

STUPID CANCER STORIES



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HOSPITAL HOSPITALITY RANT

By Molly Oldham

The hospital is a weird place. Think of how many people touch you. Someone greets you, signs you in, takes down your information. The nurse asks your name, birthdate, weighs you, checks your vitals. Someone pokes you with an IV, and if they suck, someone else pokes you again. You might see an "Attending," but I'm not sure what they are attending to because they don't stick around too long. The doctor in charge comes to greet you to let you know he's arrived. He's in the official white coat that is followed around by people in shorter white coats that look more scared than you are.

It's bad enough your sisters think you're faking your headaches for attention, but then professionals tell you that you "google too much", and that you just need Benadryl because they have "seen worse." I hate to break it to you Dr J, but your migraine cocktail didn't do a darned thing to the tennis-ball-sized tumor in my brain that Google suggested you should scan for — but what do I know? I promise that I wasn't throwing up for months just to get a "beach-bod..." even though I did look pretty good after losing 25 pounds in one month. Some people use the ER for their family doctor, so the hospital can't give a scan to everyone, but when you see someone lying in their own vomit, she probably isn't faking for a Dora the Explorer sticker and cardboard pajamas that don't cover the backside.

I slept for 40 hours without getting up to eat or pee, so we went back to the ER and someone with good sense approved scans and told us that I won the Rare Brain Tumor Lottery.

Within 5 minutes, my room had 14 doctors in it. I had so many questions. Where did they all come from? Who would be the one cutting me open? What is the average ACT score among them? How much money do you make? Are you going to get a good night's sleep before you touch my brain matter? Is the beautiful woman doctor in the Jimmy Choo shoes going to be mine? Because I want her! My successful surgery was actually done by the new guy. I'm glad I didn't know he was the new guy until AFTER the surgery. He arrived 2 days before I did. Let that sink in. His first major surgery at the hospital was on me.

I came out singing Ben Platt's "Ease My Mind" one hour after surgery. My sister turned on Ben Platt's "If I Don't Live Forever" first.

Why on EARTH do they test the fire-alarms at three and five in the morning? They always tell you "get some sleep."





Why then do they wake me up every hour to give me oral medicine (can't you use the IV since you poked me for it?), take vitals (after I confirmed the secret code — name and birthdate), ask me if I need to poop (knowing the meds stop me up).

Does anyone else notice that we get different nurses every shift and although they spend lots of time typing up reports, when a new nurse comes in, you have to answer the same questions all over again. Yes, tennis ball size. Yes, surgery. Yes, my pain is a 10. Yes, I would like more morphine. No, I didn't poop.

It's a well-known fact that some meds make you constipated and others reverse the situation. The outcome is messy and EVERY TIME, in walks the hottest male nurse. Do they only save these guys for sponge baths and dirty work? There's nothing like looking into the eyes of a man who should be the next Bachelor and giving him your daily stool update.

When you're sick and you look worse than you've ever looked, everyone wants to tell you how fabulous you are holding up. After they shaved my head, I was complimented on how perfectly round my head was. "You are glowing." (I haven't even started radiation yet.) "Have you lost weight?" (Yes the brain tumor was at least five pounds.) Everyone's lying. I looked like I'd been hit by a bus. At this point, I want someone to just be honest with me. If a stranger came up to me and told me I looked like hell, I might just give him a hug.

My last PSA: if I'm not crying, don't sit by my bedside and cry for 5 hours because the tumor is cancerous. Consoling YOU is using up all the extra brain cells I don't have to spare. You know what you can do? Keep those cookies coming! Chocolate Chip please. Turn up the music on the way out and please tell the hot nurse I have to poop.



STATE OF MIND

By Harshavardhan
Sanghrajka

There is always a moment in everyone's life that changes the perspective of how they view themselves and this universe. For me, that moment arrived when I was diagnosed with cancer. I've always had this weird fantasy where I used to imagine myself having this life-changing ailment. Cancer, a small word which holds the power to break down the strongest warrior within us and make us miserable in front of the whole world to watch. I've always been curious about how things would change if I ever got this powerful disease and how it might change how I see the world and how the world sees me.

Little did the kid in me know that it wasn't just going to be a fantasy. Did I attract cancer to me? Well that's a question that's going to be in my head until my last dying breath, but this single question changed the whole perspective of how I see life. What if cancer is just a state of mind? Intriguing, right? Maybe all those filthy self-help books were true, maybe I control it all, maybe I am the power that holds control over everything happening in my life. God made me strong enough to question myself with these



questions. This made me reflect upon every moment in my life where I just thought of something and then it happened, that something changed everything. It all seems so vague and ludicrous when I just say it like this, but having undergone such a huge life change makes me rethink everything over and over again.

Perhaps this cancer is just in my head, projecting over my body as a result of not being able to contain itself in my mind. Luckily, my body is as strong as my will, it will never give up on me. I have the strength and the energy to see this through. When I'm feeling low and dull, all I think is, "God just wanted to make me feel loved". Getting diagnosed was difficult, but it opened my eyes to see everyone who loves me and is by my side. Blindsided with grudges and preconceptions, this is something I failed to see before. The song lyric 'to believe I walk alone is a lie I've been told' from "Let your heart hold fast" instantly came back to my

mind, and now it made sense to me. I never thought that I would be surrounded by so many people who love me, it makes life far much easier knowing that so many people really do love you.

When I was in the hospital, my parents and uncle came to me and said, "Harshu, you always have been a King, now it's time to act like one. We are all your soldiers, and we will only be strong and composed if our King is strong and composed. We are with you every step of the way; we won't fall apart because you have been this strong so far. It's just so long before we win this battle and you lead us into victory."

Imagine a nineteen-year-old being called a King, I was on cloud nine! Love wasn't all that I was getting, I was getting everything I've ever wanted, not that I already didn't have everything, but just more! I didn't misuse this opportunity to get all the luxuries of the world, I love my family, and at this point in life all I wanted was this love. The definition of family changed for me, Family wasn't restricted to blood relations anymore. For the first time in my life, I took down the barriers and let people in. My friends emerged as my extended family, closer than ever. Mobile phones and social media have made everyone so broken and out of love, so if it weren't for this cancer, I would never have known about how many of my friends really do care about me.

What was most shocking to me is when five people willingly went bald for me. I don't think anyone has done a nicer thing for me in my entire life. The day my hair started falling off as a result of the side effect of the chemotherapy, was one of the most emotional days of my life. But having five more people go bald along

with me, just made me feel confident and loved. I still remember returning home after getting my hair chopped, I ran straight to the washroom and started crying.

My hair, my most beloved possession, just chopped away in a matter of seconds. I have always been obsessed with my hair, every strand of my hair had to be perfectly set at all times or I wouldn't step out of my bedroom. My hair was like my best friend, someone that would always be with me no matter what. Well I was wrong, my friends were better than best friends, they were family now. The hair, it went; but my friends, they stayed. They have been by my bedside ever since I was diagnosed, I really am blessed to have such a caring family and so many loving friends.



TINY HEROES

By Matilda Portanova

Inspiration, simply put, means to have an unconscious burst of creativity; therefore, unconsciously, I was allowed the honor of creating amazing boys who thus gave me the creativity to find motivation amidst trauma.

I can easily say my inspiration is being a mom and my two boys. I didn't have to go far to find my motivation; from the beginning, it was staring right at me each and every day. They were the ones I have poured all my energy into, always, and I would do the same during one of the most difficult times in my life. For parents, your children are always your inspiration. They are the ones you do everything in your power for, get out of bed on a shitty day for, and put that smile on your face for. When you're facing cancer, the last thing you want is to have your children witness it. But, selfishly, they can also be what you need to get out of bed and put that smile on your face.

My boys experienced cancer twice in their lives, within two years. This was very unfortunate and my heart breaks for them each time this reality hits me. Luckily their first experience was a demonstration of strength, courage, and positivity that prepared them for what they would go through with me. I remember the day my brother was diagnosed and how I wished they didn't have to see it. They were much younger and a lot of them couldn't understand. I can't imagine what their thoughts were during those months, but it wasn't their parent and it wasn't in their house. Life was still pretty normal for them. They witnessed positivity and bravery, they didn't see the struggles he went through. They were able to see and celebrate a battle won. That experience shaped how they would see and react to my experience two years later.

In their hearts and mind they knew this could be overcome and I would be ok. They were beyond fortunate and I am beyond grateful for that.

The moment I was diagnosed, my immediate thoughts went to them. Driving home from that appointment, in my car, I yelled and screamed about how unfair this was for them. As a parent, your life is all about your children, every decision directly affects their little lives, and, thus, every "big" illness impacts them in a way that we can't comprehend. They would now have to face cancer for the second time, but this time it was their mom, their caregiver, and in their home. They would wake up to it and go to sleep to it. They would see it each and everyday, the good and the bad. My cousins told me this would make them stronger and I would be stronger because of them. At that moment I didn't want to hear that. It was just unfair and I was angry they had to face it. Now I see how right they



were. My boys made me strong and brave, and they were resilient and courageous. Without knowing it, I made it my mission to demonstrate positivity, bravery and strength to my boys.

Selfishly, I became grateful I had them by my side. The one thing I was most angry about became the one thing that motivated me and got me through most days. They got me up each morning, I helped get them ready for school, make them lunch and watch them get on that bus. For the first time since they were born I was doing something I never did, a tiny piece of their day became the most important and best part of my day. I began to cherish those mornings and became grateful to be able to experience those mornings with them. Each morning I made sure to make them delicious breakfasts and lunches, looking on Pinterest for the best ideas possible. Together, we waited for that bus to pull up and I waved and watched them leave for school. Those little details kept me wanting to get up everyday, I had something important to do each morning. I can't say every single day was that way. There were plenty of mornings my parents came over, my mom made them breakfast and I just sat and watched. I knew, and so did they, that these mornings where I didn't feel my best wouldn't last. After a couple days, I would be the one making them breakfast again.

Soccer was their outlet but also became mine. Their passion for a sport was the thing they focused on during a difficult time in their lives. Like tiny men, they used it as a driving force to get them through most days. That summer, soccer camp became their home; they attended as many days as we could afford. It kept them occupied while I went through test upon test. Their games became a motivation for all of us. I attended most games, when I could, with my husband or my dad, quietly cheered them on and watched them play. So many of those Sunday mornings I would've rather spent

snuggled and sleeping, but watching them on that field brought me so much joy, I couldn't pass it up. I tagged along to soccer practices, sat with my fellow soccer moms and talked. They became my motivators, they shared stories and inspired me to stay strong and positive. Their sons became such good friends to my boys, they supported them through these difficult days without even knowing it. These women, these fellow soccer moms that I cheered alongside, have now become such good friends and their boys have built true friendships with mine that will last a very long time.

One very special night at practice, they had a celebration of the end of my treatments. Nickolas came to get me, walked me over to his team and coaches, and they formed an aisle for me to walk down while all those boys clapped and the coaches cheered. The importance of that moment for me and for Nickolas is beyond words. The thing he is most passionate about, the people he spent most of his days with, who supported him quietly, helped him celebrate this huge moment for him and his family.

I tried very typical family activities as well, the things we read up on to keep us busy, and guess what?? They actually worked. We built forts on the weekends and snuggled in bed reading books. I typically fell asleep after one or two pages but they didn't care, the fort was the best part for them. We watched a ton of movies and made cookies or popcorn. Family movie nights became a huge event in this house and I truly look forward to those nights. Ice cream sundaes became our favorite dessert, our freezer was full of flavors, and our pantry full of syrup and sprinkles.

Our village, our supporters, and their biggest fans stepped in to make things easier for them, and for us. They had sleepovers with their grandparents and uncles and aunts. It was hard for me to admit defeat, for me to say "yes take the boys." It felt as if I was losing in a way. But as much as I needed them with me, I also needed them away from me so that I could heal. Coming to that realization, that some nights were best spent alone, was very hard. I was both happy and sad when I heard the memories they created with others. Even hearing memories they built with their dad, my husband, pulls at my heart a bit. I was sleeping during a lot of those moments, so I don't remember the stories they've told me, even though I pretend to.

That's why all of that hurts most. It forces me to admit I wasn't always "ok" and I wasn't always there being perfectly positive and courageous. Sometimes, I missed moments, sometimes I needed help, but in the end it was what we needed to make sure I could fight the battle and it was all ok. They continued to laugh and to enjoy life, they continued working hard in school and soccer and they continued to demonstrate resilience every day. That was the most important thing I could have wished for, even if I missed some things and wasn't perfectly ok all the time.

Strength and resilience don't come without worries and fears. My boys were brave, they inspired me; but what went on inside of their hearts and minds I can't imagine. I wasn't always given a window to their thoughts. They quietly coped. Matthew shared stories about me with his teacher. How fortunate he was to have a teacher who listened and supported him. I am beyond grateful he was able to talk about what he saw but in a way that made it just a part of his life, not something that he had to overcome. Nickolas kept a lot of it inside and dealt with it

as best as he knew how. His method of coping was more understandable to me, culturally that's what I knew, the men and boys I was close to kept it all inside. As much as I wanted him to talk about it, he couldn't or didn't want to. But he got through it with quiet courage. They both experienced it and coped differently, but they were both resilient, brave and courageous through it all. The way they managed their emotions and stood by my side amazes me. Their courage inspired my courage. I had no choice but to be for them what they were showing me they needed me to be.

Those months of treatment are hard to forget, but the way my children inspired me every day is something I will truly always remember. Their quiet resilience, their strength and courage, the bravery they had each day is motivational for any parent. These little boys kept their smile, kept their amazing kindness and sweet hearts and sat by their mother's side without hesitation. They were proud when I shaved my head, they were concerned when I didn't feel my best, and they had fun on all the other days. They found ways to cope, they used their passion as an outlet, they talked about their feelings if they could, and they got through it with flying colors, in my opinion. This was a moment in time for our family, it is something that has changed me and made us stronger as a unit. It will forever be with them and has forever shaped them. My wish is that it shaped them to keep that positive spirit alive, face their challenges with a smile, keep on believing in themselves and in their own strength and move those mountains.

LOVE & CANCER: IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

By Whitney O'Connor

5...4...3...2...1... HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Once upon a time, on New Year's Eve in 2016, a man and woman got married in Charleston, SC. They celebrated their new marriage with bubbling champagne, the liveliest dance party the South has ever seen, and the best late night pizza Charleston had to offer. They left their wedding in a pedicab, ready to take on the world together. They had a new house, a new dog, and great jobs waiting for them when they got back to Georgia. What could go wrong?

Remember that whole "in sickness and in health" thing that people say when they get married? Well, I had no idea how soon that vow would be tested. 6 weeks after I got married, I got my annual exam, a mammogram, and a biopsy, followed by a phone call from my doctor. I will never forget where I was: I had just gotten home from work, around 5:15pm, and as I walked through my house to let the dog out, my phone rang. She didn't even say hello... She said, "Mrs. O'Connor, I hate to be the one to tell you this, but all of the tests we ran indicate that you have breast cancer." Wait, what? I just turned 30 a week ago. Are you sure? To be completely honest, I never knew women could get breast cancer before 60. I exercise and take care of myself. I eat and drink the right things 75% of the time. Why would someone like me get stage 3 breast cancer?

I was too shocked to cry. Instead, I just paced outside and tried to figure out a way to tell my new husband. How in the world was I supposed to tell him that he married a sick woman instead

of a healthy one? How was I supposed to tell him that the life we envisioned together was going to look different than we had originally hoped? As I continued to pace and think about the words to say, I heard the car door close. He was home. Crap! The tears finally made their way from the other side of my eyes out into the world as he opened the back door to greet me. I looked at him and he knew. He just knew. I didn't say a word. I didn't have to. He saw my tears and said, "I'm so sorry babe." We held each other out on the patio until I was brave enough to look at him in the face again. Once the tears stopped between the two of us, I remember thinking it may have been one of the hardest moments of my life.

It was the first of many hard moments. Now it was time to tell my family. The last thing I wanted was to be responsible for their tears, their need to pray, and their worrying. How was I supposed to tell them, "Hey, guess what guys... we have to do this cancer stuff all over again." We had lost my Dad in 2015 to a glioblastoma brain tumor, the most aggressive type of brain cancer you can have. The prognosis was not good. My family and I took care of him for almost



2 years. He lasted longer than most. The fears began to set in. Would I last 2 years? Is my husband going to be left alone like my mother was? Would my mother have to deal with another death so soon?

Because my breast cancer was progressing rapidly, we had to get going on treatment immediately. Instead of using our wedding gift cards to buy plates, silverware, and bedding like most newly married couples, we were buying chemotherapy supplies, surgery pillows, and anything that had ginger in it. Educating ourselves seemed to minimize our anxiety about it all because we had a rough idea of what to expect. We had a plan which created some relief. The plan was to have chemotherapy followed by a double mastectomy. I was doing what they asked me to do (for the most part), and my husband was getting his "doctorate degree" in breast cancer. Knowledge became his weapon of choice and prepping became mine. The plan was working out and by the time I had my first chemotherapy treatment, we felt like we knew everything there was to know about boobs. Then I got my genetic testing results back.

My medical team conducted genetic testing to see if I carried the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes. The good news was, I didn't. Then there was the bad news. It turns out that I have a rare genetic disorder called Li-Fraumeni Syndrome. I didn't fully understand what this meant for me until I started googling it. What a mistake. I felt like I did moments before I had to tell my husband and family that I had cancer all over again. This genetic disorder (that I still can't spell without spell check) is known as the "cancer gene." Basically, the T-cells in my body are not operating like a normal person's do to screen and filter the bad cells out. So the probability of cancer showing up in my life again and again and again is quite high. "Great..." I thought. And the hits just keep on coming. Because of this

disorder, I will be scanned, tested, poked, and prodded for the rest of my life. Sounds fun, right?

With this realization, I was less concerned about myself and more concerned about my marriage and what my future will actually look like. Guilt came over every waking hour, and it even showed up in my dreams. This is certainly not the kind of wife I wanted or imagined to be. What if there is more "sickness" in the "in sickness and in health" part of the vow? What if we are consumed with medical bills? What if I died before we even got to celebrate our 10 year anniversary? What if our whole marriage is consumed with dread and anxiety over what problems we're going to have next? What if he gets tired of looking at my "sick" body all the time? What if he's better off with someone else that will live longer?

Neither one of us signed up to deal with cancer for the rest of our lives. So where do we go from here? When I heard the words, "You have cancer", sirens went off in my brain. My heart became heavy and my anxiety was constantly stuck in my throat. But my husband, he didn't hear sirens. He heard a bell. You know, like the one you hear in a boxing ring. He fought for me, with me, beside me, and through me.

There aren't enough words that exist in the human language that can adequately express the love, respect, and joy that I feel for this husband of mine. Our friendship started in college when I was 19 years old. I spent the majority of our friendship trying to find him a girlfriend because I thought he was so amazing! Then one day, when I was 26, our eyes changed and we saw each other differently. We've been together ever since.



The best way I can describe how I feel about him is to compare the feeling to Christmas morning. For me, Christmas morning has always been a source of pure joy, excitement, and wonder. I can remember almost every Christmas morning that I've had since I was a little girl. I remember trying so hard to stay awake on Christmas Eve so I could sneak out and see Santa lay out all of the presents. Chace is my Christmas present that I get to open all the time. Will Li-Fraumeni Syndrome take away my present?

I finally had the courage to approach Chace with my concerns. This is what he told me.

"Whitney, would you be willing to take all of your problems and put them in a bag with 1,000 other strangers? Then, reach into that bag and exchange your problems for theirs?"

I had to really think about this... I started thinking about all the good things in my life that I wouldn't trade for anything. Ultimately, I said to him, "No. I wouldn't."

And he said, "Yeah, me neither. We're going to get through this the same way we started, by celebrating."

Since that day, my fears have turned into gratitude.

I've beaten breast cancer twice now since we've gotten married and I STILL wouldn't trade my circumstances with anyone else. I've spent more time in treatment than out of treatment ever since we said to each other, "I do." When my guilt of being a "sick" wife sneaks in, I remind myself to not let the worries of the next scan, the next treatment, or the next "you have cancer again" phone call ruin my day.

Since that day, my fears have turned into gratitude. I've beaten breast cancer twice now since we've gotten married and I STILL wouldn't trade my circumstances with anyone else. I've spent more time in treatment than out of treatment ever since we said to each other, "I do." When my guilt of being a "sick" wife sneaks in, I remind myself to not let the worries of the next scan, the next treatment, or the next "you have cancer again" phone call ruin my day.

We decided that we would get through our marriage the same way we started it, by celebrating. There aren't many silver linings to cancer. So we decide everyday to create our own, big or small. We adopted the titles Boobie Queen and Boobie King to remind ourselves to eat dessert first and treat ourselves well. We even started a business called, The Boobie Queen Company to show others how to do the same. The ultimate goal is to remind the other Boobie Queens out there that they were strong before cancer and they will be strong during and after cancer just the same.

Because, there will be more sirens that go off. There will be more tragedies that will make us suffer. And when they do, this Boobie Queen and her Boobie King will find ways to celebrate through the chaos and through cancer. Again and Again.

THE 2ND LAST DAY

By Kyle Freeland

The last day of chemo is supposed to be a wonderful celebration of finally beating the crap out of cancer. But for me, this was my second "last day." And it felt nothing like a party. The first time I defeated cancer was December 2007, when I was turning fourteen. At that point, I'd been doing chemo for almost four years. I'd put in my time, and I couldn't wait to be done forever.

And yet there I sat at Children's eight years later, waiting to do it again. It wasn't the same. Not when I was supposed to be planning a different kind of celebration. My college graduation should've been rolling around in May. But that got pushed back the day my cancer relapsed. Sitting in the treatment room with my Mom, who couldn't help herself from documenting our cancer "adventures," I wanted to cry. While she smiled and took pictures, relieved this day had finally come, I stared out the window, miserable.

All I could think of was here I am at the end of my two-and-a-half-year treatment and everything that could go wrong was. Confused and upset, I finally did break down and cry. Multiple times. Nothing like the happy crying my mom had been doing all week. And why? This was supposed to be a good day. Why did I have to feel this way on today of all days?

For starters, I was mad that my chemo buddy in the next room was finishing treatment as well. He got to celebrate on the same day as I did when he didn't take the same journey. He was a one-time survivor who only served a six-month sentence. I know. It wasn't fair of me to be mad. It wasn't his fault, and chemo sucks whether it lasts for one month or thirty. But in that moment, I didn't care. I'd been cheated.

Too soon, the time came to make my last treatment official. I'd ring the bell and sing the song — Pack your bags, get out the



door, you don't need chemo anymore — and move on with my life. Right? Not so much. What was I celebrating really? My life being ruined? My friends deserting me a few months into treatment? Dropping out of a college I loved? Having to move home? Losing my independence? Being forced to regain all my strength? And then there was that giant “elephant” looming in the room — going through chemo again if I relapsed a third time. All I'd known for over two years was sickness. Weakness. Frustration. Confusion. Setbacks. Isolation. Anxiety. Depression. What was I supposed to do now? Start over? And what was the point?

I know what you're thinking. Well, this is a depressing, sad story with zero encouragement. But I'm not done. I'm writing this over four years later. If I could go back to that day, here's what I would tell myself in that moment: Cancer sucks. This last treatment is not the last day of anything. In fact, this weekend you'll be admitted to the hospital for fever and complications from this last chemo treatment. After that, you'll start to recover. You'll go back to college and make new friends. You'll even change your major and find “your place” in the world of psychology. You'll graduate and apply to grad school. Then, just when you think you might be returning to a sense of normalcy, you'll be diagnosed with hemochromatosis — a blood disorder that's caused by iron overload. That will set off a chain of other disorders — liver disease, diabetes, and other complications. Oh, yeah, and you'll have to figure all of this out while starting grad school.

But hey, yay you! You got in! Earning your master's in counseling will be tough. You'll make friends and lose friends. Have a few relationships you wish you hadn't. And then that diploma will be hanging on your wall, and you'll finally get to start kicking cancer's ass by helping others conquer the never ending psychological battle that goes hand in hand with chemo.

Cancer may leave physical scars, but the emotional scars cut deeper. The emotional damage cancer left was far worse than all of the physical damage combined. I wish I'd understood that while sitting in that room in 2016. I get it now. But I survived. I'm stronger. I'm wiser. I'm more peaceful than I used to be. I've earned the experiences, not just the skills, to help someone else push through it.

Now that I'm done talking to myself, here's what I want to tell you: Whether you're working toward your first last day or your second or third, just know that it's okay to feel like everything is not okay. It's even more okay to ask for help. This is hard in a way most people don't understand. But once you make it through, you can use all that bad to do something good.

HOW LOSING MY HAIR WAS ONE OF MY FAVORITE MEMORIES

By Alice Moon

I knew I would be losing all my hair since the day chemo was first mentioned. I knew some people get very emotional over the loss of their hair...and I knew I would fall in that category. I have been praised for my beach wavy hair all 26 years of my life. It hid my egg shaped head and overly wide cheekbones. It was the part of me that made me feel the most beautiful.

I was surprised that after 3 sessions of chemo, my hair was still intact! Maybe I had dodged the bullet of hair loss. But then one day in the shower during week 5, fistfuls of hair were slipping out with my shampoo.

I called all my friends... "Hey want to do something crazy with me? Want to shave my hair off tomorrow?"

My friends, sister, and her 4 month old baby came over. I stepped into a garbage bag in my bathroom to keep the hair from littering my clothes. They each chose a dream hairstyle they wanted to carve into my hair. And one at a time, each one took their turn of shaving a different hair style.

My three-foot mane went to an edgy undercut bob, then Skrillex, to mohawk, and soul patch... on the top of my head. I have never cried harder during my cancer journey than I did at that moment. I'm thankful those tears that came hardest were out of pure entertainment by making me the butt end of the joke.

With cancer, I've learned that you get more creative to find the happier moments in life. Sure, the events are terribly dark and all have potential to be terribly sad. But plan ahead to make each day and moment extra creative to make you happy. It takes a team effort but in the long run when you look back at your painful journey, it will be glittered with love and joy. Light shines brightest in the darkest places.

