

Take the 'Why Me?' Out of Cancer

by Beverly Kirkhart

When I first heard that I had breast cancer, I saw in my mind's eye my mother's slow painful journey with cancer, and I quickly flashed on other relatives and friends who did not survive this disease. I was scared that I, too, would become one of them – a statistic. I asked myself: *Why Me?* Have you ever asked yourself this question?

Sitting across from my doctor I cried out, "No, this can't be true! I've just lost everything I treasure and love in my life and now you're telling me I have cancer. Why me, doctor?" Just a year

experienced them. It wasn't easy, yet with time and a lot of hard work, I found ways to turn the negative attitude of "why me?" into living with a spirit of "why not me?" However, I am aware that not everyone asks the "why me?" question. As I travel across the nation speaking to cancer survivors, I frequently hear, "I never thought 'why me?'" In fact my younger sister, who is also a breast cancer survivor, always told the family, "If it is going to happen to someone, why not me?"

Each one of us is uniquely different in how we react to a cancer diagnosis.

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prior to being diagnosed I was devastated and overwhelmed from a divorce, bankruptcy, and unemployment. When hearing that I had cancer I found myself, once again, careening down an emotional precipice. I thought to myself, "Why cancer? Why me? Haven't I had to deal with enough tragedy in my life?"

During the most desolate times in our lives – facing a catastrophic illness like cancer, loss of a loved one, divorce, or being fired from a job – we may feel our tragedies are insurmountable. It would be much easier to turn away from our frightening thoughts and feelings than to deal with them.

These frightening thoughts are gut-wrenching. I know because I have

Our response to our situation can determine our outcome. The key is to not allow ourselves to continue to live in a place of emotional turmoil; this doesn't serve the healing process. This is not to say that you should deny the fear or anger or the "why me?" attitude. I surely didn't. Instead, I urge you to call upon all of your strength and that of those around you to help you find an acceptance to your illness. If you are a spiritual person, rely heavily on your faith to pull yourself up to a place where you can still be glad to be alive.

On my cancer journey I discovered some helpful tips in shifting my negative attitude. As I applied these tips, I turned my setback into a comeback

and emerged as a stronger, more positive person. The following tips may work for you, too.

✓ **Affirmation Wallpaper** Fill your bedroom wall with colorful sticky notes, with phrases like "I am beautiful," "I am healthy," "I am worthy of happiness." Repeat these affirmations daily, and soon you will find your negative self-critic being replaced with positive images. By shifting to a positive attitude, you can find the courage and strength to take back your life.

✓ **Turn Back to Give Back** Volunteer. Share your story – you didn't just survive, you learned valuable lessons from your experience. Help others to discover there is life after cancer. By focusing on others, we are taking out the "why me?" and are moving into a place of passion to ease the burden of others on their journey.

✓ **Who Can I Talk To?** Surround yourself with people who believe in you and reach out to them for the courage, strength, and inspiration you might be lacking.

✓ **Banish the Blues** Laughter is healing. Find ways to turn a disheartened attitude into playful consciousness. Laughter and humor are important tools for recovery, along with hope, the will to live, faith, positive thoughts, determination, and love.

✓ **Gratitude Journal** Before you go to bed each night, record all of the wonderful people and things that came into your life that day and why you are grateful for them or the blessings you have received.

On that October day in 1993, when I heard that I had cancer, I thought I would never be a lover of life again.



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The truth is that by making the choice to have a positive attitude, and actively turning back to help others, I found life to be more meaningful than ever.

Editor's Note: Beverly Kirkhart is a nationally acclaimed speaker, author of *My Healing Companion*, and co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Surviving Soul*. She can be contacted through her Web site, www.beverlykirkhart.com. ■