

Passive Suicide

Written by admin

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by Tessa Middleton



"I would rather die than have a mastectomy! " This was my reaction to a breast cancer diagnosis. How many women feel as I did? Many. This true, short story shows how I came to terms with my mastectomy. I hope it will encourage other women facing this same situation.

Warm water rains over my body. My hands are lathered with body wash, and I rub them over my wet breasts in slow, circular motions. I focus on the twelve o'clock position on my left breast. The nickel-sized lump I noticed six months ago is now the size of a quarter. Denial hasn't dissolved it. Within a week, a mammogram, ultrasound, and biopsy confirm the dreaded diagnosis--I have breast cancer.

Apprehensively, I listen as the surgeon explains the findings. "There are two definite cancers, possibly three." His finger points to the pertinent areas on the x-ray. "The cancer has already spread and the affected area is too large, you're not a candidate for a lumpectomy." He flips the light off on the x-ray and turns to face me. "We'll have to do a mastectomy."

"No way!" I retort. I've already looked on the Internet and seen photos of the hideous disfigurement from mastectomy. My breasts are symbolic of my womanhood, the very essence of my femininity. "I can't lose my breast!" To me, death is preferable to a life without them.

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"There's always reconstruction," he suggests. "I can make it look very natural. Give yourself six months to recover after the surgery; then, we can begin the process of reconstruction."

"No! Absolutely not! I'll consent to a lumpectomy, but you'll never remove my breast." I'm adamant about it, and the surgeon gives up with a sigh.

Within days, the surgeon reluctantly performs the lumpectomy; he calls a week later with more biopsy results. "I have good news and bad news," he tells me. "The good news is the lymph nodes are clear, I don't think the cancer has spread. The bad news, we didn't get it all. I'm sorry but you still have breast cancer."

"But how do you know? How can you be so sure?" I'm devastated. I'm in denial mode again.

"Because we didn't get clear margins." He explains exactly what that means; and with compassion, he adds, "I know how you feel about a mastectomy, but without it, the cancer will continue to spread and you will die. It's only a question of time."

"I need to think about this. I'll get back to you." The room is spinning, and I feel faint.

"Don't wait too long," he warns, somberly.

Ever since the cancer diagnosis, I've searched my heart and soul. I'm not afraid to die. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord--all my pain and suffering will be over. I'll be whole. Yes, I determine, it's better to die than live without my breast. I'll allow the cancer to take my life; I'll commit passive suicide.

In the days that follow, an inner voice nudges my soul, 'Do not lose heart; outwardly you are wasting away, inwardly you are being renewed day by day. Your inner being will be strengthened with power though his Spirit.'

I look down at the remains of my breast. So much tissue has already been removed that it's half the normal size. Is my breast so important that I'll give my life for it? Will I lose my life for vanity? Is this corruptible body the most important part of me?

'No,' something inside me screams. 'I want to see my other daughter marry; I want to see my grandchildren; I want to grow old with my husband. And I want to live the life God has planned for me.' I realize God has allowed this trial to happen to me for a purpose, and He has a work to do through me.

A week later the mastectomy is performed; the surgeon has done a thorough job this time; I'm filleted down to my ribcage with only a thin layer of skin covering the bones. There's a concave hollow instead of a breast mound, but this time the margins are clear. As far as we can tell, the cancer has been removed.

My body is given two weeks to recover from the mastectomy then the chemotherapy begins. Ten days after the first chemo treatment my hair begins falling out in clumps. I cut it as short as

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possible but I still find clumps everywhere. It looks horrible. I finally give up and have the rest shaved off.

A month later I'm mutilated, bald, nauseous, and too weak to stand; in this moment of weakness, doubts creep in. Will my husband be able to look at me with desire again? Will I ever feel like a woman again? I feel so ugly and repulsive.

My husband lies beside me; he wipes away my silent tears, and kisses my bald head. "You'll always be beautiful to me, inside and out." he assures me. I fall asleep in his arms.

Six years has passed since my mastectomy. God has used this experience to strengthen my faith, and He has used me to help others. At His good and perfect timing, He will call me home. Until then, I will fight the good fight.

And, in case you're wondering: no, I didn't have reconstructive surgery. It took some time, but I came to realize that my outer shell is not important; it's the person I am within that counts. For some women reconstruction is the best option, but due to other medical conditions, for me it was not a viable option. But I'm okay with that.

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