

## *A Cancer Journey*

**What?** Brides are **NOT** told they have breast cancer. Who didn't get the memo? This does **not** happen! . . . **But it did**, one month after the wedding.

Well then, I'll have a lumpectomy with no chemo and no radiation. Who was in charge? Painfully, I discovered it wasn't me. I did have choices — all undesirable. There were consequences to consider. I was not alone. I had children and grand-children; extended family; friends; and, a new husband. They had information to share and opinions to hear.

A friend who had gone through this, told me, "Making the initial decisions and working out a treatment plan is the hardest part." Another friend said, "Every woman has her own journey." This wisdom helped.

Many friends asked, "What can I do?" That inspired me to create "Can-Do Circles" of friends who would take on something they had wanted to do to improve THEIR health. They could motivate me and each other. We could all benefit from better attention to our own health. **Why waste this cancer just on me?**

This new statue became my "**Can-Do Lady**." I found beautiful red fabric in *circles* for the **Can-Do altar**. The fabric was the skirt of a ball gown. "Where would I EVER wear this?" The laugh was on me. I wore it to dinner dances for Valentine's Day and Christmas!



The treatment plan was complicated. I needed a mastectomy and perhaps, chemotherapy for a year. I spent a helpful weekend with my healer friend in New York, Dr. Judy Roth. She explored many options with me including three weeks of treatment in Mexico.

My friends Steve and Patty Bauer offered me their house near Portland for a three-week healing retreat. Clair Nafziger, a cancer survivor, healer, and research nutritionist, supervised my diet, supplements, exercise, and infra-red sauna treatments. Counselors, energy workers, and healers, including Michael, worked with me.

I listened to healing, meditation, and sleep tapes. I committed to doing the inner work of emotional, mental, and spiritual healing, as well as physical healing.



Harry came for weekends. We put together a jigsaw puzzle of Jesus that **jumped out** at me in Mountain High Store — our half-way stop between Sunriver and Portland.

Seeing Jesus holding the child as he reached out to the butterfly deeply touched me. I felt like a child in his arms looking for transformational healing.

During the retreat I felt like my life had become many scattered puzzle pieces I needed to fit together into a new picture I had not seen. Harry and I were creating an altar piece together.

Toward the end of the retreat, I had a **BREAKTHROUGH**. I felt light and joyous. I was **birthing** into a transformed place in my life.

I shifted from being a victim of the cancer to having some control. I **CHOSE** to have the mastectomy and I **CHOSE NOT** to have an implant.

I was leaving the cocoon even though I didn't know what the "butterfly life" would be like.

I called Dr. Andy Higgin's office in Bend, Oregon and asked to have my surgery on

**November 11, 2014,  
My birthday!**



My sister Marzenda and nurse/healer Ann Chamberlain came from Portland to be with Harry and me for a week during and after the surgery. I asked Dana Gregg, a spiritual director in Bend, to lead us in a sacred ceremony in the St Charles Hospital chapel before the surgery. We created an altar there and she led us in an ancient Celtic ritual. I wore the prayer shawl from my Wilsonville church.



In preparing for surgery, Dr. Higgins prayed with me for healing in my body and for guidance for him in the operation.

As he began the surgery, he discovered I had turned my breast into a smiley face using little round band aids for the eyes and a long strip with a grinning mouth. The nose was in place.

After the surgery, Dr. Higgins laughed as he told Harry, "**She got me!**" The humor has continued in each of our appointments.

The humor had actually begun before the surgery. Karen Alexander of my Prayer Shawl Circle, found a website with patterns for "knitted knockers." Harry and I found a squeaky toy frog to put inside the purple one she knit that was the replacement for my Missing-In-Action breast.

People who hugged me were surprised! Now I realize humor and laughter are uplifting components of the "*butterfly life.*"



Two days after surgery, I could remove the chest wrap and view my single-breasted birthday suit. This felt a bit scary to me. I invited Harry to help with the unwrapping.

I created a candlelight altar on the bathroom counter. A butterfly card against the vase of stargazer lilies, rose quartz book ends, the twined candle sticks, a wedding gift from his daughter, created the atmosphere.

We were caring and loving as we slowly unwrapped the binding. Then we stood in front of the mirror like the gothic couple and laughed on top of the tears—our new reality.



Over the next months I continued to make changes in my big altar to focus on support for healing. I added cards friends sent, especially those with butterflies.

Melanie Weidner's poster on the wall

**"Damn.  
I mean,  
thank you."**

had fresh meaning for me. I understood the double edge of my healing journey. Shock and distress existed along with wonder and gratitude.

There was more space within me to hold a great array of emotions. I entered the supportive world of cancer survivors.