediately drawn back down to the pillow by some unknown force from the bed. The nurse asked, "What's wrong?" I said, "Something is pulling me back down." We looked under the sheets and found this ball about the size of a large Christmas ornament with a tube leading under my Johnny. "Oh, this must be the pain booster," said my presumably knowledgeable nurse. "I've never actually seen one of these before," she said.

Great, I thought. Dr. Sing is unsure and nervous, and my knowledgeable nurse just found out what a "pain booster" looks like. I'm in good hands here!

So, I figured out that in order for me to move anywhere, my ornament must come with me. When I picked it up I realized it weighed about 2-3 pounds, which felt like 10 to me at the time.

So with my right hand on my moving IV cart, also known as "Rolling Dorothy," and my ball in my left hand, my nurse escorted me to the bathroom miles away with my backside showing to the 6th floor as I traveled.

When I got to the throne, I again realized something troubling. The amount of tubing from the ball was only about 8 inches. This wasn't nearly enough line to set the ball on the floor while peeing. So what's a girl to do?

Day two I got smarter. While I'm sitting there holding my ball and chain, I saw a paper bag hanging from the wall next to the toilet. It was a small bag, but I thought it was big enough to hold my ball. But was it strong enough? I couldn't quite reach the bag though, so I tossed my ball in, risking my life because if the ball made the bag fall to the ground, I would be pulled off the toilet and fall along with the ball. The bag held tight. I called my nurse in and told her I found a ball holder. She immediately reinforced the bag by putting more tape on the wall and patted me on the back for being so creative. I was feeling pretty proud of myself at that point.

With the initial stage in my road to recovery completed, I knew that there was much more to come. And with that, more stories. Each new event along the way provided the substance for another entry in my blog. As I moved into the chemotherapy stage, the following story emerged. I call it "The top 10 Benefits of Having Ovarian Cancer" (written David Letterman style).

10. Being able to blame the loss of a golf match on having the big "C."
9. Winning a golf match because of a blood infusion the prior day.
8. Spending hundreds of dollars on full body massages without any complaints from your husband.
7. Time saved each morning with:
 - No blow drying
 - No shaving
 - No eyebrow plucking
6. Getting homemade meals after each hospital stay – sometimes I even lied about being hospitalized just to get another free lasagna.
5. Chemotherapy is a natural bug repellent.
4. Saving hundreds of dollars on hair products and bikini waxes.
3. It's the only time I've been able to wear a baseball cap – they never looked good on me before.
2. Being able to shock my hairdresser's clients by waiting for their busiest day, walking in, taking my hat off and saying "Look what you did to my hair!"

And the #1 benefit of having Ovarian Cancer is:

1. Being selected as this year's Chia Pet holiday season promotion.

Some of these benefits only last while going through chemotherapy, but there is one that I have used recently and can use for the rest of my life. I call it "Playing the C card." When you look at where your time is being spent, are you happy with everything you're involved with. If you are in a book club, or an organization that you dread going to, play the C card. It goes something like this, "After everything I've been through, I'm looking at where I spend my precious time and for

now I need to resign from this group and focus on my health and family.” Pretty good, huh? No one, I mean no one, will give you any flack for that excuse. I’m very lucky to have that card.

Cancer to me has been a blip in my road of life, not an obstacle I cannot overcome. I have met wonderful caregivers, I have learned who my friends really are, I have met and hopefully helped fellow cancer patients, and I have gotten closer to my family. Additionally, I have learned so much about veins, medications, side effects, and other medical facts that next year I’m thinking about taking my medical boards.

While medications and treatments continue to heal my body, humor continues to heal my mind. Going through something like this doesn’t have to be depressing for you or your friends and family. If you can find the slightest bit of humor in any of your experiences and share that with people around you, they too will be uplifted and positive. And remember they are your best support system.

Contact:

Pam Lacko

<http://wacko-stories.blogspot.com>



TERMS OF USE

The International Journal of Healing and Caring On Line is distributed electronically. You may choose to print your downloaded copy for relaxed reading.

We encourage you to share this article with friends and colleagues.

The International Journal of Healing and Caring – On Line

P.O. Box 76, Bellmawr, NJ 08099

Phone (609) 714-1885 (519) 265-0746

Email: center@ijhc.org Website: <http://www.ijhc.org>

Copyright © 2009 IJHC. All rights reserved.

DISCLAIMER: <http://www.wholistichealingresearch.com/disclaimer.html>