

Cancer – adjusting inside and out

By **Katy Yoder**
Columnist

As my cancer experience recedes into the past, it's easy to feel impatient and focus on what hasn't happened yet. A perfect example is adjusting to the reality that my hair is taking a painfully long time to come back. It was almost easier to cope with having no hair at all. I was going through chemotherapy, so of course, I lost my hair.

But now a year later, when I look in the mirror I'm often caught off guard by what stares back at me. I call it my duck-fuzz phase, the hair I do have is baby-soft and wispy at best. When I make the mistake of taking a mirror and looking at the back of my head, I'm mortified at what I see.

Most of the time, I'm able to just forget what my head looks like and move through my day without feeling self-conscious. But there are certain triggers that remind me. Sometimes it's just the fact

that a bare head is a cold head when the temperature drops. Other times, it's a quick glance in a window or mirror that shows me I'm not a woman with long dark hair anymore.

I tell myself I should focus on how I live my life, not how I look while I'm doing it. That is sometimes easier thought than done.

To get myself back on track, I decided to read some journal entries I'd made over a year ago. It took me back to the day, I chose to shave off my hair and regain some control.

My daughter, Amy, was home from college and my sister, Victoria, had recently moved to town from Sonoma. My mom was there too — three generations of women facing my challenges with me.

"Woke up thinking, I've got to get to the water. Breathe the salt air, see the waves. A few days later we went. The ocean brought immediate emotional relief, the physical rejuvenation took longer.

Hair began coming out even more, handfuls releasing like overripe fruit.

"Again, my inner voice spoke, now's the time to let it go. Seeing the terror in Mom's eyes reminded me how hard this is for her to watch, to be a part of, and to accept it. But we pushed on. We carried a chair to the top of a dune that overlooked the beach. With the waves crashing white below, we made it an adventure, first I had a samurai cut, then a Mohawk. Each hairdo, took me smiling and afraid toward the inevitable.

"But I made the decision; I chose when I would lose my hair. I couldn't help smiling throughout the whole experience. The buzz cut became falling confetti. I kept my eyes on the waves and trusted the hands that gently took me towards the next step in this journey."

When I returned from the Oregon coast, hats took on a whole new meaning. They were essential. I developed a



PHOTO PROVIDED

Katy Yoder with daughter Amy and sister Victoria. Family support helps weather the traumas of facing cancer.

new found sympathy for men without hair... it's cold! But I also realized how important it was that I wear hats that truly reflected my personality, so I became discerning and true to my personal preferences... even if it meant I had to say, "No, thank you" to some very well-meaning offers of hats for me to add to my growing collection. If I looked in the mirror and felt

uncomfortable, it came off immediately. At least I could control that!

I'm hoping that this is just one of those things that take longer than I'd like. If it's the new normal, I'll just be joining the many men and women who wear cool hats and look great. It's another lesson in letting go of what I can't control and making the most of what is.

Sisters salutes...

- Hats off to Circle of Friends for expanding their mentoring program and partnering with other organizations in the community. Their one-on-one mentoring efforts change the lives of children — and of the mentors, too.

- Sisters Kiwanis continues to better people's lives in Sisters Country. Everyone knows about their food bank services, which provide a vital service in the community. But Kiwanis also provides scholarships to students and, through its Kiwanis Career Opportunity Fund (COF), for adults looking to better themselves. COF assists adults 25 or older who are financially unable to return to school or retrain for a career change. In today's unstable economic climate, that kind of hand up is vital to people's continued success.

- As individuals help others in their own community, Sisters continues to have a connection with communities across the world. A salute to those who have donated to Amy Abramson's campaign to deliver school supplies to students in Guatemala. And a tip of the hat to the Sisters students (and adults) who are working through Project Uganda to provide practical hygiene assistance to girls in their "sister school" in Masaka, Uganda (*see story, The Nugget, February 4, 2015, page 1.*)

- Two teachers had additional praise for last week's Sisters High School (SHS) Student of the Month, Maddi Boettner. Samra Spear said: Theodore Roosevelt once said, "If we are to be a really great people, we must strive in good faith to play a great part in the world. We cannot

avoid meeting great issues. All that we can determine for ourselves is whether we shall meet them well or ill." Maddi is a really great person who chooses to play a great part in our world. She is not afraid to confront big issues and makes a genuine effort to make herself and others better. It is with a sincere belief that I say that this young lady will positively touch lives and strive to make a difference, no matter where her future path leads. She is a treasure and will be dearly missed at SHS.

Bethany Gunnarson said: Maddi has a great work ethic, and I like the attitude in which she approaches problems. She is thoughtful, but willing to be critical and inventive. Plus, she has great energy and I enjoy having her in class, as do her classmates!

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