

If you know or love someone who has cancer, give these inspiring stories of hope and heartfelt triumph from those who have Beat Cancer, real cancer survivors.

**Beating Cancer: Stories of People Who Are Surviving and Thriving**

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**BEATING CANCER: Stories of people  
who are surviving and thriving**

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## CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>BLADDER CANCER.....</b>	<b>7</b>
CANCER? ME? .....	9
<b>BONE CANCER .....</b>	<b>13</b>
DEDICATED TO AUNT ELAINE .....	15
<b>BREAST CANCER.....</b>	<b>19</b>
THOSE “THREE LITTLE WORDS” .....	21
FROM ATLANTIC TO PACIFIC .....	25
I’M STILL STANDING.....	31
A SIDE-TRIP .....	37
THE MIRACLE OF SMALL GIFTS .....	39
VICTORIOUS OVER CANCER.....	43
A JOY TO BE CURED! .....	47
JUST ASK.....	49
THE JOURNAL OF BLUE SKIES .....	52
<b>COLON CANCER.....</b>	<b>57</b>
CANCER, A REAL ROLLERCOASTER .....	59
A RELATIONSHIP, NOT RELIGION.....	61
<b>MULTIPLE CANCERS .....</b>	<b>65</b>
DANDELION THROUGH CEMENT.....	67

*REBECCA JACOBY, EDITOR*

<b>NECK AND THROAT CANCER.....</b>	<b>71</b>
God's MYSTERIOUS WAYS .....	73
<b>OVARIAN CANCER.....</b>	<b>77</b>
TURNING THE TABLES.....	79
TOTAL CONTROL .....	81
ADOPTING KAYLA.....	85
<b>STOMACH CANCER.....</b>	<b>89</b>
10 YEARS LATER AND STILL GOING STRONG .....	91
KAYE'S CANCER HOTLINE.....	93
<b>THYROID CANCER .....</b>	<b>97</b>
FINDING MY WAY .....	99
<b>UNDISCLOSED CANCERS .....</b>	<b>103</b>
LEADING IN LOVE, LEAVING WITH GRACE .....	105
A WIFE'S GRATITUDE FOR SAVING GRACES.....	107
<b>VAGINAL CANCER.....</b>	<b>111</b>
PASSION ON THE MOVE.....	113
<b>ABOUT SERVANT HEART PROJECT PUBLISHING .....</b>	<b>119</b>

## The Journal of Blue Skies

By Ozella Rohrer

*Listening is such a simple act. It requires us to be present, and that takes practice, but we don't have to do anything else. We don't have to advise, or coach, or sound wise. We just have to be willing to sit there and listen.*

*- Margaret J. Wheatley*

When I was diagnosed with cancer, my mom gave me a lovely journal in which to write. It had that wonderful new-paper-first-day-of-school smell that I loved so much. The pages inside were lined and smooth just waiting for me to write the first word. Using a journal would be a good way to tell my story, to chronicle my experiences with surgeries, chemo, radiation, loss of hair: the good, the bad and the ugly. But I just never seemed able to put pen to paper.

How could I possibly describe my feelings about having breast cancer or the fear I felt for my children's future? What words could I write that would say how much I wanted to live?

I didn't write down any of these things. The journal lay on my bedside table but I had nothing to say. One day, I thought, I would fill that book from cover to cover, but not yet.

Instead, I focused on healing. When I was too sick from the chemo even to sit up in bed, I concentrated on breathing. Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale. I listened to my heartbeat and vowed to live to see my children grow

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up to be good, happy, successful people. I got through it one minute at a time, then one hour at a time, and eventually, one day at a time.

A few days after each treatment, I would start to feel better and found that the only thing I wanted to do was to get back to my “real life.” I folded laundry, helped my kids with their homework and went to the grocery store. It was a blessing to be able to be me again.

I was very lucky to have the support of my family and friends. I worked at a business that provided health insurance and allowed me to alter my work hours throughout the entire year of treatment. Some days all I could do was put my head down on my desk. My boss would bring me milkshakes when I didn't feel like eating. Co-workers told me jokes and offered words of encouragement.

I liked to joke that the best thing about getting breast cancer was not having to shave my legs for six months; or, was it all the money I saved on shampoo and conditioner? There was always something to laugh about.

There was the time my wig flew off my head in an unexpected gust of wind while I pumped gas at the filling station. And the time I was in a hurry putting on my eyebrow makeup and accidentally ended up with one brow higher than the other, giving me a quizzical expression on my face all day long.

I could not allow myself to wallow in self pity. That would be far too exhausting. Instead, I found something to be grateful for every day. I began making mental lists of things that were good in my life during that time. Some days, the only thing I could think of was that the sky was a particularly beautiful shade of blue, but there was always something to be glad about.

Chemotherapy treatments usually meant a glorious two- or three-hour nap while the chemo drugs waged war on my cancer cells. No one said anything, but judging by the smiles on the nurse's faces, I'm pretty sure I snored a lot during those naps.

There were a lot of good things that happened during that year. While I was not well enough to drive my daughter, Hayley, to ballet classes and rehearsals for her very first part in *The Nutcracker*, I was able to help her put on her makeup for opening night. My sisters, brother and dad went to the performance on my behalf and came back to tell me all about it. It meant so much to me to have my family there and to hear them tell me about the show.

My youngest child, Charlie, was six years old at the time. Even on gorgeous sunny days, he chose to lie across my bed and watch old cowboy movies with me. Always a funny, upbeat kid, he would make me laugh by pretending that my bald head was a crystal ball. He would rub my head and use his best, most mysterious fortune teller's voice to set the mood. He always saw hair in my future.

Chelsea was just starting middle school and needed me more than ever. It was a blessing that I was now able to sit still and listen to her without any other distractions. She didn't need me to solve her problems anymore. She just wanted to talk it out. What a wise new skill I had developed...listening.

It seems odd to say that getting breast cancer had a positive effect on my life, but indeed it had. No, I didn't become a saint...patient and kind to all mankind? I'll leave that to others. Instead, I learned to talk less and listen more.



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There have been so many occasions when people have confided in me about their own cancer or told me of their mother, sister, aunt or friend who was recently diagnosed with breast cancer. Many of them didn't even know that I was a cancer survivor. We just seemed to be drawn to each other.

I have been able to offer the gifts of reassurance and sympathy: a tissue to dry tear-filled eyes, a prayer for strength, a hug that says I know exactly what you are going through.

It's been seven years since I got the call from my doctor telling me that he was very sorry, but I had breast cancer. The journal is still blank, but there are pages and pages in my mind. Time has flown by and some days there just are not enough hours to get it all done, but I never forget to think of all the things I am grateful for...a loving family, soft sheets or blue skies. Especially blue skies. **SHP**

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