

The Blessings of Cancer

No I haven't been drinking! Trust me, the great Lance Armstrong said it in his book, *Its Not About the Bike*. Cancer survivors are the lucky ones, because dying from cancer sucks, right? Hang on, there must be more to it than that.

Let's look at treatment for a second. Treatment, of whatever type, pulls you aside from your life: the hectic bustling around, the things you do almost on automatic pilot because you think you enjoy doing them (but actually have turned into chores); the obligations you feel you have to meet (but only because they're obligations in your mind, they're not really); and then there's the petty stuff (folding napkins into beautiful swans, because that's really worthwhile!)

All that stops. All you concentrate on is the treatment; cycle to cycle, getting better. All the clutter in your life disappears and you just focus on what is really important. You, your family and your friends. You can do what you really want to do and when, because that's the Great Cancer Excuse. Not having to do the so-called obligations. "Sorry I'm on cycle 57 and I'm just too exhausted." And for those with fatigue or immunity problems, now you really do have an excuse to cut out those annoying friends, who haven't even offered to help anyway.

So there are two enormous blessings straight away: truly seeing your life for what it is, and what you want it to be and the blessing of no more dinners over at hubby's boss' house. Oopps! Sorry honey and said boss, didn't really mean that one. Moving on.

For us ladies, there are also the perks of chemotherapy. You must be out of your mind I can hear you saying, but bare with me. Think about it. Loosing all you're hair is a humiliating process, but let's look at the positive. That morning shower and blow dry, which used to take 45 minutes, now takes 10.

It's 'Shine and Go.'

And think of the money you're saving on conditioners, mousse and hairspray alone. You're even being green by cutting down on electricity for the hairdryer, curling tongs, straightner, whatever it is you do for

so long each morning. No hair dresser trips - saves time, money and gas. No underarm hair – no pain! And finally, if you're lucky enough to have treatment in the summer, no shaving those legs every time you want to slip into a pair of shorts. Magic!

So now you've finished treatment and thankfully in remission. Well I'd consider that a blessing straight away, but there's more. Lance's argument was that being made aware of your own immortality is actually a good thing. Since most of us blindly stumble through life without even thinking about what we want to achieve, or what type of person we want to be, cancer forces you to do that and hopefully makes you a better person for it.

My argument goes a little further. What cancer survivors actually practice is mindfulness. They don't just analyze their life, they analyze everything. They look out the window at the view and see the mountains, those same mountains they see every day. They look out the window and SEE THE MOUNTAINS! There's a difference and not just the caps lock I just found on my computer! Cancer forces us to appreciate what we're doing as we do it. Oh look I'm cleaning my teeth. Boy! that toothpaste tastes good. But seriously, just look at your children and rather than seeing them as scruffy ragamuffins who've just smeared mud all over themselves, look at them as your children. Wasn't that beautiful? Did it put tears in your eyes and a smile on your face? That's the blessing.

As cancer survivors we have to endure an awful lot of pain. Every day is uncertain for us. We dread the day when the fight is lost but look forward to the days when we've won another battle. For those of us still fighting, we fight to stay with our families and we fight to honor those comrades who couldn't. We fight to comfort those like us and we fight to give those in the future a better chance. My life has meaning and humor is my weapon of choice. Now that truly is a blessing.

Kay Kerbyson is Secretary of the Los Alamos Council on Cancer. Help and support for local cancer patients and survivors can be found at www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org