

Two women share stories of breast cancer, find strength

by **Stephanie Tatum and Lucille Anne Newman**

Paraglide

It's not easy to sit on the cold examination table and to hear the words "You have breast cancer." Those words can cut deeper than a knife.

"I was diagnosed in August 2004," said Tina Patterson. "I was shocked and then I was worried because I just had a baby and didn't know if this would affect my newborn. I had to stop breastfeeding immediately because I required an immediate mastectomy."

For some it is a matter of choice, for others sharing their diagnosis helps strengthen support.

"I didn't hide it. I told my family, my husband and our friend as soon as I was diagnosed," said Patterson. She then continued to explain the effect it had on her family. "(Normally) I'm an independent woman. (After going) through all the tests, biopsy, removal of the lump (tumor) and then a mastectomy. (I had to) rest from all the procedures, not being able to take care of my kids and having to rely on other people.

"The biggest effect was on my husband who had to become Mr. Mom for quite awhile after the surgeries and during the chemo and radiation treatments, she said. It was a big adjustment for him to have to suddenly clean the house, do the laundry, cook and take care of two little girls."

During and after the treatments she began feeling the side effects - hair loss, sickness, extreme fatigue and migraine headaches on top of a surgery that caused loss of mobility in her left arm and shoulder - which made taking care of a three-month-old baby and a very energetic two-year-old difficult.

"(I was no longer) able to go to

the gym, pick up my little girls, take care of the family in the way that I wanted to," she said. "As I recovered (and tried to) get back into my old routine, it was hard. After the surgeries I found it difficult to lift things, work out, etc. and chemo (therapy) was the hardest. I was so sick I did not have the energy to do anything during the four months. I started getting the energy back until about half way through radiation then the fatigue came back ... it took several months to recover from that."

But luckily, having a supportive husband and talking with other women who have gone through the same treatments or who are currently fighting the cancer as well made all the difference in her road towards recovery.

"Now that I have completed the treatments and reconstruction, I'm getting back to normal, except for the occasional emotional roller coaster and crying," Patterson said. "My husband said I'm a lot more easy-going, I don't worry about little things as much, I concentrate on getting better and taking care of my children. (But during the treatments) we talked, shared experiences, and talked about family and friends ... that time with them I think helped all of us get through

it, and pass the time of the lengthy treatments."

But not all families experience a successful recovery or a happy ending.

"In 1979, I was in jump school at Fort Benning, Ga., my family lived in Maine at the time," said Donna Tabor, XVIII Airborne Corps Historian whose parents tried to keep the diagnoses of breast cancer a secret from her until after the initial surgery.

"My mother, Beverly Barr, 45 years old, went in for a biopsy and was told if they found cancer she would have a mastectomy before she woke up. I was making my first airborne jump and my sister was having a baby in California the day she had the surgery. My mother didn't want to worry us until she knew for sure she had breast cancer."

After the surgery Barr returned one year later to have the second breast removed and had to go through reconstructive surgery, which became hard to deal with.

"My mother worked in the cosmetic industry before she retired (and) always prided herself on her hair and make-up being just right. It was so hard for her to lose her hair and wear a wig. I remember her telling me it was hard for her at night when she

would take off her wig and her bra with the prosthetic breasts and put everything into her dresser," Tabor said. "She even said if she had to have dentures she would have lost it."

Tabor said breast cancer isn't a stranger to her family, having a maternal grandmother whose sister died from breast cancer years before her mother was diagnosed. But luckily her mother was very open about the situation and the family didn't feel they had to watch what they said to spare her feelings.

"It was scary but she was upfront with information and talked about everything openly," Tabor said. "My mother made all of us promise to get yearly mammograms. I had my first (mammogram) when I was 23 years old. It made us more aware of the research going on and because of the nature of the disease, you think more about when you will get it (instead of if you get it.) My sisters and I also have daughters, and we worry about them too."

After the treatments, Tabor said her mother became a survivor. Tabor attributes her mother's survival to her secret weapon — personality.

"She was always fun loving and smiled, and laughed way more than anyone I ever knew. She was positive and upbeat," she said and added that her mother eventually became a counselor for other breast cancer survivors. "She told them to 'be positive, you'll live longer.' A couple years later my mother and father moved down to Fayetteville where I lived and I was able to see her almost every day for the next 20 years."

Tabor said while in Fayetteville her mother took up folk art, went walking everyday, joined a local church and became an obsessed golfer and

could often be found on Fort Bragg's golf courses playing with other ladies when she was not helping Tabor care for her three children.

But then things turned for the worse in 1998.

"She had bone scans and check ups every year and had always been free of cancer," Tabor added. "Then around 1998 she started coughing and (having) problems breathing. For several months she was told it was one thing or another, then they discovered she had fluid in her lungs and the cancer was back. Around October 1999, she wasn't feeling that good but was still getting around fine."

Tabor said it was after a Christmas party with the ladies golf association her mother fell and was in pain. After two weeks spent in bed, her father decided to drive her mother to the hospital on Christmas morning after a bad night of problems.

"I went down to their house and helped her into the car, kissed her and told her I loved her. Then I went back to my house and told my husband, but didn't say anything to our children until after they opened their presents," Tabor said. "(That's when) my father called and said my mother died in the car while they were still in the hospital parking lot and we needed to come to the hospital."

She said while they were on their way the doctors were able to revive her temporarily and kept her on life support until we were able to say goodbye. "... then they turned off the life support," Tabor said. "After my mother's funeral, my sisters both went back home and to their doctors. Both of my sisters found out they also had breast cancer and have been treated."



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