

Coming Full Circle as a Caregiver

by Susan Beausang

I never stop learning from my mother. Through Mom, I am learning what it is like to make your way through cancer treatment at the age of 89. It is nothing like the mom I witnessed facing and beating cancer over 30 years ago. The medical system, cancer treatment, and most importantly, Mom have changed.

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This experience guiding, caring, and advocating for Mom has me more convinced than ever of the importance of patient advocates and personal caregivers.

Mom has lymphoma, the bad and the good kind, depending on how you look at it. It is fast-growing, but for that reason, more treatable. In some important respects, Mom has journeyed this path before, walking both sides of the care line – giver and receiver. After beating

breast cancer, she was there for my father through his struggle with pancreatic cancer. I was there for Dad too, but it was different. My dad was a doctor, still fairly young and confident, and he had my mom to lean on and respond to his needs.

Having survived breast cancer and a radical mastectomy, and having been

by my father's side through his journey with pancreatic cancer, Mom always swore that if she ever again faced cancer, she would not seek treatment. She has changed her mind. She is receiving chemotherapy and has been doing remarkably well with that aspect of her care. And I am here, walking beside her.

Patient caregiving and advocacy has gone from being the frosting on the medical care cake to being the flour.

Patient advocacy is just one of many aspects of caregiving. After doctor's visits and trips to the pharmacy, most caregiving happens at home. From monitoring and administering her medication, to seeing her through sleepless nights, to finding and creating activities or social situations that improve her quality of life, caring for a loved one is a gift.



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I began this journey more scared than my mom, but with each passing day, my gratitude grows. I'm thankful I have this opportunity to be her foundation, to be her guide, to be her emotional pillar. It is a mother-daughter relationship come full circle.

Editor's Note: Susan Beausang is the president of 4Women.com, which aims to help women and girls cope with the emotional upheaval of medical hair loss and to advocate for greater understanding of the emotional impact of medical hair loss. An alopecian and a previvor, Susan is bald but cancer-free. ■