

Betsy Redler and Her “Pink” Posse



October 23, 2006 was the day that Betsy Redler heard the words “you have breast cancer.” When she was diagnosed she was overwhelmed by the number of people who stepped up and said they were there to help.

“The thing that is crazy about cancer is it becomes a game of odds and percentages,” says Betsy. “Fortunately, I found I had many things in my favor; early detection, good health and excellent medical care.”

Studies suggest that the support of friends and family help cancer patients live longer and increases their chance for recovery. As a past President and active member of Junior League of Wichita, President of the International Baccalaureate Parent Association at East High School, and a past member of the Robinson Foundation for Academic Excellence – Betsy understands the effectiveness of connecting with others for a cause. She didn’t realize until this happened, just how many friends she had made along the way.

“The Junior League understands networking and the connection of women to women. It’s a force. It’s part of their great strength. They take care of community issues, but also take care of each other,” she says. Even her husband Scott found himself on the receiving end of support when several women from the league approached him at the gym and told him how tough his wife was and that cancer didn’t stand a chance.

Cards and flowers arrived randomly with notes of encouragement. “I think a lot of people don’t know what to do to help, but even a funny card or note lets you know you were thought of. It’s the little things that make a difference,” Betsy says. Friends brought delicious meals that might also include wine and flowers for the table. “The details were fabulous, and they really do lift you up. My daughters and Scott (who is a great cook), loved getting dinners from all sorts of cooks. This is when my family and I truly began to understand the girlfriend connection, and the impact of reaching out to care for others. We have always been the givers and it was humbling to be on the receiving end.”



Photography by Season Schwind, Capture Your Moments Photography

From Left to Right: Mimi Shellito, Deb Sinclair, Betsy Redler, Candace Stultz and Sharon Brown

“Once we found out Betsy was diagnosed, a core group of us banded together to support her,” says her friend Candace Stultz. “We’d worked with Betsy in Junior League for years.” The girls didn’t wait until Betsy lost her hair from chemotherapy, they decided to turn getting her a wig into an event, a “Girls Day Out.”

“It was a posse of girls who went with me to select my wig,” Betsy says. “We all got in the car, got lost and then went to see the Wig Lady [LeeAnn Callahan]. She’s wonderful. My friends said, ‘Spruce her up, we need her to look fabulous.’”

When Betsy’s hair began falling out, they made a second trip to see the Wig Lady to have her head shaved. “We had to be there with her,” Candace says. “We weren’t going to let her go through it without us. There was a lot of laughter and tears that day.”

“They helped me laugh through the tough times,” Betsy says. “I had so many friends that helped me, but that day it was Sharon, Candace, Deb and Mimi. And I got a great wig.”

It was Sharon who recommended she use a collapsible folder to keep her lab tests and information organized. Betsy recorded any reactions

to medications and made it a routine to write down how she felt each day. “We scheduled things when I felt good, and didn’t when I felt bad. I said to myself ‘just keep moving,’ because it’s hard to hit a moving target.” Sometimes friends would take her to an event, sit her in a chair and let her know they were glad she was there. And that always helped.

“Scott created a spreadsheet for my medications and I’d just check them off. He’s my rock,” Betsy says. “My girls drew me pictures and wrote ‘I love my mom’ on my make-up mirror, and I can’t wash that off!”

“I was really sad when we found out, but one of my friends had his mom go through it, and he helped me a lot,” says Betsy’s eldest daughter Katie. She and her sister, Kelly, made their mom a Build-A-Bear with a superman costume, as well as posters for her hospital room. “But we gave her space, too, when she needed it. We learned to help without asking a lot of questions.”

Seven days after her mastectomy, a friend sent Betsy a bouquet of flowers with a note that read, “Hang in there, this is the worst part of it.” “She had survived breast cancer and she knew what I was going through,” says Betsy. “You’re sore and

have tubes in and it’s awful. But about six weeks later I found myself yelling at my daughter Kelly for leaving her tennis racquet in the middle of the kitchen counter. She just rolled her eyes and flipped her hair and said, “Well, someone is certainly feeling better!”

And she was indeed. “The medicine healed my body, but my girlfriends healed my soul,” Betsy says. “It was a friend who would get me out of the house by calling and saying to slap that wig on your head, we’re going to a shoe sale at Nouveau.”

She feels very fortunate that she won the battle, but is painfully aware that not everyone is so lucky. One of the Junior League’s past-presidents, Amy Lou Stephenson died this year from cancer. “Amy Lou was blessed to have her girlfriends by her side bringing her joy and laughter until the end,” Betsy says.

The grandest lesson Betsy has learned is that little things – a quick call, a magazine or a plate of cookies – do make a difference in someone’s life. And surrounding yourself with family and friends with positive attitudes can help you find fun in just about anything. ●

~BD THARP