

# An Imagination Run Wild

Category: Awaiting a Diagnosis

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | August 1, 2025

I have had four breast biopsies. The procedures did not hurt since they occurred when I was in a twilight sleep. What caused me pain, however, was waiting for the results.

My imagination would run wild. Would I need a single or double mastectomy? Would I have implants or just live my life with a flat chest as I did through most of my teenage years? Would the cancer be stage 4 and have spread to lymph nodes? How much time would I have left to create memories with my beloved children?

Never did my mind turn to the positive—that the results would be benign, acknowledging only that I have thick breast tissue. Never did I ease up on myself because that is not my nature; I am a worrier who jumps from A—best case scenario—to Z—worst case scenario—in any situation that has no conclusive ending.

My proclivity to assume the worst has not served me well. It has led to gobbling dark chocolate M&Ms, my comfort food, in unhealthy amounts. It has caused sleepless nights and days when I am short-tempered and unable to settle down with a book or television show. It has also deprived me of the daily naps that I cherish. An imagination gone wild leaves me vulnerable and frightened, catastrophizing that a hospice stay followed by a painful death awaits me.

All four biopsies were, thankfully, benign. I can barely see the scars they caused. But every year as my annual mammogram approaches, I decline once more into anxiety. Oh, I am fine during the actual test. I chat with the technician, don't cringe when my bare skin touches the cold machine or when the machine squeezes my breasts, and hold my breath when told to do so. I engage in upbeat conversations with the other women in the waiting room. As we talk about the news or a book we have recently enjoyed, however, I wonder if they, too, have waiting angst—if the time between the mammogram and getting the results causes them to lose all rational thoughts. I wonder if they wait for the phone to ring that day, believing that a bad mammogram will lead to a rapid phone call to convey the dark news.

I have never learned to wait for test results with the maturity of an adult—and I probably never will.

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