

Diary of a Cancer Patient 2011

Sunday, January 2 – I take the Christmas tree down while thinking of all the nice times we had this holiday in spite of everything. It was good having my family here and my friends gathering around. But now it is time to move on and get well this year. That is my goal and I will do everything in my power to make that happen.

Monday, January 10 – I start my new treatment today. My friend Sharon is driving me just in case I am a little shaky after the treatment. I don't know what to expect. She has a cup of coffee and I smell the aroma. I miss my coffee in the morning but the caffeine reacts adversely with the chemo and other drugs I am getting. I have to stick to my herbal teas for now.

We arrive early. I have my blood test and check out okay. I am weighed, 126.5 pounds; haven't lost any more weight. My blood pressure is 139/75 which is really good. But I have been working out. I see the doctor and he says that I am doing really well. The tumors have shrunk to almost nothing. He tells me that the treatment for the next twelve weeks will do any clean up of possible rogue cancer cells. I certainly hope so.

I find a chair in the chemo room and my nurse starts the pre-meds, injecting me with a drug that causes me to become very sleepy. I am not happy about that. For the next three hours I am out of it, can't read or do anything. She says to relax and go to sleep, but I can't do that either. Finally the main drug, Taxol, is finished. I still feel a little woozy and am glad to have a driver. I go home and rest for awhile and then go for my usual afternoon walk and I do feel better after that.

Tuesday, January 11 – Most of the drug from yesterday that made me sleepy has finally worn off and I feel amazingly good, lots of energy, no nausea, in fact I have a good appetite. Hope this continues.

Wednesday, January 12 – I still feel good today. I have noticed that my fingers are stiff and somewhat swollen and it is painful to touch some things. I was told that I would have tingly fingers and toes, but this is not good. I am having trouble opening jars and turning off lights. Maybe it will pass.

Sunday, January 15 – I take the dogs for along walk on the canal and then go back home and clean up a bit and go to my tai chi class. It is so relaxing. I get ready for tomorrow's treatment, drink lots of fluids and eat as much as I can. I am still losing weight. I just can't get enough calories. My jeans are falling off me now, I look like a grunge. I will have to do something about that.

Monday, January 17 – I have a friend pick me up and take me to treatment. I definitely can't drive with the Benadryl so I have a different friend every week and that spreads out the liability for them. They have been so willing and helpful in every way. Today my friend will leave me after we find out if my blood is okay to go.

I take my blood test and my blood levels are good. I tell my friend to come back when I call her. Sometimes people stay and sometimes not. I know that people have things to do and don't want to sit in a chem. room. It's not the most pleasant.

I take my seat and get prepared to zonk off on the Benadryl. And even though the doctor cut the amount in half, I still feel it as it is being pumped into me and there is that awful metal taste in my mouth for a few minutes. And the effect is just the same as the last time. My eyes kind of cross and I get sleepy and then I just fall off to sleep for awhile. I hate it. I can't read or talk to anyone intelligibly. This is what I must feel like to do hard drugs which I am against.

Two down and ten to go. I go home and I am wiped out. After eating some lunch I watch TV for awhile and then go into the bedroom with the dogs and sleep for a couple of hours. They look at me like what is wrong mom. This isn't like you. But what can I do. I then get up and take my two mile walk.

Tuesday, January 17 – Again I feel pretty good today. My face is flushed; must be the drugs. I take the dogs to the dog park and everyone asks how I am and I tell them I am doing well.

Wednesday, January 18 – I do a home work out with my free weights. I walk the dogs and take my two mile walk. And then I get some writing done.

Thursday, January 19 – I go over to the mountain and climb as far as I can. I don't go all the way to the top, but I get a good workout, get my heart rate up. The reason I am doing this is that I need to protect my heart and my bones and keep them strong through all of this. And then I won't have so far to go to build myself up again when I am off the chemo. I think it is also helping to mitigate the side effects of the chemo. I feel surprisingly good these days, almost normal.

Friday, January 21 – Walk the dogs and then I go over to the YMCA and do my workout. I can do twenty minutes on the elliptical, about a mile and a half. I get my heart rate up again and that is good. I then work out on the weight machines for about half an hour; biceps, triceps, abs, Pecs and quads. I always feel good after a workout. It relieves the stress.

I go over to Costco to get medicine for my dog. I walk along the food section where the demos are happening and taste all of the goodies. It is fun, like a carnival every day. Simple pleasures are all that I have these days. I then look at the jeans and I buy two pair size six and eight to see which will fit best. There is no where to try on here so I will have to take them home. I can't believe that I might be back to a size six again. I was wearing size four at one time when I was a lot younger, but those days are gone I hope. I like carrying a little weight now. It keeps the wrinkles away.

Saturday, January 22 – Take the dogs to the dog park and then come home to have lunch. Eating as much as I can these days but still can't keep the weight on. I'll have to

start eating more bread. I go for my four mile jog/walk and come home feeling refreshed. This kind of exercise is a wonderful for getting rid of stress. It is movie time tonight, at home with the dogs curled up beside me. They are my best friends these days.

Sunday, January 23 – my tai chi instructor called and said that she had a cold and the class was cancelled. I wished her well. I am will catch up on getting ready for taxes Plenty to do. And then read some in the afternoon. Fortunately I am back to my same reading level as before if I can stay awake. I sometimes fall asleep. And talking about sleep, I get plenty of it these days and that is a good thing. I used to get up a five in the morning but now I am able to sleep until seven. The dogs sleep beside me all night and never stir until I do. They are no longer puppies and can wait to go out in the morning.

Monday, January 24 – My friend picks me up for my treatment and 8:45. He is going to stay with me throughout the time; he is so good to me. We get to the office and I see two friends from a few weeks ago. They wanted to buy my books so I tell them that I have some with me and they buy them.

My blood checks out okay and I get started. Same drill, Benadryl, fight the sleep but finally nod off. My friend is bored watching me sleep so he goes down to his car to make some calls.

Three down and nine to go. I come home and I am so tired. I eat lunch and watch TV, go take a nap and then take my two mile walk. I feel refreshed when I get back. I think it helps to cycle the drugs out of my body.

Tuesday, January 25 – This is a day to remember. My mother would have been 100 years old today. She was eighty-eight when she died of sepsis due to having a stroke a couple of years earlier. She languished in a nursing home for two years. Not good. But she is at peace now.

I have an appointment with my new breast surgeon today. I have seen two other surgeons and they just weren't right for me so now I hope this woman is what I want. She works well with my oncologist and that is important. It has to be right, the team is important to recovery.

Wednesday, January 26 – We're going to the dog park today.

Good news from my new doctor. The tumors are nearly gone now and she checked my other breast and nodes in the rest of my body and said that all looks good. Of course I will have to have another Pet scan to ensure that the cancer hasn't spread. But she said that I should come through this just fine. We talked about the surgery and I will be having a full mastectomy with the removal of the lymph nodes under my right arm. I saw photos of other women who have had this and it isn't that bad. And I can have reconstruction and they do wonders these days in that area. I came away with hope. I have to say I have been worried this whole time since my diagnosis. It could have gone either way. But I think with the aggressive chemo therapy and my hard work of diet change and keeping

fit, I have boosted my chances for survival. These cancers are virulent and it takes strong measures to overcome them and rid them in your body. I will be having radiation after the surgery, and then I will be taking Tamoxifen for several years to make sure the cancer does not return. I will have to be ever vigilant for the rest of my life, being careful with my diet and keeping my immune system healthy. But yea, we are not even at the end of the chemo therapy and it is working.

Tuesday, February 1 – Four down and eight to go. Was very tired yesterday when I returned from treatment, but as usual I have bounced back today. Must be the steroids. My friend Janet took me and I am so appreciative. I came home and ate some soup and then rested and didn't even have the energy to go out and walk. But the good news is that I saw my doctor (I don't see him every week now) and he is amazed with my progress. The tumors are all but gone. He said that if they don't find cancer in the breast when they remove it, that it is not likely to return. Evidently, along with the chemo, I am doing something right. I think keeping my body as healthy as possible helps and that is what I am trying to do.

Saturday, February 5 – Got up early, 6:30 and let the dogs out. I am planning my day. I will take the dogs to the dog park, do my little jog/run and then work on some writing. I worked out yesterday.

The side effects from the chemo are minimal. My hands are still chapped and sore and my fingertips have lost feeling. I am having some bleeding from my nose; my sinuses are acting up again. I went to the drug store on Wednesday and bought some saline solution and that seems to help. I also have some dry mouth and my lips are always dry. I am using a special mouth wash to help that problem. Other than these small things, I feel pretty good over all.

I need to talk about the emotional side of all of this. I remember when I was first diagnosed, how frightened I was. I knew this was life threatening and I wasn't ready to die. I thought about leaving this earth, my son. I have two young dogs and would I find suitable homes for them? I have had two good friends who died from cancer and I pictured how it would be to die. As time went on, it felt like I was entering a tunnel where events happened along the way and I was looking into this place from somewhere else. It was something surreal, as though I weren't really experiencing this at all; my body was separate from my mind. There have been days when I've seen darkness, but then the light shows through again. I take my walks and I think here I am alive and I have this indomitable will to keep on living, at least for a few years longer. I have never cried all this time. Not that I am especially brave, I haven't felt the need to cry right now. I have taken action and when I do that I feel powerful; that I am somehow able to control the outcome of this disease attempting to ravage my body. I say attempting because I am not going to allow this to happen. But on the other hand, I do think that if it did happen, if the cancer prevails, I will accept that. But I can say that now with glowing reports from my doctors. They say that I will overcome and live to tell this story and that is the happiest thought of all.

Tuesday, February 8 – I had my fifth treatment of Taxol yesterday, only seven more to go and I am done with chemo. I can hardly wait until the end of March. Then my hair will start growing back and I can get my body back to health again. Although I am doing pretty well, all things considered. My nurse told me a few weeks ago that my blood levels would be dropping, white count and iron, by the fifth week and they were okay yesterday. I don't want that to happen because I was told that I would have to give myself shots at home and I am against that. But of course if I had to I would; anything to bring this episode to closure. But I think my immune system is healthier than most on chemo due to the natural methods that I am using along with the chemo; my exercise, the supplements I am taking, and my diet. I am eating beef, which I really do not like. I also eat lots of green leafy vegetables, spinach and chard and black beans and yams. I buy organic beef from Sprouts and beef liver from Whole Foods, again organic. This boosts the iron in my blood and provides the protein that I need to build muscle. And for my white count I am taking Mitake every day, an essence of a mushroom and it seems to be helping. The bottle says 6,000 mlg and I put six drops in a glass of water.

I am still wiped out the day of treatment, but bounce back the next day and feel full of energy the rest of the week. I am going to ask the doctor if they could drop the amount of Benadryl again as that is what makes me so groggy all day Monday. The effects didn't wear off until midnight last night.

Tuesday, February 15 – I am half way there; six treatments down and six to go. So far this is so much easier than I thought it would be. And I am holding my own as far as my blood levels are concerned. The technician who tests my blood said that I must be doing my homework. The nurse told me going into this that by the fifth week usually the white cell count is too low and shots have to be given. I have beaten those odds so far and I intend to keep the momentum going. I don't want to have to take the shots. And they cut my Benadryl back again yesterday and I could tell as I recovered much faster earlier in the day.

I saw a friend yesterday whom I had met at Christmas time. She has lung cancer but the cancer had spread throughout her body. When I first saw her she was barely able to walk, on oxygen and terribly overweight. When I saw her yesterday, she had lost considerable weight, was walking on her own unassisted and she looked so much better. Her daughter is always with her. She just has such a positive attitude is always laughing and full of fun. I so enjoy talking with her. I meet these brave souls every day fighting this battle of life over death and so many more are winning.

What I would like to see for this disease is a means of determining just exactly what is causing it. Although it is so much more complex than that, there are many causes; environmental, diet and lifestyle, individual genes and heredity. But I don't think cause and effect is addressed as much as it could be. And if we could find the cause or causes then we could much better prevent cancer from happening at all.

Monday February 28 - Went for treatment and saw the doctor. He said that I was doing extraordinarily well. My blood levels have held so far and I have not missed ne treatment.

He said that we should move up the surgery given my excellent recovery rate a couple of weeks. Gulp.

If my blood levels go down and I have to miss a treatment that would be a set back for me. So I keep doing what I'm doing, getting lots of exercise and taking my supplements, especially the Maitake Mushroom elixir, my secret weapon, which I think is helping my immune system. The exercise keeps the immune system healthy as well along with my bones, heart and lungs. And keeping these organs healthy will hopefully keep the cancer from spreading to them. It is a battle; a battle for my life and so far I am winning.

Wednesday March 2 – The breast surgeon's office called and wanted to schedule my surgery. I told them that I needed a PET scan first to determine if the cancer had spread. She said that I should call my doctor and check with him. I called him and left a message.

Friday March 4 - The doctor called me back. I mentioned that they wanted to schedule the surgery and asked if that wasn't premature and he said no. Yes I have to have the PET scan but had no doubts that I would pass with flying colors. I asked how he knew and he said that if any cancer had spread we would likely know it by now, with the blood tests and I would be able to detect it in my body. I hope he is right. So I called the breast surgeon back and we have the surgery scheduled for April 14th, two weeks sooner than expected. I have a lot to get done in the meantime. Getting all my trimming done in my yard, and any other job that I think I won't be able to handle after the surgery. My son is going to be here for few days but after he leaves I am on my own.

Wednesday March 15 – I am finding that I am having more fatigue now. It is cumulative no doubt. Last week I had to really push myself to get out there and climb the mountain and do my workout and my little run on Saturday. But I keep on going like the energizer bunny. And yesterday when I came home I was so tired that I sleep all afternoon and then went to be early and slept the night through. But I am feeling fine today again and hope for a good week. Lot's to do this week and next week I am going for a little getaway to Sedona, probably the last I will have for awhile. Looking forward to it. Some friends have invited me to come and stay a couple of days in their time share. Should be fun.

One thing that I am so thankful for is all of the friends who have been so supportive of me through these months. People who have called and brought me gifts of love and those who have been there for me in driving me to my treatments. I couldn't have done this without them I cannot drive on the day that I have treatment as I am so sleepy from the Benadryl. And people have called me and asked to take me and it is so comforting.

Wednesday March 23 – I had a burst of energy yesterday, trimmed some of my plants in the back yard and repaired my drip system that Lily, my Brittany ripped apart again. But today I am very tired and worried about driving to Sedona tomorrow. I will try to get a good nights sleep and hopefully feel well enough. I do not want to drive impaired and have an accident. I am preparing to go and if I am not well enough I will just have to stay home. Although my friend said he would come down and get me and I have had two

offers from friends here in Phoenix to drive me up there. How can I be so blessed with such good friends?

Saturday March 26 – Well I drove to Sedona on Thursday. I was a little shaky but I got there in good time. After I arrived we went to lunch at the Enchantment Resort overlooking the Red Rocks and then went for a little hike. We came back to the hotel, time share and had drinks, and I had a couple of glasses of red wine which I normally don't do. We then had supper and went to bed early. At 1:30 I was awakened by a beeping noise and I followed it to the kitchen where the timer was going off. I cleared it and went back to my bed, a roll-a-way in the living room and tried to go back to sleep but I was plagued by my sinuses and not able to breath and my toes hurt and my legs were aching. Bottom line, no sleep for me. On Friday I was feeling really tired, had diarrhea in addition. We went to lunch, and then came back and I slept for awhile until dinner. No wine tonight as I want to make sure that I would be able to drive the next day. We had really good steaks and went to bed early. Fortunately I was feeling well today. We went for a short walk along the edge of the complex where we could view a panorama of the Red Rocks. It was beautiful. I will have to come back again when I am healthy enough to enjoy it to the fullest. I drove back to Phoenix with no problems. The bottom line is that traveling with this illness is risky and difficult but I am glad I did it. It was a good getaway and the last for awhile.

Wednesday March 30 - On Monday I went for my last Taxol treatment. What a milestone. My friend Janet took me. She brought me a beautiful flower in a Hope pot with an angel. When I arrived, my chemo friend Betsy was waiting for me with a beautiful rose. She was not having treatment but just came to sit with me for awhile.

The nurses were praising me for how I had handled the last five months of chemo therapy, emotionally and physically. They said that I done great job. And the doctor said the same. That I had such a positive outlook and I said what else was I going to do. And he said that some sit under a cloud and brood the whole time, but that's just not me. So now I will have a PET scan this week some time to make sure the cancer has not spread. If it has, the surgery will not happen. At least not yet. I asked the doctor what were the possibility that it had spread and he said, low, low. So that is encouraging. Of course if it has then it will be more difficult to go for a cure. But if it hasn't I will have my surgery on the 14th and then radiation some time after that. And the doctor said that after five years, if the cancer has not returned, I can be considered cured. I am going for that. And I know it will happen.

I have a bottle of champagne ready for the celebration after the PET scan and finding that I am clear of cancer and I think I will have an ice cream Sunday as well. And now I can't wait for my hair to grow back and to feel entirely normal and healthy again. I will continue with the diet I am on because that will help to keep me cancer free.

What a journey this has been. But I have learned a lot and met some very brave people. I have a reverence for life that I didn't have before. I have learned that I have friends that I didn't even know about and have been overwhelmed with their kindness and generosity. I

have learned to treasure the small things in life. I am again glad that I have my little house to keep me safe and warm. And my dogs have been my constant companions and brought me joy and comfort and comic relief when I was feeling poorly.

If I should leave this earth tomorrow, I know that I have given this my best shot. But I think I will be around for awhile. I have things to do and places to go.

Friday April 1 – Today was PET Scan day. I had the test at 9:30 this morning and should have the results by Monday at the latest. Hoping for the best. The doctors are optimistic, but we won't know until we get the results. The scan itself takes about thirty minutes, but prior to the scan they inject this radio active fluid into your vein and you sit for an hour while it circulates through your body. Then they put you into this large cylindrical machine and you have to hold completely still for the duration which is difficult. My arms were raised over my head and I started to lose circulation and wanted to move, but I couldn't. I got through it though. Some people are claustrophobic and have problems just being in the machine, but that didn't bother me.

I am so tired again today. I wanted to go and work out, but I couldn't muster the strength. I did climb my mountain yesterday, sort of, only to the second bench and I was really tired. I will try to run tomorrow, maybe not very far though. And it is getting hot here, 98 degrees today. I will walk my two miles after dinner tonight and that should revive me I hope. Finished reading my weekly novel, have another I am starting on. I have so many things that I need to get done so I am going to have to play catch up next week. Hope I have more energy. This is much like the days before the first of the year when I was on the hard chemo, only I don't have the nausea.

In fact my appetite is huge. I want to eat all of the time and I do and I never gain weight. I have lost about thirteen pounds since I started this. Not a good way to lose weight. I would not recommend this method. But actually I am at a weight that I would like to stay at. I had to buy new jeans however as the ones I had were falling off my body.

Tuesday April 5 – I cried yesterday for the first time, tears of joy. I went to pick up the report from my PET Scan at noon and went back to my car to read it. It is very cryptic and full of medical terms, most of which I am not familiar with, but reading through it I was able to understand that my cancer has not metastasized, it has been contained and that means that I have stage three cancer and not stage four. Of course the implications are huge and the treatment very different. If it had spread, I would have been spending the rest of my remaining number of years fighting this disease. As it stands, I will have the mastectomy and then radiation and will then go for a full cure. I will have to be careful, however for the rest of my life, be ever vigilant and watch my diet and get tested regularly, but I can do that.

I know that I have been rather stoic as one friend put it, these last few months, but I worried every day that I might have to put my affairs in order and face the possibility of an early demise. I thought about dying, about leaving behind family and friends, my dogs. But I was spending most of my energy on this battle to save my life and it has paid

off. Everyone is going to have to put up with me for years to come, I am not going anywhere.

So I am now preparing for my surgery next week and not looking forward to it. But I have gotten this far and I will prevail again. And I am not the first to go through this; others have been there before me. Other women who have been very brave and have overcome so much to come out the other side and say they, too are survivors. What a wonderful thought.

Wednesday April 13 – The day before surgery. Can't quite decide how I'm going to take this. Am I sad about losing my breast? Am I worried about the surgery? A little to both of those questions. But I don't seem to feel anything except relief that I am going to get rid of the cancer and be a healthy person again. That's the most important thing. Maybe I'll feel differently when I look down at my chest and see flatness on my right side. I don't know yet.

My son arrived late in the afternoon. We went to Corbin's for dinner; I had an ahi tuna sandwich and he had an ahi tuna salad. After dinner we went to the neighborhood yogurt place and pigged out on yogurt sundaes with lots of fruit and nuts on top. It was so good. I can eat up until ten pm and then no food or water. I am breaking my diet this weekend and will get back to the mundane cancer preventative foods after surgery.

Then we went to the Vig to hear my son's friend who is lead guitarist with the Gin Blossoms play. We stayed until about ten and then went home and I went to bed. I am still feeling okay with everything. I know this has to be done and I'm going to do it and that is all there is. I'm glad my son is here with me at this time for support.

Thursday April 14 – This is the day. This is the day I lose my right breast. I get up early and start to prepare; feed the dogs and take care of some bills and other things, pack a small bag with my toothbrush and body lotion. I feed the dogs. I know they will miss me but it is only one night; they'll get by. I shower and put on my clothes, a loose T-shirt and some comfortable fitting pants. My son wakes up about nine. He has breakfast; I can't have anything, not even water. By ten we are ready to leave. My son gives me a gift, an iPod to use in the hospital. How sweet of him.

We drive over to the Piper Center where my surgery will take place. We arrive on time, eleven am and check in. A nurse calls me and takes me back to the prep area, takes my vitals and asks me to put on this atrocious looking paper grey gown with all kinds of flaps and ties. I do as he says. They put me in a bed and I ask to have my son with me. The assisting nurse comes in and talks with me while they are taking more info from me, then the doctor and the anesthesiologist. The doctor marks my right breast to make sure we remove the correct one. I am getting nervous now. My blood pressure is 106/69, not very high. I tell the anesthesiologist that I have a high pain threshold and to go easy on the pain meds, morphine. I hate having that stuff in my body and I'll recover faster with less of it. He takes note; don't know if he will comply. They've put an IV drip in my vein and

now the nurse is injecting a relaxant into my IV. I look at my son as the room whirls, saying to myself, "this is it" and I am out like a light. Gone.

I wake up, don't know how much later, must have been a couple of hours. I am in my room and not in recovery. My son is there and he talks to me. I am groggy, my mouth is dry and I am nauseas. I take some cracked ice and lay my head back and sleep awhile; time is elusive to me. I wake and take some water and then vomit; nothing in my stomach but water. This goes on for a couple of hours. My son leaves to go and have dinner and I sleep off and on, wake and get sick and then sleep some more. The nurse asks about pain and I say to her what pain? I feel no pain at this point. I touch my right side and feel the flatness that was once my breast. It's gone now. In it's place is a large, white flat bandage. I have another smaller square bandage on the other side where they removed my port; no more chemo, yea.

I sleep and wake and vomit and sleep again until midnight when I ask the nurse how I can break this pattern and she told me that I should eat something. I try some chicken broth and that doesn't stay with me. I ask for something to help me sleep and they give me a valium and that puts me out for a few hours. They have the pressure wraps on my legs contracting every few minutes to keep the clots from forming and I am aware of them in my light slumber. They know so much more now that they did a few years back. The night nurse is checking on me often to make sure that I am okay. They were so attentive to me all throughout the night.

Friday April 15 - It is six am and I am wide awake with a ravenous appetite. Breakfast won't be served until eight am. I can't last that long. The nurse asks again if I am in pain and I am not. No pain meds for me. I feel a little pain when I move my right arm a certain way but other than that, nothing. Why take a drug when there is no reason to do so. I ask for some toast and peanut butter then turn on BBC World news and lay back and wait. I'm feeling pretty good at this point. The toast arrives and I eat it all. I then ask to go to the bathroom and we take a walk. I am a little unsteady but we make it around the nurse's station and back to the room. Breakfast arrives at eight as expected, scrambled eggs, toast and bacon and I eat it all and drink some juice and soy milk. No nausea.

My son arrives at nine am. I am pleasantly surprised. He takes me for another walk and we do three laps around the nurse's station. I am feeling better by the minute, ready to go home soon. Still little or no pain. They take out the IV, take off the leg wraps and I can now move about on my own. I am told that the doctor won't be in to see me until after noon some time and I can't go home until I see her. I order a huge lunch and my son goes across the street to buy some lunch and brings it back to the hospital. We take another walk.

At about 1 pm the doctor comes in to see me. She said the surgery went very well. And then preps me on the drain that I have to take care in the next week or so. This drains any excess fluid from the breast in the first few days after surgery. It's kind of a nuisance. She writes a prescription for pain in case I need it later. It is Percocet, a form of oxycontin, a very strong drug. Want to stay away from it if I can. The doctor said that the staff wanted

to keep me another week, they liked me so much. Well, nothing doing. I am out of here, although they were super nice to me and took the best care of me; Andrea, Connie and the others. I can't remember all of their names. They are saints.

The nurse comes in with discharge papers, asks about my pain. "Oh, that's right you didn't take any pain meds did you?" I say no. She offers me one last chance to take one pill and I refuse again.

I dress and gather my things. As usual I have accumulated more than I can carry, always do. The nurse walks me out to the front where my son is waiting with the car. I get in and we drive home. I feel good, a little tired and I am amazed at the mobility of my right arm, I can almost move it in any direction.

The dogs are happy to see me. I go in to the bedroom to rest for a while and they try to pile on top of me. I send them to the end of the bed, but Sophie creeps up to lie down next to my body with her head lightly resting just below my breast and Lily comes up to her pillow beside my head.

There was a note on the door that the florist tried to deliver a flower and I call them later; they will deliver in the morning.

After a couple of hours I wake up, hungry as usual. My son wants to get Whataburgers and we search the web for a location which is way over on 35th avenue. We drive over and I get a double burger with fries and a small chocolate shake. We drive home to eat them.

Saturday April 16 – We all wake up and have breakfast, my second one for the day. My son asks me what I would like to do this day and I tell him that I would like to go to South Mountain and take a hike to see if there are any wild flowers left. He looks at me incredulously, but says, okay. We leave the dogs behind and drive down to the park through all of the interesting barrio areas of South Phoenix. I love this area. When we reach the park it is obvious that it is in disrepair; the funds have been stolen by the state to shore up the budget shortfall, which is due to giving more tax breaks to large business. This is a city park and it was always so well run, but no more. They are trying to privatize it and the other state and city parks and then charge money; something for which I already pay taxes for. What a shame. We hike for an hour, about two miles, everything is dead, cactus has been pilfered and stolen. I am saddened to see this. The vistas are still lovely though, of the Estrellas in the distance. I hope we can get our government back to working for the people again.

I am tired from the hike. We stop at the library; I wanted to show it to my son. I pick up a couple of books to read.

Tonight it's Chinese takeout for supper, spring rolls, and spicy shrimp over rice with vegetables. Very tasty. And then early to bed; it has been another long day. I fall asleep immediately although I have to be careful not to sleep on my right side as it is somewhat

painful and I usually sleep in the fetal position so that is a problem. But I am so tired that I am soon in slumber land with the dogs close beside me, making sure that I don't leave them again.

Sunday April 17th – To the dog park. The dogs haven't been in over a week and they are ready. My son helps me with Lily and I take Sophie. When we get there all of my dog park friends are shocked to see me and even more shocked when I tell them that I had taken a hike the day before. But that's the way I do things. We talk, the dogs play and it is a beautiful morning, birds singing, trees budding.

Friends are coming for dinner and a little party. It is pot luck with paper plates and plastic cups. My son and I go to Sprouts to pick up the rotisserie chicken and some fruits and vegetables. He is going to make fresh guacamole. Others are bringing baked beans, cole slaw and potato salad. We all gather in the living room at around five eating chips, salsa and guacamole and drinking beer. We open a bottle of sparkling wine, cracking jokes about breasts and I announce that this is the best breast surgery I've ever had. And the last. We then fill our plates with food and head out to the picnic table on the patio with a candle and lantern for light and a full moon overhead. I feel the love and the warmth of my family and friends and the beauty of the night. I am indeed blessed in so many ways.

Tuesday April 19th – My breast surgeon called with the pathology report. There was still a small amount of cancer in the breast tissue that they had removed and seven of the nine lymph nodes were cancerous. That the other two were not is a good sign that the cancer had not spread yet.

I am still feeling well considering. Still little or no pain and I have energy and am able to go about my daily activities. The dogs make sure that I keep going.

Thursday April 21 – I have my first appointment with my breast surgeon since the surgery. I arrive on time and am taken to an examining room where I am told to remove my blouse and camisole and put on a gown. The doctor comes into the room and looks at me and asks how I am feeling. I tell her that I feel well and then I tell her about the short hike on Saturday. She calls me a showoff. She says that I look good with color in my face.

She removes the bandages and I am confronted with the flat area that was once my breast, violated with a six inch horizontal incision. I look at it and then my other breast and I am sad. The incision under my arm is less noticeable and I anticipate when that heals that it will look just like my other arm pit and I will be able to wear sleeveless blouses like everyone else. The doctor says that I will need to get used to the new look of my body. I don't know if I ever will. So suddenly I am thinking about how I look again. I guess I am recovering. Two weeks ago I was worried about being alive.

She looks at the drain and says that it needs to stay in for a few more days. Bummer.

Friday April 22 – I am experiencing pain for the first time and it is significant. It feels like I am still on the operating table and they are cutting my breast. It is periodic however; it comes and goes. I take an extra strength ibuprofen and that seems to help. I don't want to take the strong stuff because I need to stay alert and mobile. Also the drain has completely stopped. I call the doctor, and then remember she is not in on Friday so I am stuck with the drain for the weekend. And I have parties to go to. Bummer.

Saturday April 23 – Took the dogs to the dog park to run off some energy; I wish I had what they have. It's a beautiful day, sunny and warm.

A girl friend from Oregon is in town and we go to lunch and spend the rest of the afternoon catching up after not seeing one another for several years.

The pain comes and goes. I only take the ibuprofen at night or when the pain becomes too unbearable.

Sunday April 24 – It's Easter Sunday. I think the dogs almost caught the Easter Bunny this morning; there was so much barking going on in the back yard about five am.

I am invited to an afternoon party and then a friend is coming over later in the day. It is difficult dressing with this drain hanging from my body, but I tied it down with gauze and put on a loose fitting blouse and it looks okay. I arrive at the party with my friend and start talking with people. There are several women here who have had breast cancer. The first one I talked to had a bi-lateral mastectomy. It was obvious that she had not had a reconstruction and I asked her why and she said she was too old to do that. The hostess had also experienced breast cancer and there were a couple of others that I talked to. Amazing in such a small group and so many women who have had breast cancer.

Tuesday April 26 – I go back to the doctor to have the drain removed. The doctor examines me and says that the drain was plugged and that I will have to keep it for a few more days. Bummer.

I am walking every day and thinking that I will step up my exercise program in a few days. I feel okay but I think I don't know what normal is anymore because I've been sick with the chemo treatments for such a long time. I am also amazed that it has been almost a month since my last chemo treatment and I am still feeling the effects in my extremities, numbness in my fingers and toes and a couple of my fingernails are barely hanging on.

I now have peach fuzz all over my head. It's like baby hair; I call this my rebirth. I wonder when I'll get my real hair back. I'm becoming impatient. I am tired of wearing the wig although everyone says that it looks very natural. But it is uncomfortable and it's not my hair. I want my eyelashes and eyebrows back too. Although I am getting good at "drawing" on my eyebrows. My vanity is showing like a dirty petty coat.

I have to remember every day that I have been given an extension on my life and I had better put it to good use and stop complaining.

Wednesday April 27 – I have an appointment with the radiation doctor today. He lives at Banner/Good Samaritan hospital where the radiation machine resides. I check in and fill out more forms for the 1000th time. I will be so glad when this information is digitized so I don't have to do this every time I see a new doctor.

I am then directed to go down this long hallway, get on an elevator to the lower level. I am taken to a room where the nurse takes more information and then the doctor comes in and asks more questions, and thoroughly checks out my upper body. He then tells me what to expect and it isn't pretty. I will be in treatment every day, except weekends and holidays for six weeks. He said that the fatigue usually does not set in until the third week and will last six weeks after I am finished with it. I may have swelling of my arm. There will be a blistering of the skin in the area that they give the radiation. And my right lung will likely be damaged. But not to worry, scar tissue will form and I should be able to function normally.

I'll have to admit I am frightened. But then I was with every other treatment that I had as well because I'd heard horror stories, but they never materialized. I hope that is true with this as well. I have also heard that radiation is not nearly as difficult as chemo therapy. So there you have it. We shall see.

This is the last phase of my treatment. After this I will be done and then I can work on recovery from all of the treatments. I will have to say, after five months of chemo therapy and breast surgery two weeks later; I am feeling a little tired these days. Just shows that I am human after all and not super woman. I'm glad to know that. I've been a little depressed as well. But I think that is to be expected. I am not exercising as much as I would like and I think that is one reason. And just the fact that I've had this tremendous change to my body most likely is a factor. I'll get back on track here soon.

Thursday April 28 – Went to see my breast surgeon and she removed the drain. Yea! She also gave the green light for radiation. Boo! But it is better to get this started as soon as possible and get it over with. It is like taking really bad medicine. You open your mouth, shut your eyes, hold your breath and swallow and then it's all over with. Six weeks is a long time to hold my breath. I hope it will be easier than I thought it would be.

I am trying to find information on how I can keep healthy during this time and this isn't much out there. I think if I keep up the exercise, do some deep breathing every day and maintain a good diet, I will be doing all I can to help this along. It worked during the chemo therapy.

Friday April 29 – Got up at 1:00 am to watch the Wedding of the Century, Kate and William. I wasn't going to do it but then I thought, I have a front row seat with my HD TV, why not. It won't cost me anything. And it was a beautiful wedding. They truly look like they are in love. I love romance.

I watched until 4:00 am and then went back to bed and I paid the price all day with being very tired. I took several naps.

Wednesday May 4 - Can't believe it's May already. Every month that passes is a month closer to the end of this journey that I have been on.

I went to see my breast surgeon. There is still a small amount of fluid building up in the area under my arm. She wants to see me next week as well. Soon this fluid will be absorbed by my body but until then she needs to pull it out with a syringe. No pain, just inconvenient.

I had dinner with a female friend and I wore a bra for the first time with my little pad on the right side. I felt somewhat normal but then only I know that my breast is not there. We joked about reconstruction and she suggested that I have the other breast "enhanced" when I have it done. Then I can have a body like the Hollywood stars. We laughed about it. But you never know.

Thursday May 5 – Cinco de Mayo today. I went to my mountain to climb for the first time since my surgery. I was a little shaky but I made it up as far as the second bench, .6 of a mile. I tried some push-ups off the bench and it hurt a little so I stopped. I am continually stretching my arm to regain flexibility. It is amazingly supple; however I still have some pain if I stretch too far.

Friday May 6 – Went over to the YMCA to work out for the first time since before surgery. My energy level is coming back and it felt good. I did a full twenty five minutes on the elliptical. I didn't do intervals but I think next week I'll ramp it up some. Then I very carefully worked on the weight machines and I was able to do almost as much as I had before the surgery. I am getting there.

Saturday May 7 - I decided to do my jog/run early today so that I wouldn't be fighting the heat. Again first run since surgery. And it was delightful. I ran most of the way, very slowly of course, but I wasn't tired and my joints held up which amazed me as I have been feeling my bursitis lately. It was a great run. I am energized.

Took the dogs to the dog park and then came home and worked on some paper work, bills and such and then read for awhile. I did some laundry later and I still have energy to spare.

Monday May 9 - Yesterday was Mother's Day. I started the day by taking the dogs for a walk on the canal after breakfast. It was still cool, but the sun was shining, promising to bring the heat of the afternoon. We saw mother ducks on the water with their babies swimming around them to keep up with the current. Of course my Brittany was intent on jumping in the water to catch one or more of them. But I didn't allow her.

I had a friend over later for dinner. I didn't wear my wig because it was too warm. In fact I took off my scarf and was bare headed and it felt good. My hair is about an inch long and still fuzzy like; not long enough to go out in public, but it is okay around the house. And my eyebrows are slowly coming back and I see little stubs of eyelashes. My fingernails are still lifting in places with a few black streaks. I think it will take awhile for those to grow back normally. I keep them very short and sometimes put on nail polish when I go out to cover them up.

I commented to my friend that overall I am feeling quite normal again for the first time in months. The stress and shaky feelings are gone, my appetite is back to normal, I am sleeping well and my energy level is coming up. But I most always slept well throughout all of this time with the exception of a few days when I was super stressed.

I'm fudging a little on my diet, eating some sugar, chocolate, a little cheese. I added decaf coffee to my breakfast menu. And on the weekends I drink a beer and maybe a glass of wine. I am feeling that I can't deprive myself of all of the things that I love. I tested my PH today and it was still in the good range, although that will vary throughout the day.

Thursday May 12 - I made a feeble attempt to climb my mountain. My eyes were burning from an eye allergy that I have off and on and I experienced vertigo at one point and had to sit down. Someone asked if I was all right and I said that I would be. The May flies were out as well, swarming around me, getting into my mouth when I opened it, my ears and nose. Very unpleasant morning.

Back to the radiation doctor to record the areas of treatment. Photos are taken of the areas in order to maintain the treatments uniformly in the same area for each treatment. The nurse technician then places five small tattoos to delineate the perimeters of the treatment area for placement of the radiation machine each treatment. I have to say in all that I have endured, five months of chemo treatment, breast surgery, this was the most painful that I have yet to experience. In fact I had been thinking of getting a small tattoo on my new reconstructed breast, maybe a small rosebud. But no more. It is too painful.

The doctor examines me and tells me that I will start treatment next Tuesday. My incision from the breast surgery has not healing as fast as he would like. So next Tuesday it is.

Friday May 13 – I went for my workout at the Y today but was still tired and feeling the effects of eye allergy although it is getting better. I did what I could but it wasn't my best.

Saturday May 14 – Tried to do my run today and again was pretty tired. Came home and took the dogs to the dog park then came home and took a nap. Some days are like that. I must say that I am also worried about the radiation, not knowing what to expect. Some tell me that it is easy even though I will be fatigued and then some have told me that it can be very difficult. I would guess like everything else it depends on the individual.

Tuesday May 17 – Well today is the day for my first radiation treatment. I arrive early, sign in, go to the dressing area and put on the fetching hospital gown as I have been instructed to do and wait in the waiting area. There are only a couple of other people waiting there. I am then taken in to where the machine is. The two technicians place me on the table, position me and line up the quadrants with the tattoos and then place a metallic scarf over the area to be treated. They then tell me to hold very still, but breath normally and then they step out of the room. The head of the machine rolls to the left of my body and then I hear beeping/honking sounds coming from it. Then it rolls to other side and disappears momentarily and the sounds occur again. The machine then rises from my side like some kind of monster and is positioned over my neck area. The technician comes in and removes the metal scarf and then steps out again while they treat my clavicle area on the right side. And then it is done. Fifteen minutes total. I felt nothing and don't feel any side effects yet. I am told to apply moisturizer to the treatment area when I get home and I do that. And I was so worried.

Thursday May 19 – Climbed my mountain today. What a difference from last week. I was full of energy and climbed up to the highest point just below the switch backs. I then went home, had lunch and prepared for my radiation.

One note here; I am noticing that I am having small twinges of pain coming from where breast was. It's almost like having a phantom breast. It is only bothersome, not too bad. I think what is happening is that the nerve endings are "waking up" little by little. The whole area where my breast was removed and under the arm, has no feeling at all. The doctor told me to expect this.

Saturday May 21 – I did not work out yesterday as the facility was closed due to painting. I did get up early this morning and ran my four miles and it felt very good. I am getting my energy back little by little.

I attended my writer's club meeting at noon today and it was good to see my writing friends again. I am thinking about cutting back on my responsibilities with the club as I intend to do some traveling in the near future. My priorities have changed and I feel that I need to do the things that I have been putting off for many years.

Monday May 23 – Saw the doctor today for my weekly visit with him. All seems to be going according to plan. He mentioned that I should not miss a radiation treatment if I could help. He does not know me well yet. I have never missed any of my treatments. I need to keep moving forward so that I am done with all of this and then I can move on to better endeavors in my life.

Friday May 27 – It is my birthday today. I am glad to be having one and look forward to many more. I received flowers early in the day from a friend in Washington State.

I dress in some new shorts and a new top; it is going to be warm today. And I go to my treatment without my wig. This is the first time I have gone public without the wig. I

don't have that much hair yet, but it looks kind of funky and I think I can get by with it. Besides, it's hot today and I feel much more comfortable without the wig.

I arrive at Banner on time for my radiation and as I am standing by the nurse's station, they were talking about my state of being wigless, one of the nurses comes out with a large happy birthday balloon with a small package of little soaps attached and they all sing happy birthday to me. I am embarrassed, but how sweet of them to do that.

More flowers when I get home, from my son who had called me earlier. I feel the love.

It is out to dinner with my writing friends; they are taking me to dinner to celebrate. Again I leave my wig at home and when I get to the restaurant everyone loves my new "hair style". I feel so liberated. There are six of us and we have a wonderful, laughing good time with good food and good wine. We had two deserts for everyone to share and most didn't want much so I benefited. I can enjoy life again.

Saturday May 28th – Still in a celebratory mood, it is out to dinner with another friend. More good food and then on to the yogurt store for a special treat and more presents. How can I be so fortunate?

Monday May 30th – A day off from treatment. Spend the day writing and tidying up the house.

Tuesday May 31 – I see the doctor again. He asks me if I am fatigued and I say no more than usual. He thinks I won't experience as much fatigue as others, thank goodness. Like some have said the radiation is much easier than the chemo and now I believe it. Also I am having minimal burning of the skin, in the area of treatment, but I put on gobs of lotion and Vaseline right after the treatment and that seems to help.

Thursday June 2 – I have a dental appointment this morning to have my teeth cleaned. I have had to put this off during my chemo treatments but now it is time. My dental hygienist, who has become a good friend as well, I have been going to the same dentist for years, wants to know all about my cancer. And she knows many people as well who have had breast and other types of cancer. I heard recently that one on three people in our country will have some form of cancer in their lifetime. Very high statistics.

I have my treatment and then go on to the Y for a workout. I am feeling good, lots of energy.

Friday June 3 – I go over to the mountain early as it is getting hot now and I don't want to be hiking in the heat. I have to make sure that the area where I am being treated is well covered as I was told not to expose it to the sun. So a lot of sun screen and a big t-shirt fill the bill for today. Also I am taking my new hiking boots (my birthday present to me) for a test run. They are Vasques and they are very comfortable. My old boots didn't fit me any longer and I gave them away last year. Love the new ones. Getting prepared for hiking Washington Cascades in early September. Something to look forward to.

Today is also a milestone. I am half way done with radiation, three weeks done and only three to go. It is going fast.

Saturday June 4 – Get up early and have breakfast of blueberry pancakes and then I am out the door for my four mile run. A couple of months ago it was a run and walk, but now I am able to run the whole way and I am doing the full route that I was doing before I started chemo. I am getting stronger every day.

One thing that I am noticing is that although the side affects from the radiation are minimal there are still leftover side affects from the chemo. I still occasionally have some dry mouth and my fingers and toes have not fully regained full circulation yet. I am also having some irritable bowel problem, gas and bloating and some loose bowels. Not enough to keep me from functioning normally in my daytime activities, but just bothersome. The chemo takes a real toll on the digestive track and I would imagine it will take time for all of that to heal. Apatite is good. I am not eating as much as I was before. I don't want to gain all the weight back again. 120 pounds is just right for me.

Tuesday June 7 – Each day is a new day and when you wake up you never know what you're going to get. Yesterday, Monday, I went to my radiation treatment as usual and then came home and read for awhile, fed the dogs, had dinner. And then I had this pain in my right shoulder and I had trouble breathing. I called the doctor immediately and he told me to take an Advil and see if the condition would go away. Well it didn't and I had trouble sleeping all night long. I called the doctor in the morning and he said to come in. When I arrived he examined me, couldn't find anything really wrong, lungs were clear, vitals were good. He sent me for an x-ray and when I came back to the radiation area he looked at me again and told me to go to emergency. He was thinking pulmonary embolism, which didn't really make sense because I am not a good candidate for that; I am not overweight, my cholesterol and blood pressure are excellent.

They took me in a wheel chair to emergency on the other side of the hospital and admitted me. I sat for an hour before a nurse came and asked some questions, then another hour before a doctor came. I had to call radiation to get someone to tell them I was there. I know, there were lots of people waiting, but I thought you could die in emergency waiting these days. They put an IV in, took blood, wanted to give me morphine and Zofran and some other drugs which I refused. I went for a CT scan and then waited some more. Around five the doctor came and told me that I had pleurisy and they would give me an anti inflammatory medication for it and I should be fine within hours. They then wanted to admit me and I said no.

I finally arrived at home at eight o'clock after picking up my medication. I took one pill after having a bowl of cereal, I wasn't very hungry after the day's events and it hurt with every breath. I went to bed and fell asleep and woke up at one AM, ate a snack and took another pill and went back to bed and to sleep. I have to say here that sleeping is not a problem for me, I can do it on command. I woke the next morning and felt much better..

I called the doctor and asked if I could have a couple of days off from radiation and he agreed. The problem is that the radiation is just grazing the lung area and caused this inflammation. I hope I can manage this. Otherwise I was doing so well, very little fatigue and minimal burning of the skin. But into each life.....

Friday June 10 – I have not been to radiation for the last couple of days, nice break. They called about noon and told me that I didn't have to come in today, the radiation machine was broken. Ah, this is good. But I will have to make up these days.

Saturday June 11 – I decided that I would get out into the yard and do some cleaning up and trimming since I can't jog for awhile. The doctor thinks it is too jarring for my lungs. Bummer. I love to run and yard work is a poor substitute, but I don't want to have anymore problems.

Sunday June 12 – Took the dogs to the dog park and they had fun. I came home and finished my yard project and then came inside to do some house work and laundry, looking forward to reading later on. I have found a wonderful new mystery writer whose stories take place in San Francisco. He's a great writer and I love reading about my favorite city.

Monday June 13 – I am cutting back on the workouts this week as much as I hate to do that. I am walking nearly every day, but no running. After this is finished I can slowly work back into my routine.

Thursday June 16 – Went over to climb my mountain, only part way today. Felt pretty good. It is getting hot. The snakes are out and I saw a beautiful lizards. Summer is on its way.

Saturday June 18th – Wanting to do my run, but instead decided to walk the same route, the four miles and it felt very good. I started very early so it was still pretty cool out. I then took the dogs to the dog park; this is their day to go. Spent the rest of the reading and taking it easy.

A friend called and we decided to go to McDonalds for dinner. And they have the best Angus burger, it was delicious. I have never been much for the fast foods but I have been doing a comparison between the fast food burger restaurants and so far McDonalds wins. Fortunately I can eat all I want these days as my body isn't metabolizing as it used to and I am maintaining my 120 pounds week after week and still eating highly caloric foods. I hope this lasts, but it probably won't. I love to eat.

Monday June 20 – I am finally learning how to flow with this. It has taken awhile. I figure for the next two weeks I am not going to do much of anything taxing. This will be over soon and I can get back to my frenetic lifestyle soon enough.

Monday June 27 – Mowed the lawn, did some laundry and cleaned up my office. Then spent the rest of the day reading and playing with the dogs.

Tuesday June 28 – Life is good. I am at peace with myself. I haven't done much of anything the past several days. This is dog park day and we went to the Rose Mofford Park off of Dunlap. The dogs love this park, especially Lily because there seem to be more birds to chase. Wimbledon is on and I love watching tennis. I have another wonderful novel to read. No pressure. I will look back on these days as very pleasant.

Wednesday June 29 – Today is my last day of the heavy radiation treatment. I then have to have another six days of what they call boost treatment to treat the area around the scar. I didn't find this out until last week and I was a little put out that I wasn't told this up front. But I am in agreement with the treatment as I have heard of women going through the surgery and treatments and then the cancer comes back in the scar area. And of course this tells me how virulent this cancer is. It is very strong and it takes strong measures to kill it off and I won't know whether I am cured for five years; it still could come back. And if it does than I will be fighting it for the rest of my life. But I take a positive look at this and think that we got this in time and I am going to live to be a ripe old age.

The side effects have been minimal. Again I expected the worst and it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. I am not as fatigued as I expected. I carry on a near normal life. The only real bothersome thing is my skin being severely burned where they were treating me. It almost looks like dead meat. Ugh. But that will heal in time and I look forward to the day that I have my breast reconstruction.