

With Breast Cancer, Sometimes a Loss Can Be a Gain

Life with Cancer

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Even after the loss of her mother to ovarian cancer, and her Aunt to breast cancer, Angelina Jolie's recent decision to have a double mastectomy, because of a hereditary cancer gene, is still a brave one. And yet the decision that comes with it, regarding reconstructive surgery, is just as difficult for some. So why not turn a loss into a gain.

I'm one of those lucky gals, as some would say, who, when needing a new bra, heads over to the children's department at the Mall and chooses one with monkeys, or kittens, or bright pink spots for \$5. I did venture into Victoria's secret one day, on a whim, and marvel at all the voluptuous cups, lace and cavernous cleavages and it was mind boggling. It was then that I thought, as someone at a high risk of breast cancer, that if I had to say goodbye, I would treat myself to a nice pair of double C's.

Many of my friends have done the same after cancer, opted for a little push to nature's own efforts. And some, I'm sure to the chagrin of their husbands, have decided to downsize. I can't imagine that myself, but I'm told on very high authority that they can be a heck of a burden.

So whilst the diagnosis and treatment of cancer is no fun at all, why not look for the after-benefits. For me, cancer took away my uterus and quite a lot else. Thankfully, we had two beautiful children already. So whilst I did mourn its absence, I could take advantage of the benefits: no more monthly pain, more room in my purse, and no mood swings. Well, I guess my husband may disagree on that last one! Three months of night sweats and that was it. Menopause was done and dusted. Who wouldn't say no to that? And whilst some kind of longing, or fleeting pain, does go off inside of me every time I see one of those cute babies, living cramp free is a pretty good compensation.

I might even say that, on outward appearance, I was pretty lucky. It's only when I get the whim to put on a bikini, and show the nine inch scar on my abdomen, that it's pretty plain for the world to see that something went on. With breast cancer, it's a little more obvious. Take away a large bulge from under my nose and I would feel pretty self conscious too. Some people might say "Well isn't this all rather petty? Shouldn't surviving cancer be enough? Who cares what you look like?" Unfortunately these are probably the same people who say you look beautiful when you're as bald as a coot after chemo. The reality is, it does matter. What good is surviving the ordeal if you can't feel good about yourself afterwards? Quality of life after cancer matters more than you would think.

So as someone who's at high risk of breast cancer, I've given the pro's and cons quite a lot of thought. My conclusion is: if life gives you a break, take advantage of it. Or to put it another way, if life gives you lemons, don't make lemonade. Go buy cantaloupes.

Kay Kerbyson is President/Founder of Ovarian Cancer Together! Inc, a non-profit organization working in New Mexico to educate women about ovarian cancer and support those who are touched by it. She is also an Associate of the Los Alamos Council on Cancer. Find resources and information for cancer patients at www.losalamoscounciloncancer.org or ovariancancertogether.org