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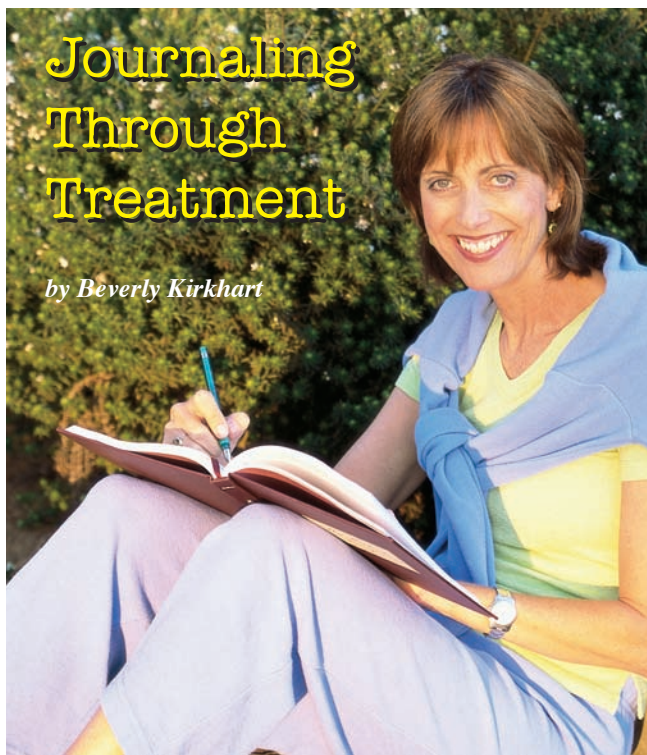
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Journaling Through Treatment

by Beverly Kirkhart



When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in October 1993, I was told that my tumor was aggressive and I had a 40 percent chance of survival. Just getting out of bed each morning and facing each day was extremely difficult, depressing, and daunting. I found myself consumed with thoughts of anger and extreme sadness. I would have remained in this depressed state if I hadn't discovered the power of journaling.

As I freely wrote, I began to understand why I felt the way I did.

I learned early on in my treatments that I needed to change my attitude, especially about myself. My self-esteem had fallen into a black hole. I had a chorus of negative voices singing in my mind: *I'm not good enough, I'm damaged goods, I'm not worthy of happiness.* Whenever I looked in the mirror I saw no beauty in my reflection. I was off the charts on the self-insult meter. I had to find a way to silence the self-critic.

Out of desperation, I opened a blank journal and began feverishly recording my thoughts and feelings. This was not easy for me at first. Up until this time, I had avoided writing at all costs. But when cancer struck, I truly let go of the fear and self-judgment and just let the pen flow. As I freely wrote, I began to understand why I felt the way I did. By clearing out my emotions, I made room for positive healing images.

My source of hope, in addition to the wisdom of other cancer survivors and the compassion of my caregivers, was

my journal. Within the pages of my journal I wrote out my fears and anger, along with my hopes, desires and positive affirmations. Journaling provided a safe place for me to express my desperate desire to feel good about my body and myself. It was my friend, confidant and trusted companion that provided a safe place for me to express these overwhelming, mixed-up emotions.

By keeping a journal, I came to realize that my identity wasn't that I had cancer, but rather that I was a creative individual with God-given gifts. In trying to survive I got more than I'd bargained for. I rediscovered my strengths and my beauty from the inside out, which served me well in regaining my health and turning setbacks into comebacks.

In an odd but wonderful way, cancer changed my life for the better. It gave me the glorious opportunity to experience the benefits of journaling and discover a passion to share with others. This led to the publishing of my journal in book form, entitled *My Healing Companion*.

It is my hope, from my speaking engagements and through my book, that people who are newly diagnosed with cancer will gain an intense appreciation for all that surrounds them, and truly learn to see the beauty and wonder in others, the world, and especially in themselves. And, most importantly, discover there is life during and after cancer.

Editor's Note: Beverly Kirkhart is an author and speaker and can be contacted through her Web site at www.beverlykirkhart.com. ■

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