

ROBB: Breast cancer survivor helps others

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Don't wait for a well-documented symptom.

The local medical professional she saw immediately recommended a mammogram. "She told me, 'there's no reason to wait, just go see if it's yes or no.'"

When the mammogram came back there was something very small showing. "From there they did an ultra sound and then a biopsy," Sherry said. "Back then you waited 10 days. That's a long, hard wait. A lot of things go through your mind in that stage: What if it is? What am I going to do?"

Soon Sherry learned that she had Stage 3 cancer.

"Even though it was very small it was in a milk duct and had erupted into the outer tissue -- any time it does that they generally diagnose it at Stage 3.

"Then they say 'let's see if it went out into the lymph glands. That scared me as much as the diagnosis.'"

Fortunately it had not progressed that far.

And she was told that unless it has spread, and if it is caught early, breast cancer is very containable. If treated early, 100 percent of women with Stage 1 breast cancer survive; 93 percent with Stage 2 survive; 72 percent of women with Stage 3 breast cancer survive.

At this point, Sherry said, the education really begins. Your options are laid out, starting with doing nothing and going on through radiation, chemotherapy, single or double mastectomy ... and you realize you are already in the midst of a process that will take years to resolve.

That's not the way Sherry likes to tackle a problem. She prefers to identify the problem and handle it. Done.

So, she chose a double mastectomy and chemotherapy because it was the treatment most recommended and "They pretty much said, 'if you do all this, you could live to be 80 or 90 years old. If you die before that it will be from something else.'"

So, decision made. Let's

get it done.

But there were a few other details to work out.

Sherry doesn't like her ordinary life interrupted. At first, she and her husband Bill did not tell the kids what was going on.

"I just kept chugging along with my daily job," she said. "But, once I started the chemo, after my third treatment my hair came out and I shaved it all and bought a couple hats."

Her workmates at Community Connection in Enterprise were "awesome" about her journey and the necessity of missing a day or two of work on a regular basis.

"I usually had the treatment Fridays, missed Monday and went right back to work," she said.

But she got a call from her youngest child's school. He was very anxious, she was told, and the teacher asked her if he knew what was going on.

"I had wanted to protect him," Sherry said, "but when your hair falls out it can be really scary for kids. Now, I think talking to kids, even if they are really little, can help a lot. You have to be open with them -- age-appropriate, but open. I was able to tell him I was having a treatment but I was going to be all right. That helped a lot."

After that, they found the time to tell each of the kids what was going on and to answer any of their questions. There was never a "sit-down family discussion" Sherry said. For the Robbs, it worked to give each child individual time.

And chemotherapy, as hard as it was, turned out to have its good points.

"The room was full of both men and women getting chemotherapy for several different cancers -- probably 12-15 people at one time -- and it was comforting to see other people in your shoes and know they were feeling the same thing you are," she said.

Getting cancer is, after all, a common event. One hundred, twenty-nine women out of every 100,000 in the state of Oregon get breast cancer. You're

not a freak of nature.

And so the next part of the process unfolded for Sherry. She got to know some of her fellow chemo patients, her husband stepped up and proved himself to be a treasure, and the kids were OK.

"My husband was scared to death," Sherry said. "But he didn't want me to know. We talk about it now and we can laugh, but he tells me about things he had to do, like draining the tubes after my mastectomy when he thought he was going to throw up. He shaved his head at the same time I did. He did a lot of the cooking and cleaning and helping with the kids. He was amazing."

Sherry is cancer-free now, just as the medical professionals expected. After five years of screenings, they told her "get out of here, you're done," she said.

And now she wants to help others. "I remember when I was diagnosed I couldn't find anyone else who had cancer to talk to," she said. "I kept looking for people who were going through it at the same time. And survivors, it's really comforting to find someone who can say, 'I'm a survivor and it happened a really long time ago.'"

Now, individuals throughout the county call Sherry for support.

"That makes me feel good -- that I can help," she said. "It is scary, but if you can talk to someone who talks about it the past tense -- that helps."

Sherry's response to cancer was very proactive, and she can't recommend enough that individuals with any sort of health issue be proactive. "I wanted to get it resolved as soon as possible," she said.



Steve Tool/The Chieftain

A scorched helmet rests on a fence post near the Enterprise High School field house.

FIRE: Blaze destroys EHS football field house

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"But local contractors want to have the opportunity to bid on that, too. Do we snub our noses at the insurance company and hire who we want to? What happens if we do? That's the question. I don't know the answer to that question yet, and that's why the decision hasn't been made yet," he added.

Cleanup, however, has already begun. Ken Nash of Nash Excavating in Enterprise was awarded the cleanup project.

No matter what happens with the insurance, local residents and business owners have been stepping up to donate funds for whatever is needed to see the sports program through the year.

The Enterprise Educational Foundation (EEF) received over \$18,000 in donations with more coming in, according to EEF President Cindi Aschenbrenner. All donations to the EEF are tax deductible.

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HEISEL: Editor hired

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Prior to his journalism career, Heisel worked for a family-owned grocery store in Missoula for seven years during high school and college. He is recently divorced and has two beagles, Archie and Henry.

The Chieftain traces its beginnings to 1884. In 2000 it was acquired by the company now known as EO Media Group, which also includes the East Oregonian in Pendleton, the Blue Mountain Eagle in John Day, and eight other regional newspapers.

Student of the Week

Kaelin is an eighth-grader this year. She enjoys sports, especially soccer and basketball. Kaelin is an Honor Roll Student and this year's editor of the yearbook. It is for these accomplishments, and her consistent, positive example, that she receives this recognition.

Kaelin Sanders
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