

# It's Not What You Get in Life

Category: Cancer

written by Elizabeth Ross | June 2, 2021

The words I heard most often from my mother are, "It's not what you get in life, it's how you handle what you get." These words have shaped my life and become the essence of what I believe.

My mother faced so many challenges in her life: the birth of a severely autistic child in the era of blaming mothers for that diagnosis; breast cancer resulting in a mastectomy; a wayward husband and divorce; a serious hand injury following an automobile accident. But somehow she managed to keep her jealousy of others at bay and appreciate her own joys in life.

At first I applied her maxim to relatively minor disappointments, like not making the cheerleading squad or a disappointing test grade. Over time I came to face my own serious challenges in my life: diagnosis with breast cancer twice and endometrial cancer once; major surgeries, radiation and chemotherapy; significant developmental issues with one child and serious health concerns with the other. Through it all, my mother's words have guided and shaped me.

My experiences have also led me to develop a personal corollary to my mother's belief. I now believe that, while others can support us in meeting the trials of life with love, caring and listening, we must truly meet these trials on our own. Despite having a loving and wonderful husband, I have learned that I, alone, must make the journey to acceptance of my situation and move on. There are no words another can say, no tasks another can do, nothing money can buy that will carry me across the line between grief and acceptance. I need to make that passage myself.

Yes, the process is painful, exhausting, scary and lonely. But the end result is that, after my loss, I'm able to rejoin the world with more strength and joy in the life I have.

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