

What I learned from Babe Cancer

On the heels of my last Coach's Corner when I spoke of reaching some realm of spiritual enlightenment which resulted in finally deciding to stop telling my body to \$#@% off...I come to you with this. I guess my body prefers it when I sling obscenities because after I chose to cradle it like a baby and sing lullabies I get hit with the line we only want to hear in movies "you have cancer". Crap.

Well, I guess I have to give that pain in the neck some credit as without it I never would have had the CT scan that revealed a tumour on my thyroid. From the moment I heard there was a "suspicious lump but probably nothing" I truly knew this was not going to be good. I can't tell you why, it's not in my nature to go to the negative first and even when everyone around me was saying everything would be fine I would nod my head in a kind of slow, deranged manner, knowing the outcome beyond a shadow of a doubt. After over two months of tests and appointments and doctor/office staff screw-ups I did finally receive the diagnosis I had expected. I will share one funny story in relation to the doctor office guffaw. I called the office a week after my biopsy to ask if results had come in...

them: "why yes they have"

me: "then why didn't anyone call me?"

them: "the results are likely good when that happens"

me: "hmmmm OK"

So...I have an appointment a few days later which was no rush of course, because results are "likely good".

Doctor: "well, looks like good news"

me: "really? ok, can I see the report?"

Doctor: "sure" He then pulls up my records and looks perplexed "I don't know why I can't see them" hits refresh "must be here" hits refresh...refresh...refresh....then shakes his head "I don't know how to tell you this but I'm thinking of a different patient."

me: "_____"

I guess there is another patient in the same office with a very, very similar name to mine who happened to have similar tests. I won't share it as this is a tiny town and I don't want to get sued or anything. But really? honestly? serious-ly?!

Well, you can imagine how the rest of the story went and after over another two weeks I finally got confirmation that I am a lucky member of the C-Club. The details of the journey aren't important. Although I did have to share that doctor story because it's just kind of funny...and kind of not. What I really want to share with you are the life lessons I was taught from Babe Cancer. Oh sorry, have you not heard that the technical term for Thyroid Cancer is Babe Cancer? Shortly after my diagnosis I learned that my all time chick-crush Brook Burke (did anyone else watch Rock star: INXS?...total babe) also had TC and then found out that Sofia Vergara (Modern Family hot mama) is the new spokesperson for Synthroid thyroid replacement because she too had TC. So, the day I found out (for real this time) about my diagnosis I came home to this in my kitchen from my husband. It was at this time, we coined it Babe Cancer and also knew a sense of humour was going to be essential in the months to come.

I've read several books and articles from people who share their lessons after life struggles, and many of these struggles are far more heart wrenching than mine but this isn't about comparing suffering it's about the learning. I want you to know I feel good today. The surgery to remove my thyroid was successful and I will find out shortly if radiation is needed but my crazy, intuitive gut (the one that knows all) says NO. I have a pretty badass scar on my neck and a constant lump in my throat (crying is very hard so whatever you do keep my happy :)). My biggest struggle is my voice. It's strained and man-like and when I talk I get very tired. However, oddly there are many people in my life that are not seeing this as a problem. Just you wait friends and family...I'll be back and there's lots I've been saving up to say! As for the lessons learned, there were many and this is my much edited version from my very personal story.



Life Lesson #1: Deep gratitude for the kindness of community

It has been a most humbling and truly life-changing experience to feel the love from this beautiful community. It was a struggle at first to accept gifts of food, flowers, cards, books...but once I allowed myself to open my arms and my heart I can't tell you the healing it brought me. One day I was curled up with a blanket in my back yard and a hockey parent I knew from years back and the mom of one of my son's friends popped by with warm wishes and bags of prepared meals. Her 18 year old son (Jesse's friend) had spent the day researching which healthy foods are best for someone dealing with cancer (honestly, this kid is something special...shouldn't he be dipping cheezies in big gulps or something?). Under the advice of my naturopath, I had recently given up sugar, dairy and white flour and was really struggling with foods to eat. Muffins with my coffee and mainlining twizzlers were essential requirements for my daily diet. Anyways, in walks this angel with a bag full of goodness...dairy free soups, whole wheat quesadillas, organic chicken, and more. I was so deeply touched. It was these acts of kindness from hockey parents, customers, and neighbours in our sweet little town that made a massive impact on my healing in those weeks after surgery. My lesson? To be so grateful for this community and remember to pay it forward.

Life Lesson #2: Say Goodnight Gracie...

I have been blessed with energy in my life and this lesson has been a tough one to swallow (haha...see what I did there?). I am a social animal for sure...I say Yes to the party and I say No to leaving early. But now I am TIRED, holy freaking TIRED, all of the time. I pray that I am just still recovering from the surgery or that my thyroid meds need adjustment but this is definitely a challenge. For now, I'll be thankful for the time I do get to play with friends but when it's time to go?...just say Goodnight Gracie...

Life Lesson #3: Self care before business...or there will be no business

While I love being self employed, I can tell you it does get a wee bit tricky when you are taken away from your business for any length of time. I have a ridiculously amazing staff who are completely competent to run the stores on a daily basis but unfortunately my responsibilities are difficult to delegate. My primary job is that I buy the clothes and pay the bills and my belief was if I faltered on either of those things...bad stuff would happen. Guess what? I faltered...and bad stuff didn't happen...well, not yet. It has taken a lot longer for me to get back in the game than I thought and my suppliers, agents, and staff have all been totally understanding. So, for my fellow nutsos...I mean, entrepreneurs, when your body calls you to care for it please answer the call. The business will wait.

Life Lesson #4: Don't worry about saying the perfect thing but please do NOT say "there is nothing to worry about".

I can tell you I heard some pretty interesting things from people during this journey and I know that every single one was well-intentioned. We all struggle with the right thing to say in the face of illness, death, or bad news and I do believe the most important thing is that our heart is in the right place and we make sure we don't pull away from people in times of need because of our own fear. But...I will say that if someone you love is waiting to hear the results of a serious medical test please refrain from telling them there is nothing to worry about. I had a close friend say this to me and then "really, this is no big deal"...uh, yup it kinda is.

Life Lesson #5: A little indulgence is OK but we can't fill our bodies with crap ALL of the time and then get all "wha???" how did that happen" when it fails us.

Probably the lowest point for me during this process was when I felt that I gave myself cancer. I mentioned earlier about mainlining twizzlers. Well, I didn't stop there...I had bags and bowls of candy within reach at all times and never really considered what consuming them could be doing to my health. I know, it's insane, there are articles everywhere about the evils of sugar and yet I chose to completely ignore them. The day after I got my diagnosis a friend called me and said "sugar is a cancer feeder you know!". I love this person dearly but at the time I wanted to stab her in the eyeball with a butterscotch candy stick. Over the next couple of days I went into a depression thinking that all of things I've consumed (and loved!) has caused this cancer. Thankfully, my very smart sister snapped me out of it and I started to look at things with more of a level head. However, this has forever changed what I will fill my one and only body with. Treats will be treated like, well, a treat.

Life Lesson #6: Cherish the gift of voice.

It's been 5 weeks since my surgery and my voice is still causing me much grief. I have a very difficult time speaking in loud environments or for any length of time. I run out of breath easily and eventually the strain from trying to talk makes me super tired. The worst part is being unable to raise my voice or inflect emotion and this can be especially hard when talking on the phone as the other person can't see my facial expression so I come off sounding like some bored surfer dude. I'm sure it will get better in time but my lesson has been to treat it gently and to choose my words a little more carefully. I try to get rid of the blah blah blah we all tend to do, you know what I mean right? saying a lot without saying anything. I like to think if I could only speak 10 words, what would they be? That being said...writing doesn't count so I have let myself speak very freely in this article. Thanks for still being with me by the way. :)

Life Lesson #7: We must share our fears with our children.

I tried to keep it together pretty well but then I showed my son I was afraid, and it allowed him to do the same. It was like we let air into the room. And since this is my Coach's Corner and I'm flying solo here I need a quick moment to tell you my son was a complete and total rockstar during this process. He comforted me, made me laugh, and showed me so much love every single day. They say teenagers can be selfish but the quality that most showed up was a genuine selflessness...he seemed to always be searching for what would make me feel better or bring a smile to my face. Love you bear.

Life Lesson #8: Find the Easy way...why do we make everything so hard?

We've all heard a million times that Life is Too Short. Well, it's true and it is and I don't know why we feel we need to accept challenges at every turn. I've learned that the easy way is waaaaay better. Whenever I'm struggling with something I ask myself "what would be the easiest way to get what I want?".

Life Lesson #9: Do what you love. Not what your parents say to do, or your spouse, or your friends, or your kids, or what you think you're supposed to.

As long as I'm not hurting anyone or breaking any major laws, or messing with my health I am going to spend my life doing what I love. I know people say this all the time but I'm really gonna do it. This isn't totally new for me as I've tried to live this way already but going forward...it's a love fest baby.

Life Lesson #10: I am so so so LUCKY.

I have a gratitude jar on my kitchen counter and it over-floweth with little pieces of paper filled with lots of things I am grateful for. Like banana chai smoothies, clean hardwood floors, the birds that have made a bath out of our wines barrels in the back yard. On several pieces of paper you will find two little letters...J and I. What I learned from Babe Cancer is that my husband, JI, is one ah-mazing man. While I have always known this cerebrally I feel I have now experienced him with new eyes. He showed up for me when I needed him most in so many ways...thru his heart, his humour and his devotion I never felt alone during this struggle. He always complains I never give him "ink" in Coach's Corner and it's a bummer I had to get cancer in order for him to finally make the page but here you are my darling. My greatest life lesson from Babe Cancer is that I am so lucky to be loved by you.