

When cake becomes therapy

By Melissa T. Schultz, Huffington Post

For my birthday seven years ago, I received a diagnosis of breast cancer. It wasn't the kind of present a girl wants to get – not like a pair of earrings, or a pretty nightgown or a bouquet of fresh flowers wrapped in colored tissue. For a while after my cancer, I couldn't stand the sight of birthday cake. How could something so sweet leave such a bitter taste?

Then, one September morning five years ago, unable to sleep and anxiously awaiting a doctor's appointment later in the day, I found myself staring down at a plate full of white cake with buttercream frosting, spread to resemble the ocean's waves. The cake had called out to me the day before from the refrigerated case at the bakery – the same case I'd walked past countless times and never once noticed its contents.

It's not as if I was going to eat the whole thing in one sitting, mind you. I cut the enormous slice of icebox-cold treat in half, placing one portion on a plate and carefully returning the rest to the refrigerator. Alone at my kitchen counter I ate slowly – savoring every luscious bite, washing the cake down with hot black tea which I drank from a tea cup that once belonged to my grandmother. When I was done, nary a crumb remained, though my anxiety about the day ahead lingered.

The lump I'd found on my neck weeks before was still present and accounted for, serving as a constant reminder that life can be unfair. It led me to my oncologist – a man with a kind face and tender touch despite his occupation in the dark arts – who directed me to make an appointment with a specialist, which prompted me to walk by that bakery case in the first place. Since my original diagnosis of breast cancer, every lump and spot that surfaced anywhere on my body has been

examined under a microscope. I've been biopsied and X-rayed, then generally left to stew over a long weekend awaiting the results. Each time, I told myself I couldn't affect change by worrying, and needed to press on with life. So I organized drawers and emergency contact lists, in case I needed to turn over the reins of mothering in an instant, and watched reruns of I Love Lucy till the world felt like a happy place again.

Read the whole story