

I'm Not Normal I'm a Cancer Survivor

Life with Cancer

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I've tried to be normal for over 2 years now and I just can't do it! To you, I may look normal, sound normal, smile when I should and argue when I shouldn't, but behind the façade is a person acting out a role. Why? Because cancer changes your life. Normal went out the window.



If you've ever been in an oncology clinic, you will probably have seen that poem, taped to the wall, about what cancer cannot do..."It cannot rob you of your smile, it cannot steal your hope..." etc. etc. and it's very true. But what it can do is make you feel like a pear in an apple basket. That's probably why I like hanging around with other pears. We can all be pear-shaped together.

In groups, we don't have to pretend to be what we're not. I don't have to hide the fact that I'm a one errand a day girl. That days are classified by 2 naps= bad, 1 nap= good, no naps = I'll regret it tomorrow. I can groan when I stand up because my joints have seized, say "ouch" when I walk because the soles of my feet hurt, happily turn my neck and demonstrate the load clicking noises it makes, and I don't always have to be upbeat.

I can recount stories from my list of "Oh my God I don't believe I just did that", which includes, putting margarine in my coffee and nearly pouring milk on my toast, trying to clean my teeth with soap, and not being able to write an email without triple checking it (what I think I'm writing is never actually what I wrote!). I don't feel bad when I forget people's names, or suddenly can't remember the word for that thing you do when you get in a car. I can be sub-normal and feel good about it.

Ah but time, you say, The Great Healer. What peeves me about time is that it's a two edged sword. Yes the longer I'm in remission the fewer side effects I should

have, and the less likely it is that my cancer will come back. But, and it's a big but, the further out I get, the more I have to lose. Why? Because, the more hints I get of what it's like to be normal again.

None of us like to think that cancer robbed us of our past lives. I'm as big a proponent as anyone that cancer benefits your life and makes it stronger, makes it blessed. But sometimes, when I spend a lot of time with you normal folk, I just get tired of the charade. Instead of acting out 'It's a Wonderful Life' I'd rather be playing Guess Who I Am. And, the truth is, I'm still trying to figure that one out.

We all deal with it in our different ways. Some people deny that it ever happened and never talk about it. Others pour out their hearts. To be honest I'm always too happy to tell people I've had cancer. I feel their expectations of me are so much lower! So when I goof up, which is often, I'll get that sympathetic, "Oh it must be the chemotherapy" look rather than a startled "OMG is she crazy?"

So to be upbeat for a moment (and no I'm not pretending), rather than categorizing ourselves as exhausted or full of energy, struggling with pain or pain-free, feeling normal or abnormal, let's think of it in a different way. Because when my husband complains that I can't recall a word of the conversation we've just had, I'd rather tell him "well Honey, that's just because I'm special."

Kay Kerbyson is an Associate Board Member of the Los Alamos Council on Cancer, and Founder/President of Ovarian Cancer Together Inc., the only non-profit specifically supporting women in New Mexico with ovarian cancer. Resources, support and education materials, for those effected by cancer, can be found at www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org and www.ovariancancertogether.org

