

Cancer survivors are thankful for every day



BARB GUY

Suzy was only 33 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. I was 17 at the time. Looking back, there were some mistakes made in Suzy's care and maybe because of that, or maybe not, Suzy got worse instead of better.

Soon she was told her cancer was Stage 4, meaning it had spread to other organs in her body and it was still growing. Cancer and breasts were still pretty hush-hush topics back then, but Betty Ford, first lady of the United States, had breast cancer in 1974 and she had made the courageous decision to disclose her illness and treatment to the American people.

Suzy was inspired by Mrs. Ford. She did her best to fight as hard and be as strong as the first lady had been.

While Suzy was being treated but growing ever sicker, her sister

found a lump in her own breast; then another and another. The strain on the two grown sisters and their parents was intense. Suzy remained the only one with cancer; her sister's lumps were all benign.

As Suzy took chemotherapy treatments she lost her hair and became gravely ill. She was known for her great sense of humor but the grim, unwelcoming waiting areas and treatment rooms were nearly as hard on her as the cancer. She told her sister that when she got well they should form a team, Suzy improving the aesthetics of the cancer patient's experience and sister Nan working on speeding the grindingly slow research on how to treat breast cancer.

Suzy didn't live to do any work on beautifying waiting rooms, but her grieving sister Nancy used \$200 and a typewriter to form the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, now called Susan G. Komen for the Cure. The organization has raised more than \$1 billion and become the world's largest breast cancer charity. The group's first fundraising Race for the Cure 5K run/walk had 800 participants. Today, organizers of the annual Salt Lake City walk alone are planning for 17,000 people.

Komen also hosts Salute to Survivors luncheons. In Salt

Lake, it's a fancy annual affair at Little America. I went to the luncheon for the first time last year, only due to the pleading of my darling friend Jules, who is a breast cancer survivor. Even though I'm a breast cancer survivor, too, I didn't want to go. In the end, though, my love for Jules and the promise of a cash bar won out.

The luncheon is free to any and all breast cancer survivors; guests pay to join in. The event turned out to be a really nice time. There were good speakers, free gifts and a posh lunch. But then again, anything with Jules is fun.

Not long afterwards, Jules got word that her breast cancer had recurred and she had to go back into cancer world. This insidious disease and what it does to people I love makes me apoplectic. Jules is doing really well; she and I will be at the luncheon again this year, standing up when they call for survivors to rise.

I'm planning to participate in Salt Lake City's May 9 Race for the Cure, too, and only partly because I'm the honorary chair of the event. I'm forming a team of good-hearted walkers and I'll leave my comfort zone far behind to join in a very public display of healthy exercise with other people who want to kill off breast cancer once and for all.

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Race for the Cure participants get white T-shirts for the event, except for the breast cancer survivors. We'll be the ones in pink, thanking our lucky stars for the day.

BARB GUY is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.