

ARTICLE FOR THE DECEMBER ISSUE OF THE HOPE TREE WEBSITE:  
By Deborah Spooner

Well here I am, two years after placing my “hopes” inside the Hope Tree, still living optimistically and moving forward! I was thrilled to have the opportunity in 2009 to share my treasures with the Hope Tree, and after doing so I had a wonderful, uninterrupted time of good health. I took a bicycle trip around Holland in the spring of 2009. On that trip I was thrilled to find the place in Leiden Holland where my ancestors from England settled before setting sail for the Pilgrim Village in Plymouth Massachusetts. Right around that time I was also diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer to the bones and liver. I was very fortunate that I was able to take an oral chemo which gave me incredible freedom to travel, work, play, etc. A year after I started the oral chemo I became resistant to it and began infusions. Since then I have been on a steady regiment of chemo. Most recently I started a BRAND NEW chemotherapy that takes only 5 minutes (2 out of every 3 Mondays) to “push” into the vein. It is truly amazing what scientists are learning, ALL THE TIME, and I feel very blessed to benefit from their genius, research and hard work!

In the recent “Hope Tree Website” publication I noticed that Carol spoke of hope and optimism and how they are different. I would like to continue that discussion and comment on that theme:

I agree with Carol that optimism is a general way of being in the world and seeing the world...it is a way of meeting the future with excitement! Hope, on the other hand seems much more focused and specific. In my lifetime I have tried to squeeze the good out of every day and live seeing the glass as half full. That is what I call optimism. I also hope for lots of things... for years I hoped that my breast cancer would never return. It did, and now I hope for every day to be a good one...

However, I recently realized that something had undermined my hope and I had been oblivious to that. Here is what happened:

When I first found my way to the Breast Center at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center after discovering that my cancer had recurred following a double mastectomy and a 22 year hiatus, a receptionist who did not know that my cancer was “Stage IV”, made a careless statement to me as I checked in. She innocently said, ” you are so lucky that you came here... if you had come here with stage four breast cancer your odds of living 5 years would be 14% as opposed to 3% somewhere else”. I looked straight at her and said “WOW, so that is what I am looking at?” Of course she was embarrassed and had assumed that my cancer was early stage.

Since that time four and a half years ago, I have been “going along” famously and living life fully. I have traveled to Hawaii on numerous occasions, biked in Europe, traveled to the West Coast of the USA, the East Coast of the USA, and many many places in between. I have felt good and always have trusted my amazing doctor and “partner” in the journey to steer me the right ways. I take chemo regularly, and then move along with my life! I have lived optimistically, seeing the glass as half full. However, recently I realized that my degree of hope had been damaged and somewhat undermined by having heard, 4 ½ years ago, that my chances for surviving 5 years were 3% to 14%. I realized that I was spending time doing things that were not normal for me... I sought out a conversation with my “Power of Attorney” to make sure that all was in place. I reviewed my list of beneficiaries on my assets and investments. Finally, in spite of the fact that I didn’t feel very well, I made a point to travel to see my Dad in Florida and my brother in W. Virginia. Without my even realizing it, the words of the receptionist had stuck in my head and were telling me that “my time was coming”.

Then 2 weeks ago I saw my amazing doctor, Virginia Borges. at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center and I told her about my “fears”, which I had become aware of. My hope to survive beyond 5 years had been seriously undermined. Dr. Borges looked straight at me and said, “you need to change your thinking”. then she proceeded to tell me a story about a man that she had treated in Boston. The man had been diagnosed with a cancer that he researched on line. He read that the type of cancer he had took the lives of most people by 24 months post diagnosis. Dr. Borges told me that in the course of the almost 2 years that she treated him he did very well with his therapies. However, prior to the 24 month anniversary of his diagnosis, he sought Dr. Borges out to say “good-bye”. At that time she examined him and told him that his disease was in good control and there was no need for “good byes”... cancer would not be taking his life any time soon. He replied that he was coming up on 24 months of survival, and that was how long he was *supposed to live*.

Dr. Borges told me that there was no medical reason for him to die, yet at 23 months post diagnosis he did. For me there is such a powerful lesson in this man’s story. which is that I cannot let *anyone or anything* (like a comment or my own brain) take away my hope - ever.

I certainly have days when I don’t feel great and on those days I will, once in a GREAT WHILE, let myself have a small and “time limited” pity party. I will allow myself to feel sad and grieve the loss of lots of things that I can’t do well anymore. My body feels so much older than it should, too. Then after acknowledging my own sadness I know that it is time to get back in the saddle and LIVE LIFE like there is no tomorrow!

As I recently told a friend, “cancer has given me far more than it has taken from me”... and I have the good fortune to know that life is finite and that every day matters. Now I know, (thanks in large part to Dr. Borges and the HOPE that she gives me), that I am getting ready to start my second set of 5 years of LIVING IN THE MOMENT... How fortunate am I!