

Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



REBECCA RADMACHER, 72
DIAGNOSIS: BREAST CANCER

But Radmacher thought there was more. "I just kept pushing it, telling them: 'There is something else in here that is wrong.'"

Eventually, a CAT scan revealed a hiatal hernia.

"It is quite a large hernia," she said, "so I am having surgery the day before my birthday in September."

Radmacher said she was lucky that "the support was absolutely tremendous from my family. It was totally awesome."

Her husband, Kurt, "cooked; he cleaned house. The big thing he did, he is a real positive guy. He always looks for the silver lining."

"He is not delusional, but he tries to find the best. He says when it comes to the worst, then we deal with what we have."

Now, Radmacher's activities are limited. "I still don't clean my own house," she said.

"I don't work in the yard. I can't lift much more than 20 pounds. The physical part of my life has changed tremendously."

Radmacher does not dwell on the possibility of a recurrence.

But in 2016, "I had to go back in and see the doctor," she said. "Another biopsy was done but it was OK. I only think about it when it is October. That is breast cancer month, and my mammogram is coming up."

Radmacher's radiation treatments were done out of plan so she could be treated in the High Desert rather than in Los Angeles.

"I said I would like to opt for an out-of-network doctor up here. I chose convenience, and I wish I had not. The (provider) candy-coated the after-effects of radiation."

"I wish I had read more about the effects of radiation. I would have done it anyway, but I would have been more prepared. They pushed me at the clinic up here: Don't read anything, don't get on the Internet, it makes people more anxious."

Caregiver Perspective

When Kurt Radmacher heard his wife's cancer diagnosis, "I was totally in shock," he said. "I didn't believe that it could happen to her. But we are here for each other, that is all that matters."

"You kind of expect the worst and hope for the best. Everything turned out OK except for this stupid treatment she got afterwards."

He is still angry his wife was not informed about possible radiation side effects.

"We enjoyed going out, fishing, and going to the gym together. We don't do that anymore due to her condition," he said.

“*Know your illness. Know your options.*”

"I should have followed my gut instinct. I didn't like that they (think) you are so vulnerable. They just know the illness and how much it takes to kill it."

Radmacher says anyone who receives a cancer diagnosis should "read, research. Know your illness. Know your options."

Radmacher's niece, Vicky McIntosh, gave her the best advice: "She said, 'Put your war paint on, Aunt Becky, you are going to need it.'"

The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Apple Valley
- **OCCUPATION:** Retired
- **FAMILY:** Kurt, 81, husband; Gerald Wild, 54, son; Shannon, 51, daughter Vicky McIntosh, 64, niece
- **HOBBIES:** Writing in journal, camping, fishing, used to hike
- **PHILOSOPHY:** Do your own thing.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Rebecca Radmacher was "religious" about getting mammograms, but she was not prepared when one came back with a bad result.

"I never missed a mammogram in 10 years, and it was on Oct. 15, my granddaughter's birthday," she said.

"They called and said it had to be redone. They did the more extensive ultrasound and a diagnostic mammogram."

"With that result comes the stereotactic biopsy. That's where they go in and take a plug out of your boobie."

"It showed I had DC – ductal carcinoma in situ. My stomach just turned over."

"My husband was there with me, of course. It's just overwhelming. I was trying to be so strong."

"The doctor said I had to have surgery. It was aggressive and graded as fast growing."

"We had to do it now, not dilly-dally. I had two choices: lumpectomy or mastectomy. I opted for the more conservative approach."

"My older sister, although she did not die, had a mastectomy in the 1970s. My niece had a double mastectomy and died at 46. Naturally, I was really scared."

"My surgery was Nov. 6, 2014. I had to go back in 10 days for another surgery because the margins weren't clean."

"So, I had two full surgeries – deep, right down into the muscle. I came through that well. I was lucky."

"I smoked probably 40 years; I could shoot myself in the foot if I wasn't scared to."

"Now I have emphysema. It is worse in my left lung, where I had the radiation. I just found out about two months ago. Radiation can affect your heart and lungs."

Radmacher did not join a support group, but recently she attended a Relay for Life event in Victorville.

"I would like to join this organization (Relay for Life) because I would like to help. I can't run, but there are a lot of other things I can do. I was telling Liz (McGiffin of the American Cancer Society) about the repercussions of about 35 radiation treatments."

Radmacher said the effects of radiation "have been horrible."

Doctors also discovered she had an inflammation of the cartilage that connects her ribs to her breast bone.

"I kept telling the doctor I had a pain that was like it was behind my breast – that is the only way I could explain it. I ended up with costochondritis."



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