A Survivor's Story

Eleven years ago Brenda Ganong heard the words that she never wanted to hear: "You have breast cancer."

Brenda had gone for a mammogram, and had been scheduled to come back for a one-year follow-up. "But I knew something wasn't right," she says. With the encouragement of her former husband, Brenda decided to seek a second opinion. After another mammogram and a biopsy, her fears were confirmed.

"When they told me I had breast cancer, I was very emotional," she says. Brenda talked with her oncologist, Dr. Charles Catcher of New Hampshire Hematology/Oncology in Hooksett about treatment options including chemotherapy, radiation, and lumpectomy, but made the decision to have a mastectomy. "I just wanted it out of my body," she says. The time from her diagnosis to surgery was less than four weeks, but Brenda says it felt like much longer. "I cried all the time, because I thought I was dying. I was working at Cantin Chevrolet at the time, and they were wonderful. I worked with all men in the service department, and nobody knew what to say to me. But they were all there for me, even if I just needed a hug."

Closer to Home
After her surgery, Brenda began a five-year cycle of Tamoxifin, an anti-estrogen drug. It was then that Dr. Catcher told her that he could provide the same care he was providing in the southern part of the State much closer to home at Lakes Region General Hospital. Since that time, Brenda has been a patient in the Hematology/Oncology Department at LRGH. Today, she feels fortunate that she need only come for annual follow-ups, but over the years she has been in many times, sometimes for treatments and sometimes for reassurance when she was scared. "That place is wonderful," she says. "Having worked as a nurses' aide for 15 years, I have spent time around a lot of different doctors and nurses. The caregivers in that department are just a different breed—they are angels."

Today, Brenda has a positive outlook on her life and her future, but cancer has changed her life. After her diagnosis, seven more women in her family were diagnosed with breast cancer, including her mother, her younger sister, two aunts, and a cousin.

Making a Difference
After her experience, her message to women? "Get a mammogram. My mother was 60, and had never had a mammogram until after I was diagnosed. It was an annual mammogram that detected her breast cancer several years later. It's important to get checked, to keep yourself healthy and to catch anything early."

"Cancer is not limited to older women," Brenda emphasizes. "Women today are surviving and thriving after breast cancer diagnosis. It is up to us to be proactive and to support one another. It's an honor to be a survivor."
later. I truly believe that if I hadn't gone back for that second mammogram 11 years ago, I wouldn't be sitting here today. Women need to trust their instincts, know their bodies, and get regular mammograms. It can save your life."

But telling other women about the importance of mammography wasn't enough for Brenda. In 2003, Brenda and her husband, John, started the Winnipesaukee Ride Against Breast Cancer; a motorcycle ride to raise funds and awareness to fight cancer. The first year, there were 35 bikes, and the money raised was donated to the American Cancer Society. This year, the ride was expanded to "Brenda's Ride”—"Breast cancer has touched my family, but I've also lost family members and very dear friends, including Eddie Barbado and Bob Harding, to other types of cancer."

This year more than 200 people participated, and Brenda donated nearly $10,000 to support cancer care at LRGHealthcare. "I decided I wanted to keep the money local," she explains. "I want to help make sure cost doesn't stop anyone from getting mammograms or cancer treatment. There are so many programs out there to help, and I wanted to do my part to support those."

Brenda says that going through breast cancer was frightening, but there were bright spots in the experience. The brightest came in a letter she received in the mail one day from her 16-year-old daughter, Christina's, teacher. A homework paper had posed the question, "Who is your hero and why?" Christina's answer? "My mom. For going through cancer."

Brenda still cries when she tells of the moment she opened that envelope. But today, they are tears of pride.

**Early detection is our best defense against breast cancer.** Starting at age 40, the American Cancer Society recommends that all women should have an annual mammogram.

In our community, you have a choice where to schedule your digital mammogram—**Caring for Women** (Two practice locations in Laconia), Lakes Region General Hospital or Franklin Regional Hospital. You don't need to be a Caring For Women patient to schedule a mammogram at either practice.

**To schedule your digital mammogram, please call:**

- Lakes Region General Hospital 527-2992
- Franklin Regional Hospital 934-2060
- Caring for Women 527-1855

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