



Laura Gano
Breast Cancer

In 1997, I was in a serious car accident that severely damaged the left side of my body. As a consequence, I was left with my legs, ankles, and feet held together by titanium screws, and plates and nodules in my left arm and breast.

Flash forward to late 2008...I'd been experiencing intermittent pain in my left breast and the nodule in that breast was growing larger. By Thanksgiving, I was unnerved enough to mention these symptoms to my mother who urged me to have a mammogram. I told her I had a routine appointment scheduled with my doctor for early December, and if the symptoms persisted, I would discuss them with my doctor at that time. I went to the doctor as scheduled in early December and she ordered a mammogram. During the mammogram, the technician advised that the radiologist wanted to perform an ultrasound examination. I said I would make arrangements to come back for that, but the technician informed me that the radiologist wanted to do the test immediately. As the ultrasound examination progressed, the radiologist entered the room to observe the testing procedure and then changed my life with the words that nobody wants to hear—"that looks like cancer to me." The presence of cancer was confirmed by biopsy one week later.

Naturally, I was frightened – but more frightened of how the treatment regimen would affect my ability to maintain my status as a full-time student and finish up my degree than of dying from cancer. And, of course I was frightened by the recommended treatments: chemotherapy, surgery, and radiation.

I never believed having cancer would kill me, but I knew I was going to spend the better part of the next year doing what I could to defeat the disease and it wasn't likely to be pleasant. I am certain this pragmatic attitude can be directly attributed to my parents who are sensible, matter-of-fact, courageous people who provided absolute, unwavering, unquestionable support during my year of cancer treatment. Thanks to their encouragement and help and to the excellent care I received from my treatment team, my experience with cancer was more "this is a terrible inconvenience" than anything else. The oncology nurses at the Morgan Hospital Cancer Care Center were truly exceptional at providing care—physical and emotional—and at cheering me on and keeping me going when I was disheartened.

My take-away from the cancer experience is that with love and support and a talented, caring treatment team, cancer can have a minimal impact upon a patient's life—if that is what the patient chooses. Cancer patients, survivors, and the general public would do well to realize that cancer is a chronic disease like asthma or diabetes, which can be managed with vigilance and by making ongoing positive life and health choices. As we learn more of the etiology of cancer and as pharmacological interventions improve, cancer is no longer the death sentence that it was in the past; patients and survivors are well advised to invest in hope.