

We all have been touched by cancer. This witty inspirational book gives life lessons on how to get through the cancer experience from the perspective of a cancer survivor. Lessons included are for the patient and the friend offering assistance.

Lessons From A Bald Chick

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**LESSONS FROM A BALD
CHICK**

Mary Beth Hall

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Normalcy is Overrated

I am a 46-year-old wife, mom, guidance counselor, and Christian; not necessarily in that order. So far, I have been in education 22 years as an elementary teacher, middle school teacher, writing teacher, special education teacher, reading specialist, university instructor, and counselor. I have an undergraduate degree in special education and regular education, a master's degree in administration, a master's degree in counseling, and certification for school principal. All of these degrees mean one thing only; I am flat broke.

I am not normal.

When my kids burp at the dinner table I rate them on a scale of one to ten and loudly chastise them if they score anything below five. I've threatened them on occasion for anything below a three. I try to keep other bodily noises to a minimum (at least at the dinner table), so I think I get points for that. I've taught my sons since they were old enough to kick a ball that it doesn't matter if you win or lose, what matters is how your hair looks while you are playing. I tell them every winter in all sincerity not to eat yellow snow. I am convinced when their friends come over they come to play with me and seeing my boys is just an added benefit. I like to serve meals as if I am the waitress and when I put the plate in front of each person I love to say with life or death severity, "Now, this plate is very hot. Be veeeerrrrry

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careful”. Sometimes I serve meals of only one color. I love pajama parties. I believe pumpkin pie is a breakfast food. Tipping the whipped cream canister completely upside down and squirting as much as possible into each other’s mouths and dousing the floor, cabinets, refrigerator, and sometimes ceiling is huge fun in my world. My boys get in big trouble when their father walks in the kitchen and sees the mess. They innocently point their fingers at me because yes, I started it. I am not right. I admit that.

I am married to a prince. When he reprimands the boys for slurping loudly from their cereal bowls and they protest I taught them cereal tastes better this way, he doesn’t chastise me (in front of them). When the boys and I have pajama parties and the son in the top bunk sits up in his sleep and gets whacked in the head by the ceiling fan, resulting in a blood bath and an emergency room visit at 4:00 a.m. and double-digit stitches, my prince just shakes his head, mumbles to himself about not understanding why we can’t sleep in our own beds like normal people, and starts spending excessive amounts of time by himself in the garage sitting in his boat. At these times I try scaling back on my behaviors to get him out of his boat, but so far I’m not having much luck. I saw him moving his shaving gear and pillow in there the other day.

My husband treats me like a queen. On the next April Fool’s Day we will be married 20 years. I am acutely aware I do not deserve this man. He is a gift straight from the hands of God. Why God was mad at him

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and sacked him with me I will never know. All I can do is keep thanking God for him and pray this man never learns what I am really like.

Curtis and I are complete opposites but we are both in love with the same person; me. Oh yeah, and God. We started our marriage on our wedding night praying together in our hotel room. I told him once if either of us ever stopped reading our Bibles we were doomed. He responded with a look that summed it up in one word: "Duh!" Our focus on God is what keeps us on track and steady through the years. This involves knowing God through having a relationship with Him. I've known God since I was 25 years old, and I have learned He is a God who keeps His promises. I've learned He has many facets to His personality, and I plan to spend the rest of my life learning about them. One of my favorites is His great sense of humor.

I met my husband by teaching next door to him. I thought Curtis was the nicest guy I had ever met. As we got to know one another and share about our daily lives it became apparent I did not approve of the girls he dated. In my opinion, these ditzy girls didn't deserve such a man of deep quality. Although he didn't ask for it, I told Curtis my opinion often. I'm surprised the guy ever spoke to me at all during that school year.

Since I had such strong opinions about this nice guy, I began praying for him. In my deluded mind I believed a nice and kind man deserved a sweet and gentle woman. I asked God to send Curtis the sweetest, most

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gentle, quiet, and meek woman He ever created. I kept telling God Curtis deserved this type of person in his life. I begged God on Curtis' behalf during my morning commutes to work. I specifically asked for this woman to be madly in love with Curtis and treat him the special way he deserved. This went on for many months.

When Curtis and I dated and later married, I laughed at what God had done. Yes, He gave Curtis a woman who loved him, but sweet, kind, meek, and gentle have never been adjectives attached to me. Curtis got a mouthy, opinionated, strong-willed, determined, immature, impulsive bride. Poor guy! All those mornings praying for Curtis's wife probably had God laughing because He knew who He had in mind for Curtis, and it sure wasn't the Southern belle I was asking for. Yes, God has a sense of humor. A bit warped, in my opinion, but still a good one.

Our courtship lasted one year. I became a Christian three years before I met Curtis and after spending seven years in a relationship that was a big fat waste of time I asked God to pick out my husband for me. I gave God my standard list of qualifications and asked Him to get back to me when He was ready to fill my prescription. I asked Him if it wasn't too big of an inconvenience could he sort of hurry up because I didn't feel like waiting long. I completely trusted God to take care of this for me.

Curtis and I started dating completely without my knowledge. We had a spaghetti dinner fundraiser at

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school and Curtis and I were delegated to purchase the paper products one Saturday. He picked me up at my apartment and we went shopping and then to lunch. I didn't know until much later that Curtis considered that our first date. I don't know what he considered the date I had with someone else later that night.

I have spent the last 19 years realizing anew what a gift from God this man is. God not only filled my order completely, but He went above and beyond what I had asked for and gave me a man with qualities that I didn't even know I needed or wanted in a mate. That is so like God; to not only fill the cup, but make it run over. I am so glad I had the good sense to ask God to pick out my husband and then even better sense to wait until He did.

Stubborn Ox

This husband I got from God is a frustrating, irritating, and stubborn ox. When the yearly form letter came reminding me to have my mammogram Curtis immediately demanded to know when I was going to have it done. I told him I would call for the appointment soon. He proceeded to harass, annoy, and badger me until I knew the only way to shut the guy up was to make the appointment.

Like a good girl I had my yearly mammogram on spring break. As an educator, I usually have my mammograms during the summer when I have more leisure time and my days are full of huge decisions such as which side to turn onto while on the hammock, but I was mad at God last summer because I was not getting the job I wanted. Being the spiritually mature person that I am I was too busy trying to force God's hand (a COMPLETE waste of time, do not try it) that I put off my mammogram until I had another stretch of free time, which was spring break.

Before spring break I noticed I was unusually tired and not rested after naps. I have a black belt in napping, so for my naps to backfire on me and leave me drained caused me to think two things. One, that I was pregnant, which would result in big fat YIPPEES from me and a not so big fat yippee from Curtis who informed me years before when I thought I wanted to have another baby that

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I was too old. This resulted in my extremely quick-witted (so quick it was almost genius. Sometimes I amaze myself) comment that my boyfriend didn't think so. Hilarious, if you ask me. Immature, if you ask Curtis.

The other scenario I envisioned for my fatigue was that I was dying from a terrible disease. This is exactly what I told Curtis and others who were getting suspicious and asking questions about my lethargy. My co-worker started getting suspicious one day when I was at my computer for an awfully long time without typing or clicking the mouse. My back was to her and she thought I was reading an extremely long message. It turned out I was sound asleep in the middle of the day sitting upright at my computer. I think I started getting suspicious then, too. Usually when I sleep at work I curl up under my desk where nobody can find me. Sleeping out in the open like that was crossing even my boundary lines and was, well, embarrassing.

Anyway, those were my two scenarios. I was hoping for the former because I adore every single thing about babies and motherhood (except potty training, which really should have been taken care of by God before He sent me the smelly little angels) and the latter, which although I was saying I was dying from a terrible disease I didn't really believe it. That happened to other people. This left me with just being tired.

So, I was tired. I would get over it. It was my blood thinning out for the upcoming summer. In winter I always used the excuse for a nap on the completely

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scientific fact made up by me that my blood was thickening for the cold months ahead. Never mind that during this time every show I watched seemed to have a cancer victim, every book I picked up had a cancer topic, and every conversation somehow included cancer. I could not get away from cancer. I started having that “Uh Oh Feeling” inside that God was trying to get my attention on something that I was not interested in having my attention gotten on, so like the mature and deeply spiritual person that I am, I ignored it all as best I could.

When the woman who performed my mammogram, whom I like to secretly call the Very-Evil-Person-Who-Squashed-Me-Flatter-Than-God-Never-Intended (okay, maybe I don't secretly call her that, maybe I actually screamed that at her while cradling my limp flattened self) came back in the mammogram room and said in her very evil voice,

“Ha ha ha, now we've got you, don't think you can run from us, Sucker!”

Or maybe she said,

“We need to take a few more pictures, you weren't quite on there all the way,” the “Uh Oh Feeling” returned in full force, accompanied by its good friend, the “Oh No Feeling”. I told myself to stop being silly. Tons of women have to stay and have more fun having another mammogram. It happens all the time. It means absolutely nothing. The fact that God kept reminding me He was there and would never leave me meant nothing.....really. I

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happily went home to reinflate myself and play very hard on spring break, which consisted of painting a different room every day in our house (I know, I'm a party animal) and ignore the fact that I am a horrible painter and create bigger messes that take more time to clean up than to actually paint the entire room.

LESSON: Denial works..... sort of.

Thursdays Cannot Be Trusted

My mammogram was on Thursday. I painted my son's bedroom the following Monday. I'm a really quick painter so it took me only nine hours. I took a lunch break and watched ten minutes of television during which the movie I landed on had a breast cancer victim and the two commercials I saw in my haste to change the channel were about cancer medications. Enough TV, time to get back to destroying my son's room.

Sweetie came home from work, (he is a big important superintendant of a school system) and promptly declared that I made the usual big fat mess of the room, and why didn't I at least take off the light switch covers instead of trying to paint around them? I followed him around the house, pouting, sighing loudly, and dragging my knuckles on the ground in defeat until he finally assured me that the room was fine and he was glad he does not go in there often. My feelings pacified, I then went about welcoming home from school my two reasons for existing; Alex, age 15 and Benjamin, age 13, and then happily proceeded to burn dinner.

The next day I could not hold my head up and spent the day on the couch reading. I was worn out from all of that painting and really, thinking I would paint a whole room a day was probably biting off more than I could chew and I should change my goal to painting a room, which I already did, which meant I could spend the

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rest of the week on the couch reading because my blood was still scientifically thinning, which is precisely what I did.

The phone rang and I saw on caller ID it was the hospital. I somehow knew before they even said it that I was being cordially invited back for more fun and games with the mammogram machine. This time they were going to add an ultrasound to the party and to come in three days. When the phone rang again and it was my doctor's office making sure I got the call from the hospital, I assured myself this was efficient medicine at its best and thanked them for calling.

When the phone rang a third time and it was the mammogram center making sure I got the call to come back I started thinking of filing harassment charges. What was the big deal? Tons of women get called back daily, the lady on the phone said so and even added that statistically eight out of ten call backs (where am I Hollywood? Not as much fun as I envisioned) were perfectly fine. So there! I was going to be the eight out of ten. God whispering to me, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" was just His way of saying hi.

Being the good girl that I am, plus my stubborn husband threatening me, I went back to the very nice and homey and warm and comforting mammogram center at the hospital. I was actually on time to show everyone that I was not frightened; I was eight out of ten. I even entertained the idea of doing a bit of shopping afterward since I was a woman of leisure on spring break. It didn't

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matter that I entertain the idea of shopping on a daily basis. The crucial part was I knew I would have the appropriate mind set and attitude for shopping after the mammogram party.

It turned out I did not have the appropriate mind set for shopping. I had the mind set of needing someone to get me off the cliff I was mentally hurtling myself off of. I realized too late that I needed Husband, whom I ignorantly previously assured did not need to go with me.

The important medical people performed the mammogram and the ultrasound, and the nice doctor lady came in and told me they found something that needed a biopsy (YIKES!) and blah, blah, blah..... I heard nothing the nice doctor lady was saying after that.

Lesson: Do not go to your second mammogram alone, ever.

I suppose this is the time to share my mom died of breast cancer at the age of 67 when I was too young to be without a mother, which, in my opinion is any age. I happened to be 36 years old at the time. I remembered her biopsy experience as very traumatic for her, and so I immediately retreated to my Happy Place in my mind which consisted of considering what to burn for dinner and wondering what time my Darlings would be home from school.

I then thanked everyone for the lovely party and insisted I really must go and proceeded to drive to my husband's school where I hoped he could put it all into

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perfect perspective for me, or at the bare minimum take over some of the hysteria for me. Somewhere amidst all of the fun they gave me an appointment card with the biopsy date.

This time I invited Hubby to the festivities. The nurses, doctors, and radiologist who performed the procedure were calm and orderly. I was an emotional wreck. I knew. I knew the radiologist knew. I was sure the doctor knew. The only thing the nurse knew was if they didn't hurry up and finish she would qualify for disability because I was crushing her hand. When it was over I crashed blindly through the hallways crying and blubbering and heaving myself at Hubby who I hoped would get me the heck out of there. As I threw myself out the main door I heard the receptionist call out, "Have a nice day!" Absolutely nothing made sense in this world anymore.

My sweetie and I sat in the car until I was finished secreting nasal mucous all over his suit and tie and then he promptly did the one thing on earth that makes everything better. He offered to take me out for breakfast.

LESSON: Do not go to these things alone. Someone is sure to buy you a meal.

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