

Nowhere Better Than Los Alamos

GUEST COLUMN

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Have you ever thought about where you would like to have your cancer? No! I don't mean which part of the body (I think we'd all choose one that was easily diagnosed and treatable, right?) I mean, where you would like to be living at the time.

Nearly ten years ago, I came to Los Alamos not knowing anyone. I couldn't get a work permit, so I couldn't find friends that way, and everyone else my age had babies. I knew nothing about those then and so couldn't relate to sick-up or green poopy stories (yes blueberries do do that to toddlers, just in case you didn't know). Then a wishing star must have fallen my way, because the Hilltappers adopted me as one of their own. I have to point out, by the way, that I'm not a fellow senior, even if my photo leads you to believe otherwise.

It was at that moment that I started to learn about the people of Los Alamos. I went from no friends to a handful of adoptive grandparents. They spoiled me, made me feel special and had the biggest hearts I'd ever known. I thought it must just be tap dancing grandma's who were like this, but over the years it's been a joy to find out that everyone in Los Alamos, who I have come to call a friend, is the same.

They say that when you have cancer, you find out who your real friends are. Well, not only were my current friends real friends, but there were plenty more out there I didn't even know yet.

When you have cancer, the greatest gift you can ask for, other than a cure of course, is a network of support and love: people who will do errands for you, babysit at the drop of a hat, take you to appointments, or just send you an uplifting hello "I'm thinking of you" email. These are your real friends. They stick by you and you know you can count on them. Los Alamos is full of 'real friends' and that's why I've come to love it so. It's a unique and very special community.

In Los Alamos, I lost my immortality, but found a family. That's why I'm so sad to leave. Yes, for those of you who didn't know, our family made the decision to move. If you're an avid follower

of my columns (yes they do exist) you'll remember a few months ago I talked about "Life, Decision and the Pursuit of Happiness." Well that was the decision – to leave or not and it was a gut wrenching one. This is where I had cancer – two times – and where my husband had cancer. You would think I would be only too glad to get the heck out of here. In fact the opposite is true.

I always thought that if I did get cancer I would want to be in one of those big cities near to MD Anderson, or Johns Hopkins, so I could easily get, what I thought would be, "top notch" care. But I've changed my mind. It turns out that top notch care can be in the middle of nowhere, and treatment is only part of the equation.

Would I really want to have cancer in a busy city where I didn't know my neighbors from Adam, I never met anyone I knew in the grocery store and my friends lived 45 minutes across town and never visited? Not likely!

So what does having cancer in Los Alamos mean? Well, we have wonderful caring physicians, and truly amazing cancer nurses, and, yes, sometimes, we do have to travel off The Hill, or even out of state, to get treatment. It can be a hassle, I'll not lie. But what counts just as much is what you come home to when you recover. That's when you need a community that cares. That's Los Alamos.

Now I have a family bigger than the Osmonds. Some adopted me when I arrived, some when I was struggling with two babies. But the biggest expansion came when I had cancer. In some ways, the growth of my family was rather like the growth of my tumors – unexpected and near unstoppable!

And now I'm heartbroken to be leaving. For your help, the laughs and the many tears we've shared together, I will be eternally grateful. You're one heck of a community. I'll be pining for you Los Alamos (pathetic pun intended, sorry.) And even though I'll be living somewhere else, you're my family and a piece of my heart will always be here. This is, and will always be, my home.

Kay Kerbyson and her family will be leaving Los Alamos this month to live in Richland WA. She will remain an associate of the Los Alamos Council on Cancer and her charity, Ovarian Cancer Together, will continue its work in New Mexico. Kerbyson will also continue to contribute to the Monitor.

Resources for all cancer survivors can be found at www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org and www.ovariancancertogether.org

