

CANCER ANGEL ©

BY Kim Tinkham

CHAPTER TWO

The Mammogram (Definitely Not An E Ticket Ride)

On the day of my mammogram I awoke with this feeling of dread. I didn't like taking time away from my work. I especially did not like taking time away from by work or anything else for that matter when it came to going through another mammogram. I was hoping that in the years between the last one I had experienced and this one that technology had indeed graduated out of the dark ages of cold metal and pressed flesh to a quick little laser light scan. I could hope.

I arrived at the Breast Diagnostic Center for my mammogram appointment 20 minutes early. I wanted to fill out my paperwork and be ready to go when they called me in. I completed my paperwork, managed to read through two entire magazines and several brochures that touted the various other procedures that I might want to have at a later date. I watched three other women come and go before me and walked around the lobby feigning interest in the artwork. I know nothing of art. I was just killing time. I thought to myself that I should have brought my laptop and done some work. I would have if I had known it would take this long. Next time I will have to remember. What am I saying, there isn't going to be a next time. I was reaching for a third magazine when they called my name and I jumped up as if they would give my spot away if I didn't respond quickly enough. Don't ask me why. I'm just programmed that way. I hate to make people wait for two seconds even if it is people who have made be wait for ... 55 minutes! Already I was hoping to get out of there as quickly as possible and get back to my work.

The rest is kind of hazy. The mammography tech was very friendly. As a matter of fact she was from my area. I began thinking that I hope she doesn't tell anyone that I was in. I don't like anyone to know what I do in my spare time. Who are we kidding? I make sure that I don't have any spare time. To paraphrase Gordon Gekko in Wall Street 'spare time is for wimps'. I took my attention off Michael Douglas' character and placed my attention back on the mammography tech who was now explaining to me what was going to happen. I smiled and cracked some joke about the machine not having made much progress from several years back ... or from the dark ages for that matter. Yes, it was still cold and yes, it hurt like hell. We had some difficulty getting situated. I had forgotten that this was the first time I would have experienced a mammogram since the addition of breast implants several years earlier. I was more concerned about not damaging them during the session than anything else. I would hate to have to get them redone because I sprung a leak. Hey, I don't know why those thoughts went through my mind I just know they did. Anything was better than concentrating on the mammogram. When it was all over the tech excused her self and asked me to keep my gown on. She wanted to make sure that all the pictures were clear before I started getting redressed.

While I waited for her to come back in and tell me to redress I was playing out in my mind how I wanted to spend the rest of my day. I had to stop and get gas. I needed to check the mail at the post office. I needed to make a few phone calls on the way to people who had left me voicemails. I could be pretty productive even away from my office.

The door opened and I could tell by the look on her face that it was not good news. "Sorry, Kim, the films are just not clear enough. We're going to have to take another set."

Another set? You mean I have to do this all over again? I didn't want to do it the first time. Why not just stick me in a microwave? I thought all these things but all I could say was, "okay". *I really need to stand up for myself.* I should put that on my resolutions list. I know it wasn't her fault. But it wasn't my fault either. I hopped off the stool where I had been sitting and once again subjected myself to the tech which by now was looking like the female version of the Marquis de Sade.

The second set came out clear and I redressed to wait for the doctor to come in and tell me that everything looked normal and that they would see me again in twelve months for my next mammogram. Fat chance. I had already made up my mind not to visit this theme park anymore. The lines were too long and the rides weren't fun at all. In my head I imagined women waiting in line at the mamma-rail with their cute paisley and floral examination gowns. After an hour waiting for the ride you could climb on board and then be whisked away towards a tunnel that was much too small in which you and everyone with you would be squeezed into one sixteenth of your size between two cold, metal plates all the while music played in the background repeating the words, 'breathe in and hold still, breathe in and hold still, breathe in and hold still'. No thanks, I was not returning.

"Hi Kim, how are you today?" a voice entered into the room trailed by a small dark haired woman in a white lab coat holding my films.

"Uh, well, I guess that would be for you to tell me. What's next?"

"Let's take a look at your films", and she slid them onto the light board that seemed to come out of no where. I really have to start paying attention to my surroundings. She pointed at what looked like my breast and then to a huge mass. My heart stopped. I didn't know what to say. She continued, "This is your breast implant." She must have seen the shocked look on my face. Oh, thank God! I had thought it was the lump! I almost started laughing until I noticed what she was now pointing at. A small dark mass just above my breast implant and the muscle that covered it. It seemed pretty small. But looking at it now it did look larger than what I had been feeling. Come to think of it. I now realized that it was a little sore. It must have been all the probing, pushing and stretching during the mammograms. I could actually feel its presence now without touching it.

I zoned out during part of her conversation but managed to jump back in when she said "... so we'd like to do a sonogram and see where we are. If you'll get undressed I will be back in to do a sonogram and then we will go from there."

Go from there? This was taking way too much time. This lump has come and gone and it probably would have been gone by the end of the week but now it's mad because of the stupid double take on the mammograms and will hang on a bit longer just to get back at me. Go from there? Where are we going? Where are we? That's what I was thinking but all I said was, "okay". Boy, do I need to get a back bone.

Five minutes later the doctor came back in, had me lie down on the table and place my right arm above and behind my head. She squeezed a little jelly (it was cold) on to my breast and then placed the sonogram instrument (colder) on top of it. Memories of my sonogram when I was pregnant with my now teenage son, Garrett, came flooding back. I think the jelly and the instrument were cold then to. Once again, not much progress in patient comfort had been made in 18 years.

Dr. V began talking about this and that and size and placement and things that went through my ears and above my head. All I wanted to know was what is it, do I need to get rid of it and when can I go back to work? She finished with her exam, placed a tissue on my chest to wipe off the sonogram gel and said ...

“I think we should do a biopsy today to find out if it is malignant. I can schedule you in within the next thirty minutes. I do think it needs to be done today. Is there someone you would like to call to tell them you will be a little longer? I’ll be back in fifteen minutes.” The door shut behind her. Somewhere between the words ‘malignant’ and ‘I’ll be back in fifteen minutes’ she explained the needle biopsy procedure to me. It sounded easy enough, the needle is inserted into the lump (tumor), some tissue is extracted, you get a bandage over the small incision and you go home and wait for the lab results.

Malignant? Thirty minutes? Today? Call someone? Yes, Regis, I’d like to phone a friend. And who is this friend? Oh, that would be my husband, Scott. He knows all about how things like this work ... fixing things that are broken ... making do with what you have ... he knows me.

That’s when it hit me. I really didn’t want to call Scott. He was going to tell me to do what I thought was best. I could always get my way with him. He always trusted my judgment. Funny, I’m not sure I trusted my own judgment right now. I pulled my phone out of my purse and dialed his number.

“Hi, how’d it go? Are you on your way home?” His voice was so normal sounding. I was surprised that he could hear me over the loud sound of blood rushing through my ears.

“Well, she wants to do a Biopsy today and I don’t think that’s what I want to do. I really need to think this over and do some research. Is that okay with you?”

“Yeah, whatever you want. But ... (I thought to myself, Scott, do not give me a ‘but’ right now. I really want to just walk out of here and forget everything that just happened) maybe we should go ahead and take care of it today.”

“No, I think I need to think about this right now. Besides I know that it’s going to be pretty expensive and we really don’t have the money right now. Is that okay? I promise I will get some more information and call back to make an appointment.”

“Okay. I’ll see you at home.”

I got dressed and was sitting on the table with my purse and car keys in hand by the time Dr. V walked back in. There was a look of surprise on her face. “You’re not going to have the biopsy today?”

“No, not today. I would like to think about it and get back to you if that’s okay?”

“Well, yes, but I do think that the sooner we get this done the better. I’ve been performing these for over ten years now and this does not look good. You really should have this done as soon as you can.”

“Yes, I will, I just need to think about it a bit that’s all. I also need to think about how I am going to pay for it. I’m self employed and my insurance” Blah, blah, blah. She wasn’t listening to me. I wasn’t listening to me. I just wanted to get out of there. She handed me her card. I stopped by the front desk to pay and sign some things and then I walked out into the hallway, took the elevator downstairs, walked out into the parking lot and tried to remember where I had parked. I couldn’t remember what car I drove. I pushed the alarm button on my remote and a horn started blaring from the right side of the parking lot. I wondered if there was something on the remote that I could push that would sound off the alarm in my brain so that I could find it. It had turned off somewhere between Dr. V handing me her business card and me pushing the first floor button on the elevator. I can’t drive without a brain!

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