



Dealing with Cancer: A Daughter's Story
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Caring for the elderly population has deeply affected me in both my personal and professional lives. In the personal arena, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer in February, 2004. Of course, even hearing the word “cancer” was immediately paralyzing for me. The thought of my mother dying was very distressing, especially since I am an only child and my father died in 1990.

My mother is a very independent career woman who scarcely shows any vulnerabilities, and this has made her illness especially challenging for me and for her. For once she was not in control and she rarely showed her vulnerable side. As in many families, the shift from the mother-caretaker role to a patient in need of support (even from a daughter) was often difficult.

During two surgeries, chemotherapy and numerous appointments, my stepfather was her primary support person. The whole cancer experience is, of course, a draining and humbling one—appointments, fatigue, losing hair, nausea, not being able to work. My stepfather went to all doctor’s appointments and to wig and prosthesis fittings. He was there through the nausea and the fatigue.

My mother tried to protect me throughout her illness and rarely shared her experiences or feelings with me. Her tears and fears were shared with my stepfather and other friends. Sharing feelings does not come easily for her and I am extremely proud of my mother for talking about her fears with others. I usually heard about her emotional healing process through friends. But sometimes I wish she had shared with me some of what she was going through. She protected me because I have my own stresses of raising children, working and all that comes with that.

As an adult, however, I wanted to be involved and didn’t need or want that kind of protection. I am willing and able to handle whatever fears my mother has and would be honored for her to share those with me. During the difficult times, I would love to have the opportunity to be more of a support person for my Mom. Even now, when she is fearful about another symptom such as tenderness in her stomach or a sore throat, she only reveals what is happening after going to the doctor and finding out the diagnosis. I hear about the stress after the fact.

The connection with my mother is an important one. To really know each other, it is important to share both the good and the bad.