

Spirit is My Sixth Sense

Life with Cancer

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September is ovarian cancer awareness month, and, as a survivor, it always reminds me that life is definitely a journey. Most of us forget to value what we find most precious, and many just get lost in the day to day humdrum of the 24 hour cycle. Sometimes it just takes a good day to re-find our spirit. But other times it takes a miracle.



It had been a tough couple of years. I often joked that when our container of possessions came over to the States from England in Jan 2001, a giant mirror must have broken on the ship, because it definitely felt like we were getting a lot of bad luck.

After we arrived, we struggled for 4 years to start a family. If you haven't been through infertility, I can only explain it as having to re-mourn a tremendous loss, month after month. But then in 2004, against all the odds, we brought beautiful baby twins into the world. It seemed like things were looking up. But whilst parenthood is supposed to bring joy and contentment into your life, and it did, for two inexperienced baby people, it was one of the hardest years ever. But a year passed, life was getting easier, sleep deprivation was definitely getting less, and I finally thought we were getting back on our feet. But life often has other things in store. Two weeks before the twins first birthday, my husband was diagnosed with cancer. It was completely out of the blue – in his 30s, healthy, no risk factors – wham!

Eighteen months later, after surgery, chemo, and survivorship (and that's no mean feat) we were finally beginning to relax again. But physically, I felt lousy: bloating, digestive irregularities, tired all the time. I started horse riding with my doctor friend. I'd ridden as a child and loved it and thought it would help me get fit mentally and emotionally. We'd trail White Rock and look in awe at the beautiful scenery. I always rode a sweet older horse. He'd trundle along, trot or cantor when I wanted him to, but always have just the gentlest of nature.

Then one day, that sweet old horse seemed to be in a bad mood. He wouldn't walk, trotted my insides upside down and just seemed to want me off his back. I thought nothing of it at the time, only realizing later that he was trying to tell me something. When I got off I felt as though my insides had been through a blender, and to boot, I immediately got what I thought was a

bladder infection. That's what sent me to the doctor and, two weeks later, found a diagnosis of late stage ovarian cancer.

Some people say animals can smell cancer, some say that they instinctively know something is wrong and try to tell you. Well if it wasn't for him, I probably wouldn't be here today. My cancer was very close to breaking through to my lungs, and with no obvious symptoms until that day, it would probably have been at least another month or two before it was found. Did he know? Or was he just grumpy? I know which I believe, because that day he imparted to me something much more than the incentive to go to the doctors. He gave me a determination, maybe even desperation, to grab life by the horns and squeeze every last ounce out of it. Why? Because it wasn't just what he did that made a difference to my life. It was his name. Spirit. It was what I had lost, and he gave it back to me. And for that I will be eternally grateful.

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