

# April Fools' Day and the "C" Word

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**April 1, 2004...April Fools' Day.** I was walking into my most critical meeting since being hired two years ago as the Executive Director of a local non-profit that helps grieving children. The office phone rang, and the receptionist told me my doctor was calling.

"Donna, this is Dr. Mitchell." I stopped breathing. "The test results were not what I expected. The pathologist confirmed a small area of cancer." Stunned, I reached for a chair and managed to utter, "What do I do next?" "You need to contact a surgeon as soon as possible," she stated. "Can't I wait until after the wedding in two months?" I asked. "No, I encourage you to call the surgeon this week."

I hung up the phone in a daze, pulled myself together and entered a stressful meeting in which we determined how we would raise the budget shortfall of nearly \$100,000 within three months.

I stumbled to my office after the meeting and called my fiancé. Then I cried.

*"God, how can this be happening to me? And why now? Only two months before my wedding. What if it spreads...will I die? What about my kids?"* The questions pounded my head as if it were a punching bag. Tiny arrows seemed to pierce my heart. And all sense of peace, hope, and joy momentarily left my soul.

The next three months were surreal; I felt as though the world was spinning around me as I watched from outside my body.

Two surgeries to remove the breast cancer. A golf tournament for the non-profit. Doctor appointments. A car accident that totaled my 16-year-old daughter's car. A wedding followed by a honeymoon. A move and the merging of two families. A stressful, but successful fundraising campaign. A college son in a depression. Radiation.

Why does it take a life-threatening incident to make us become serious about taking care of ourselves?? Stress, exercise, and diet are repeated incessantly in nearly every book and article regarding the prevention of cancer. I had ignored this advice since I was healthy and handled stress well...or so I thought.

After discovering my life was totally out of balance, I made the decision to jump off the merry-go-round and put myself through what I called 'stress detox.' For me, that meant resigning a position I loved and, for the first time in my life, taking care of me.

Fortunately, my prognosis is outstanding. I am cancer-free, I've started an exercise program, and I'm watching my diet more closely. My strong faith sustained me and continues to give me strength. I have started a very successful personal coaching business. I am determined to keep my stress levels reasonable and to maintain balance in my life.

**Don't wait...detox yourself now.** *I was lucky...very lucky.* Cancer was a piercing wake-up call. I challenge you to evaluate the balance in your own life and to encourage your spouse, family and friends to do the same. Are you exercising, eating well, and maintaining a healthy stress level??

**Don't let my April Fools surprise be yours.**

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