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A Tiny Spot

By Barbara Carr Phillips

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A Tiny Spot

By Barbara Carr Phillips

A tiny spot is no big deal. Unless you're a breast cancer survivor waiting for screen results.

My husband and I moved to another state with our children after my lumpectomy and chemotherapy/radiation treatments. He accepted a job transfer, and we felt it was a fresh start for all of us.

After we settled in, I scheduled my first follow-up exam.

When I met my new oncologist, I read off my list of concerns. I wrote them in my journal so I wouldn't forget.

"Don't take this personally," I say, "but I don't like going to the doctor's office."

The doctor smiles and nods.

"And I won't schedule appointments with a new radiologist or a new surgeon for follow-ups. I just want you to take care of everything."

He smiles again and says, "you won't and I will."

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He gives me a prescription for Tamoxifen and schedules some follow-up screens. It's been almost a year since my diagnosis.

"Will you schedule a surgery to have my port catheter removed?" I ask. The port catheter was surgically inserted in my chest before chemotherapy treatments began. The nurses used it to draw blood and administer chemotherapy instead of sticking my arm each time. Being the type of person who faints at the sight of a needle, I appreciated it during treatment.

"Yes, as soon as I receive the follow-up results," he replies.

A few days later, I complete the screens. Piece of cake. I'm not scheduled to go back to the oncologist for three months.

I start to make plans. I'm excited because my hair has finally grown enough to ditch the bandana. When my port catheter is removed from my chest, I won't feel so self-conscious about wearing a swimsuit.

A few days after the screens, the nurse calls me. "There is a tiny spot on your liver," she says. The doctor wants you to go for a CT scan."

"Fine," I say.

I go to the grocery store with my daughters, Makenna, 4 and Amber, 17. When we check out, I notice I forgot several things on my list. I push my cart out to the parking lot and it feels like it weighs a ton. I almost make it to the car before the tears start flowing.

This cannot be happening again. I know what a "tiny spot" means. A one-centimeter "spot" detected by my mammogram a year ago initiated this entire nightmare.

"What's the matter mom?" Amber asks.

"I'm very tired today," I reply. She doesn't ask any more questions. She saw first hand how being tired made me cry during chemotherapy treatment.

I show up for the CT scan the following Thursday. I tell the nurse I have a port to draw blood from.

"I'm sorry, honey, we can't use a port for this type of blood test."

When the nurse inserts the IV, I stare at the exit sign and imagine ripping the needle out and walking to my car. It's my body.

"Are you okay?" she asks.

"Yes," I say, but I keep my eyes on the exit.

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The next day my husband, Randy, wakes up with a fever. Stomach virus. I decide to take Makenna to the neighborhood pool. I put on my swimsuit and tape a bandage over my port. I leave my cell phone in the house. When the doctor called me with bad news a year ago, Randy wasn't with me. I won't let that happen again.

We're at the pool about two hours when I see my husband parking his car outside the gate. My heart sinks. There is only one reason he would drag himself out of bed to meet me at the pool.

"You forgot your phone," he says. "And your oncologist called."

Then he hands me a piece of paper.

"I can't read it," I say. My eyes are filled with tears.

"No, honey," he says. "It's good news."

I blink and read the diagnosis: "Hemangioma. Group of blood vessels. Totally benign. Born with it."

"I asked him to repeat the information twice," he said. "I knew you'd want to know exactly what he said."

Totally benign. I can breathe. We go home and I tape the note in my journal.

A "tiny spot" will always be a major deal for me, and that's okay. I'll continue to live fully and proactively. I'll confide my fears in my journal when my family can't understand them. And I'll keep right on being a survivor.

Barbara Carr Phillips, journaling instructor, believes dreams come true when you journal your way to success. Visit <http://www.journalworkshops.net> to order your one-to-one journaling workshop or to sign up for her FREE ezine.

Fillings Get Smaller...and Smaller

By Judith Sloan

--We all remember going to the dentist, opening wide, and listening with held breath while he examined our teeth for decay. "Please, no cavities," we prayed.

With his prickly instrument in hand, our dentist probed every tooth, looking for "soft" spots where decay had invaded our once hard, pristine dental enamel. And when the point found its quarry, a tiny spot of decay, he would nod and say, "We've got a small one here. We'll watch to see if it grows into something."

No longer. Fast-forward to 2004, and the prickly instrument takes a back seat to a high-tech laser

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probe (<http://www.washdent.com/services.html>) that lands a preemptive strike in the battle against decay.

Make way for "Minimally Invasive Dentistry." (<http://www.washdent.com/services.html>) The mouthful of words means simply that dentists no longer allow dots of decay to advance into large craters. Armed with the ultimate in high-tech sleuthing, they now set out to find decay—at the earliest possible moment.

"Now we can absolutely eliminate many large fillings that lead to cracked teeth, crowns and other more invasive treatment," says Dr. Daniel J. Deutsch (<http://www.washdent.com/deutsch.html>), of the Washington Center for Dentistry in Washington, DC. (<http://www.washdent.com>)

Here's how it works: The dental decay finder touches the surface of every tooth, each time flashing a digital score that reports the presence of decay.

A tooth that scores above a certain number—has at least the tiniest dot of decay.

And getting at the teeny offending area involves another technological wonder. A gentle dental "sandblaster" uses tiny particles to whisk away decay in layers. The area gets filled in with a tooth-colored liquid that hardens in seconds under a special light.

Patients walk out of the office with tiny fillings.

"And the best part," says Dr. Deutsch, "is they have treatment with no needle and no drill!"

Judith Sloan

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– Cosmetic Dentistry in Washington D.C.

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