Hope Becomes Contagious

I promised myself I would quit the slushy stuff, as my husband calls it, and move onto more practical issues. However, something happened yesterday that was tremendously exciting and inspiring. So hold in there, practical advice is coming, but I just had to get this off my chest.

I recently gave the after dinner talk at the Relay for Life Survivor's Dinner and spoke about my own cancer story, something I've not really talked about here. So I told my story, and my philosophy of living every day to its fullest. I had lots of wonderful feedback on the night, but yesterday, out of the blue, I got an email from a stranger who was there that night. They told me their story and how, up until that night, they hadn't really accepted the fact that their cancer would be with them for the rest of their life. Now though, they are making every day count and enjoying it so much more.

When I read it, tears came to my eyes. Not only had I reached out and touched someone, but their life was now all the more better for it. Their renewed hope, wrapped around me like safety blanket and I felt all warm and cozy.

Having a regular CAT scan recently, reminded me that I do have a chronic disease and that my cancer could come back at any minute. But it also reminded me that I better continue to make every day count, and not slide down into despair. Its very easy to do. Even I do it.

So how do we maintain hope. Well, someone else telling me their story of hope was one of the strongest messages I could have gotten. And I don't just think it was a coincidence. Even if we go around smiling all the time, with people telling us we look wonderful, our brain is an antenna. And whether its picking up other people's cries for help, or sending out its own, very often something happens, just when you need it. As I just found, listening to other people, who are full of hope, is a wonderful way of getting a booster shot.

But what about if you want to give hope to someone else? The last thing they want to hear from you is:

"I know it must be really hard for you", "You'll get through it."

That's just trite and totally annoying to everyone who's ever heard it.

"No you DON'T know how hard it is? Are you fighting for your life every day too? How do YOU know I'll get though it?"

And I'm ashamed to admit, that, even being the seasoned cancer advocate that I am, I still say those things to people when I don't know what else to say. So what do you say? Well, if you have a story to tell, tell it. And if you don't, or they've heard it before, just tell them you love them and you're there for them.

Tell them miracles really do happen. I've witnessed one in my lifetime, and hopefully haven't used up my quota just quite yet! I just need one more please.

Spreading hope is not an easy business. But its like paying it forward. If you give someone else hope, they will pass it onto someone else. And they will pass it on to someone else. Its one of the best bugs you can get. And when you catch it, keep it.

Kay Kerbyson is in Washington D.C. this week as a panel reviewer for the Ovarian Cancer Funding program.

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