

Reflection in the Mirror

Category: Afraid

written by Deborah Kasman | September 5, 2017

I love my bathroom—after all, I picked the flooring and all the finishes, including the mirror spanning the wall opposite the shower. One morning, I step out of the shower, drying my underarm, when a bump under my breast reflects in the mirror. When my arm is down, it's gone. When my arm is up, it's there. Is it a cyst? Did I hit my chest? Is it in my breast? Oh, well, I'm late to work, so I run off.

The next morning, it's still there. I'm a doctor, so I decide to wait a few weeks. It may go away. Three weeks later, it's still there. Finally, I call. The appointment person hears "lump near breast" and orders a mammogram, an ultrasound and an appointment with a surgeon. I protest, "A surgeon is unnecessary. I'll see my family doctor."

My doctor examines the bump a few days later. "Maybe its a sebaceous cyst," she ponders. She squeezes it—no discharge. One week later, my ultrasound is suspicious and it's suggested that I have a biopsy.

"OK. I'm already here. I'm sure it's nothing."

The sonographer concurs. The interventional radiologist places a small marker at the biopsy site, which the mammographer can't find after four attempts. Having my breast mangled for three to four hours leaves me feeling hungry and angry. I dress, grab some food and return to work.

The next day, between meetings at work, my cell phone rings. My doctor identifies herself. We both pause. Finally, I speak first: "If you are calling about my biopsy results and it's not good," I say, "I don't want to hear it. I can't hear bad news right now."

She says "OK." I promise to visit her tomorrow.

I covet that night. My brain knows it's cancer, but my heart holds a sliver of hope it might be something else. I know that cancer patients receive harsh treatments, and we play in a field of statistics. For the next 22 hours, I'm just "me."

After lunch the next day, I finally push the elevator button that carries me to my doctor. She confirms what I know. I'm a breast cancer patient—one of the numbers. I examine my fear and find I'm more afraid of the treatments than of the cancer. I decide to get through this in my unique way. That's how it must be!

Deborah Kasman

Baldwin Park, California