

No Turning Back

Category: Tough Choices

written by Dorothy Harsen | September 2, 2017

My first chemo was a year ago today. It had been scheduled to start eight months earlier, when I was first diagnosed with breast cancer, but I chose a different path and had hoped to avoid chemo altogether. My oncologist had initially recommended four months of chemotherapy to shrink the tumor before surgery, but he also mentioned that I qualified for a clinical trial that would use a pill for six months to cut off its estrogen supply.

As I faced the plethora of decisions in those first harried days, my brother gave me some wise advice, saying, "Sis, sooner or later you'll be faced with decisions only you can make. You need to trust your gut." I spent the weekend stewing over chemo side effects vs. the possible risks of the clinical trial. Early that Monday morning, I read through the clinical trial again, and my gut clearly told me, "It's the right thing to do." My cancer was 100-percent estrogen receptor positive and slow-growing. Since chemotherapy works to destroy cells with rapid growth, my gut told me that cutting off the estrogen supply trumped chemo. If it worked well enough, I would be able to avoid chemotherapy altogether. The kicker was that I would have to wait six months to find out.

That's the thing about cancer. There is no turning back. You have to make treatment decisions and live with the results, or die with them, if that is the case. You will never know the outcome of the options you didn't choose. Even if you change course midstream, you can never go back and start over. And by the time I started chemo, I had learned that cancer isn't logical. It can do whatever it darn well pleases.

That being said, my toughest decision wasn't choosing a treatment plan, it was choosing my mental attitude. I used to hate the saying "Life is ten percent how you make it and ninety percent how you take it." It made me feel like all my hard work only added up to a ten-percent difference. But I learned that choosing a positive attitude made me feel strong and brave. My mantra became, and still is, "Come what may, I am truly blessed."

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