

'My Hot Tamales' by Jean Criss, author, **"My Pain Woke Me Up – BLISS!"** November 3, 2013



I am frequently asked why I titled my first book...."**My Pain Woke Me Up - BLISS**". Well, it did, literally and figuratively, and the saga continues. Only this time it didn't wake me up, my breast health issue occurred when I was going to bed last Monday night. Sudden and uncontrollable fever 'n chills, a warm left breast, turning hotter by the minute, with dagger-like, striking breast pain. I had my strong assumptions what this could be. It was all too familiar as I mention in Chapter 18 of BLISS and discuss **'My Hot Tamales!'**



It's called **Breast Cellulitis**. Cellulitis is an uncommon infection in the breast and can be difficult to distinguish from inflammatory breast cancer or benign erythematous conditions of the breast. Pain is a prominent feature of breast cellulitis and is associated with erythema, swelling, and warmth. Unfortunately, unknown causes – could be viral, bacterial, or just a dormant from my days with MRSA as I was told. I had my own suspicions that perhaps this was in fact dormant from one of my prior OR surgeries.

Cancer recurrence isn't one's only fear. Sometimes it can simply be an infection recurrence – in fact, a very serious infection. When you think you are over the hump as a five-year breast cancer survivor, you sometimes get hit like this - with a ton of bricks, when life is going just fine. And then, you have to deal with it. Stat and pronto!



My hot tamales were progressively putting me into a state of unconsciousness as my WBC (white blood count) went from 5.0, about two weeks ago, to over 11.5 after I got my lab results in the hospital. I was glad I acted so quickly. I had made arrangements for my children in the middle of that night, and comforted them before I left informing both of them that "Mom's going to be fine", and rushed myself to the hospital by 1:00 am. I was so use to the drill. When I arrived at the scene, the attendants seemed surprised that I had an overnight bag in hand as though I expected the worst and was required to stay. They don't see many patients going into the ER with an overnight bag but for me, this was not my first time. After all, the last time this occurred, I was hospitalized in ICU for ten days. So yes, I had my bag in hand, mini iPad, smart phone and cords. What

else does a gal do when she knows what to expect? This was my third time I had obtained MRSA or breast cellulitis over the past three years – two forms of breast infection, so I've been more than familiar with the process.

I also had text my medical team at 12:30 am to inform them that I was on my way (Infectious Disease, Internal Medicine, Oncologist, Plastics, and Breast Surgeon). It's nothing to take lightly - I wanted them to assemble the experts to ensure they were all on deck and as prepared as I was.

It's funny but when they inform you that you've become a five-year survivor, I did laugh to myself and question that status and now people understand why. While it may be five years cancer free, it has not been five years incident free. In fact, I really have not had a "free" year yet in which I have not been in an ER, OR or like situation. I long for that day.

Next was a series of tests to rule out the usual suspect things and thankfully they all came back negative while my breast began to show red and blotchy signs of the infection gaining momentum. Then the waiting game began. Lab results and a transfer to another hospital for the proper Breast Surgeon's diagnosis 10 hours later via deep ultrasound and physical exam, and the proper diagnosis was made. Caught rather quickly and put on a high dose of oral anti-biotic to stop the infection from spreading, and we attempted to put this baby to bed, so to speak. I longed for answers but you kind of get use to not knowing the 'What' or 'Why's' when this situation occurs – you just need to focus on the present. And so I did, with focus on my breast health and wellness.

What had seemed like a simple breast muscle spasm extending to my back, neck and arms with constant false results from the previous four weeks of tests, including one trip which landed me in the local Urgent Care with severe chest pain, resulted in this episode, diagnosis and treatment. It all added up now. The infection was **brewing** inside me and waited to show up for

Halloween. What timing!

The onset of pain and inconsistent spasms moving about my upper body had finally resonated to one area under my breast which sent me through the roof and into the ER on October 29th. It's ironic that I end Breast Cancer Awareness Month and my book tour in October, 2013 with a renewed story about breast health and yet, add another chapter to **BLISS!**

My Plastic Surgeon was already discussing "Plan B" and "C" as it may be. We had to be prepared if the oral anti-biotic treatment failed. "Then, if IV treatment would be unsuccessful (Plan B), then the only other option was to remove the implants and receive a TRAM Flap reconstructive surgery (Plan C)", my surgeon told me. Something I've avoided thinking about to-date since I opted not to pursue this option from the get-go. While I was trying to focus on the present oral anti-biotic treatment, remedy and getting well, I had ample time to think about Plan C. I was reminded this would entail six-month's downtime and I also knew I did not have sufficient body fat to move around to create breasts and fill the inside (cavity) and outside pockets, without undue and added risk and further complications, I would opt out. I was also concerned about body and breast function, movement, strength, image, and all sorts of other issues to contend with this form of surgery as it impacts various parts of your body. I decided five years ago against it and again, did not want to entertain it now! I even placed a call to my new **CRISSCROSS®** bra designer to speed things up in anticipation of Plan C, in case "I" needed to wear one of my new post-surgical designs. I was covering all bases in comfort and design that I have been working so diligently towards for survivors.

So, I came up with another alternative solution. I decided I would be **brave, beautiful and bold**. I would decide on this alternative, if I need to make a drastic decision, and will once again document my story. I would write about "Boob-less and Brave" or Bra-Free Forever" or "BREAST Bacterial Boob Jobs", . . . whatever the catchy title, I decided I will go boob-less! My life and children mean more to me than my breasts. After enduring too many surgeries already for stage 0 and 1 bilateral breast cancer including bilateral lumpectomy with radiation followed by bilateral mastectomy with four (4!) reconstructive surgeries plus MRSA, and two (2) breast cellulitis infections, and other minor surgeries, I didn't have to think too hard about my choices and recovery options. I want to LIVE.

My third book is entitled “**My Pain Woke Me Up - LIVE Your Dreams**” and while I complete that I am presently living my dreams. My boobs were not going to hold me back anymore. Having reconstructive surgery after surgery, not only is a toll on your body, mind and soul, it impacts your family, business, relations, finances and life.

I feel better now, the pain is subsiding and I’m up and about. A positive attitude, I’ve learned, helps me persevere thru my pain to keep calm. *Stress-free*. I cleared my plate that very next day, cancelled all biz appointments throughout this past week to focus on my good health and wellness. A lesson learned - if you have pain, seek medical help and the answers. If I had ignored this infection, it could have been life threatening.

I’ve had great support from my entire medical team, Dr. M in particular!, friends and family and that’s my story.

I share this story because **Breast Cellulitis** is not a common breast health issue. However, a “**survivorship care plan**” for cancer patients that incorporates information about late effects of treatment, health management behaviors, disease management, and recurrence monitoring for infection or other related issues is very important to your overall health and wellness for sustained ongoing treatment I’ve learned over the years. Whether you had had Lymphedema, Breast Cellulitis, or other related breast health issues, it is important to manage your lifestyle and seek treatment.

I was informed a simple paper cut, nail manicure, or skin abrasion could have caused my breast issue. Seems nominal and unrealistic but take it from the experts, my ID (Infectious Disease) specialist, they know what they are talking about when they can treat problems like MRSA and Breast Cellulitis. Although this was not contagious, it was a serious condition. So I tend to listen, act and follow thru on all recommendations they make because I’ve seen the results when my physicians continue to save my life. I am forever grateful!

It’s almost a week later and I’m feeling good and have a few more days on anti-biotic treatment. My lab results have decreased back to what they should be and I have healthy news. Life is good.

A message, my message, to survivors, **‘Don’t let CANCER get the BREAST of you!’** For more information about my hot tamales, breast cellulitis, treatment, and related breast resources and management, please purchase your copy of “**My Pain Woke Me Up-BLISS!**” today. Proceeds support Susan G. Komen. Available at major media book outlets including Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble in e-book format for \$9.99 or On-Demand in soft cover. **For an author signed and discounted personal four color copy, please submit your order here. <http://jeancrissmedia.com/bliss/>**



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Let’s put an end to breast cancer forever!