

Giving thanks and paying it forward

by Beverly Denver

Some time ago I followed the suggestion of an author I admire and started keeping a gratitude journal. In it I would list – on a daily basis — all the things for which I was grateful: my family, friends, work, opportunities to travel and play, blue skies and sunshine, air-conditioning, a good laugh, loose jeans, things going as planned, delightful surprises and, of course, my good health!

For years “my good health” was scribbled hurriedly at the bottom of each page— added almost as an afterthought. My good health, you see, was something I really didn’t think much about. It was, sadly, something I took for granted.

All that changed earlier this year when I was diagnosed with Stage One Breast Cancer.

There was no history of cancer in my family, so the diagnosis shocked me. Truly, I never thought much about cancer, never thought getting it would happen to me! That probably explains why at 50+ years old, I had never had a mammogram! Yes, I knew full well the importance of early detection, yet I danced through life in a state of dimwitted denial — a state that could have been deadly.

Thankfully, my cancer was caught early. It had not spread. Today, the cancer is gone, and I am OK. I am a breast cancer survivor! No doubt about it, I got lucky.

Battling breast cancer changed my life in more ways than even I could imagine. My priorities have changed dramatically. My dreams and passions are no longer being postponed. My sense of responsibility (to other women) has been heightened. No longer is “my good health” a given. Instead, it is something I appreciate more than ever. Daily, I am giving thanks. At every opportunity, I am trying to pay it forward.

I’m open about what I’ve been through and what I’ve learned. I explain often how differently things might have worked out had I not found that lymph when I did. I’ve become somewhat of a crusader. I wear a pink rubber bracelet on my right wrist and support groups raising funds to find the cure. I use my experience (and the pages of this magazine) to encourage other women to make sure they are doing all they can to protect themselves. Most importantly, I say pleadingly, “Go get your yearly mammogram!”

Thankfully, many others are doing the same thing, including the three women featured in this month’s issue. The lives of all three have been impacted by breast cancer, and all three are using their experiences to increase awareness about breast cancer and to help save lives!

Patti Barnett, our cover girl, lost her mother and grandmother to breast cancer. Today, Patti, a quality-home builder, is using her skills to honor the memory of those special women in her life. As the builder of the 2006 Pink Ribbon House, Patti is working hard to raise funds to help find a cure for breast cancer. Her story appears on page 7.

Fran Padgett, a breast cancer survivor, tells about the loss of her body, as she knew it, and the reclaiming of her passion for life. Padgett, a talented artist, produced a series of paintings about her experience and then penned *No One Writes A Manual* in hopes of helping others battling cancer. She also created the Weathervane Foundation to help raise funds for cancer research. Read about Fran and her work on page 13.

Playwright Lane Devereaux lost a close personal friend to breast cancer several years ago. Before and during the darkest days, Lane kept a daily journal, pouring out her thoughts and feelings about breast cancer, her friend and their friendship. The journal became the basis of a stage production. That play, *Like Fish Swimming Through Rock*, was performed here in Houston in October. Read all about Lane and her play on page 21.

I've always believed that things happen for a reason! Some are wake-up calls that teach us important lessons; some are opportunities to help others. For many, coming face to face with breast cancer is both!

And, because of that, precious lives are being saved!

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