

Kathy Buckert is a poet and creative non-fiction writer from Rochester, New York. She was diagnosed with stage 3 ovarian cancer in 1998 after outpatient surgery to remove a benign tumor. During her cancer experience, she learned how faith, hope, and survival go hand-in-hand. Journaling her experiences helped her cope with the day-to-day living that comes with a cancer diagnosis.

Cocooned in Hope

A sensation of pain ripped through my body as I struggled out of my anesthesia stupor. Why did it hurt so much? Did they cut me in half? As I wavered in and out of consciousness, needles jabbed my left arm over and over again accompanied by exasperated voices. “Try my right arm it works better,” I said as if in my unconscious state I understood their frustration that my veins refused to cooperate with the needles. It’s amazing what the mind does while we are unaware.

“How are you doing Kathy?”

“I’m scared.” Was that me who answered?

“We’ll give you something for it honey,” someone assured me.

I slipped further back into my dream world. Voices in the dark, familiar voices reached into my drug induced slumber. I could feel a gentle stroking of my hair. A whisper slipped down a tunnel to my heart.

“I love you.”

Jerry’s voiced faltered as he said the words that would change my life for months to come. “Honey you have cancer, but they think they got it all.”

My response shocked him. I simply said, “Okay.” No tears. No screams. Nothing but incredible peace penetrated my spirit. Was it the medication? It could be, but I would like to

think that I found what my pastor referred to as “the peace that passes all understanding that keeps our hearts and minds at rest.”

As I struggled to open my eyes, I once again heard a familiar voice push its way through my shadow of consciousness.

“You’re still my little girl and I will never leave you.”

The nurses said my heart rate visibly changed on the monitor when I recognized my dad’s voice. Deep in my spirit, I knew that that it may have been my earthly father saying those words to me. However, instinctively I knew my Heavenly father promised to never leave me nor forsake me, especially now in my darkest hour.

Wracked with pain, I tried to put myself into my usual fetal position for sleep while the morphine dripped, dripped, dripped into my body. Jerry wouldn’t leave the hospital. He thought I may be teetering on the edge of some cliff. He didn’t want me to go into a panic attack while he slept alone in our bed wrapped in his own fears. We had an understanding of the tendencies toward anxiety that we shared. When claustrophobia or a sense of unease hit us hard, we both knew how to be strong for the other.

While Jerry slept in the solarium down the hall, the nurses came in the room every hour and asked me, “On a scale of one to ten, what is your pain level.”

I never went below an eight.

“Do you want to change your position? You don’t look comfortable.”

And every time I said, “No.” Cocooned within the haze of morphine, tubes, and God; the fetal position, although it didn’t look comfortable, gave me security. By the light of day, the image of all those tubes taking and giving this life force of healing to my body unnerved me.

The minute my nurse tried to sit me up, the one source that took away pain began to suck the very life out of me. My blood pressure dropped to 60/40, and the cloudy edge of reality slipped away into darkness. My battle had started. The words that I heard weeks before slipped into my dazed condition. “Trust me Kathy, but it won’t go without a fight.” I fought my way back out of my disoriented state just as my children walked through the door followed by Dr. Clifford. The look on their faces said it all. I looked like death. Dr. Clifford explained in detail everything that took place during the surgery. Every time he mentioned something new they remove, my children’s reactions hurt more than the surgical wounds. Melinda caressed my hair, Bethany squeezed my hand a little harder, Brandon moved closer to the window, and Geoff looked at his father and then at me, back and forth, back and forth.

“Dr. Clifford, what do you think of everything,” I asked hoping my straightforward question would bring some peace of mind.

“I don’t know if you are going to live or die until your pathology report comes back.”

Die? Who said anything about dying? Why would you even mention death in front of my children? Geoff was only seven years old and Brandon was only eleven. The girls were older, but still how could he do that to them? I had a husband who loved me, children who needed me. I couldn’t die. I don’t why we didn’t call him on his less than professional behavior. My only explanation: We were dumbfounded by his demeanor. Our eyes darted back forth one to the other like some pinball machine with a mind of its own. Our mouths didn’t open. I, of course, thought my death was imminent.

“I’m sorry,” he said curtly and he left the room.

“Mom, he’s not the expert. Talk to your oncologist when he comes in this afternoon,” Melinda once again had the voice of reason. I knew I shouldn’t jump to conclusions until I heard what my oncologist, Dr. Eltabbakh, had to say.

In the midst of my crazy inward storm, he assured us that I would be okay, but that I would probably need chemotherapy. The thoughts of chemotherapy didn’t even register; we had hope again. To this day, I believe with every ounce of my being that no matter what the prognosis is you have to give hope to someone who is facing a catastrophic illness. Without it they give up. I didn’t give up. I fought. I survived.