

"My Cancer Story: The Best is Yet to Come"

Julia A. Berg

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CHAPTER 1

The Diagnosis: Getting the News

Maybe you are wrong. This can't be happening to me. If you are telling me I have a heart problem, I can believe that. But what you are saying can't be true. Someone made an error. I can't believe you. I don't want to believe you. It is too scary. I want to live. Aunt Joey died a couple of months ago. Cousin Susan died a year ago. Aunt Mary died years ago. I can't open my eyes. I don't want to see the world as you see it now. My eyes are stuck. My lips are sore from biting them. I want to plug my ears. My hands hurt from clenching my fists. My nails dig into my palms. I feel cold. I feel hot. I feel faint. My stomach hurts. Don't let me vomit. Don't let me faint. I don't want to listen to you. I don't want to hear what you are telling me. I have to block this out. Why doesn't Lorain tell him that it can't be true? Why doesn't he hold me? Is he scared, too? Dear, Lord, hold me, stay with me, get me through this.



I am taking some deep breaths — letting them out slowly. I open my eyes. There is a tear in the corner and the doctor hands me a tissue. He smiles, looks caring, and says, "You came in for a simple umbilical hernia repair and I give you this news. It doesn't seem fair, does it?"

I think, "If the world was fair, Christopher would be alive — not dead at 34. My brothers and dad would not have died in their 40s. The world is not fair; never was and never will be. What is fair? What does it mean? But let's move beyond that silly question". I don't want to say that out loud because the surgeon is a very nice man. He cares about me. I thank him for making this discovery. And I thank him again. He wants to know why I am thanking him. I explain that without his discovery, we can't fix "it". And I notice he is bald. How soon will I look like that?

I have already made a decision. We will beat this "thing". We — Lorain, my family, my God, my doctors, and I. I look at the surgeon and talk fast — and much too loud, "Where do we go from here? I want to get to an oncologist right away. I don't want to wait around for weeks. If it was your wife with cancer, what would the next step be for her? Where would you send her for help? Should I go to Mayo Clinic? I like it there; I have faith in their services; I have been there before. Should I go to Ann Arbor? I don't like it there, but if that is the place to start, I will go there. Should I see a doctor in Bay City? Let's move on

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Photo Caption: Lorain and Judy Berg, October 30, 2004. This photograph was taken shortly before Judy was diagnosed with cancer.

this — fast.” Talk, talk, talk. Action, action, action. Do something now. Anything! Don't just sit here and let this thing grow in me.

I manage to smile at the doctor. I smile at Lorain. I reach over and squeeze his hand. He says nothing. I make another decision. I will not let this get me down. I will believe in a positive outcome. I will believe — believe in my Lord , believe with my heart — believe that I will be a cancer survivor. I will not be an Aunt Joey and die of lung cancer, an Aunt Mary and die of kidney cancer, a Cousin Susan and die of ovarian cancer. I think the “right” thoughts; I say the “right” things. But I am still numb. I am not in denial, but I am in disbelief.

Why are my eyes closed again? Christopher, listen to me. Christopher, help me. Get with Mom and Dad, Andy and Bruce, and Uncle John. Pull for me. Put in some “good words”. Smile down at me from heaven. Help me. I need you all now — very much. I love you. I miss you. Ten years without you, my son, is too long. All you guys up there had heart problems. I sure am not going to let cancer get me to heaven. My heart can get me there later, but we will have to get through this cancer thing first. Why am I thinking of you now, Christopher?

A phone call to the oncologist and I will only have to wait four days. What is next? The unknown is so scary.

I am only seven-one. Life will go on. Life has been good. The journey have been eventful every step of the way. Many good memories. What is next? What will unfold? Positive, stay positive. What will we tell Mike and Steve and Alex and Janice? Will this worry Rita and Susan and Sherry? Don't want to worry folks. Don't even know any good swear words. Oh, shit! What is ahead? Is the best yet to come?

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