



BREAST CANCER? LET ME CHECK MY SCHEDULE!

Last month, I was dismayed to hear from an old friend that her significant other and law partner had been diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. As he lay there, unable to speak and paralyzed on his right side, I can only imagine what he must have felt – about his loved ones, his law practice, and the fact that he never got around to making a will. Obviously, cancer was not on his schedule.

Cancer and other life-threatening illnesses happen to hundreds of thousands of people each year, including 182,000 new breast cancer cases per year. This article is to let you know about a book – *Breast Cancer? Let Me Check My Schedule!* – on how professional, “take charge” people act in the face of a cancer diagnosis.

The book, edited by Erma Bombeck, focuses on professional women with breast cancer. However, the information applies to professionals in general and to other diagnoses as well.

The authors found that professionals have a unique decision-making process, a unique way of accepting their diagnosis, and a different approach to therapy and to living with cancer. According to the book, professionals often exhibit:

- a desire to play an active role in any decision made about their treatment and care;
- an insistence that they be treated by health professionals as intelligent, capable partners in the decision-making process;
- a constant curiosity about and a need to research and understand every aspect of their breast cancer and care – often challenging their health-care teams with suggestions for new, experimental approaches to therapy; and
- a desire and need to use their personal

experience with breast cancer to help other women who, by force of circumstance, follow this same route.

In living with cancer, professionals reexamine their commitment to their careers, the nature of their work, the level of stress in their lives, their sense of responsibility to others, and the value of time and money. The experience of cancer can give a person a stronger sense of who he or she is, what the person can accomplish, how to live life and a need to take better care of oneself. Cancer can also produce a deepening of personal relationships and a shifting of priorities – placing a higher value on enjoyment and pleasure in our day-to-day lives.

As a recent breast cancer survivor, I have experienced all of these things. In addition, I learned an important lesson in letting go of the outcome and engaging in the process of healing. For me, each day is a new opportunity to work on my health and well-being, as well as what I want to accomplish in my life.

Breast Cancer? Let Me Check My Schedule! was one of the first books I read as I sorted through my own treatment decisions. It provided me with useful information and the encouragement I needed as I took charge of my health and healing.

Kathy Foldes

Editor's Note: If you are interested in a cancer survivor support group, call Mike Long at 503-226-1057 or 1-800-321-OAAP.