

**MARCH
FORTH**

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**My Journey through Diagnosis, Treatment,
and Recovery from Breast Cancer**

MARCI A. SCHMITT



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My Journey through Diagnosis, Treatment, and Recovery from Breast Cancer

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“Chemotherapy takes you to hell’s door. It’s a very rough ride on a path that slides and spirals downward, beating you down physically and mentally after each treatment. The ride allows you to escape the punishment and heal briefly in time to return for another treatment. It strips you mentally and physically to the very core of your soul and what feels like the very last second of your life. Once you have entered that second, it becomes very expansive. NOTHING else matters! You really don’t know where you are going or care where you have been. You could care less if you were buck naked before the world. You just want to make it through that second so you can face the next.

It was at this point I walked and talked with God. I felt his presence helping me . . . God was my ‘bridge over troubled water’ when pain was all around me. . . .”

-Marci A. Schmitt

To Steve and Lindsay,

I love you,

Marci

To Corey and Clay,

I'm proud of you.

I love you.

Mom

I will survive.

March Forth!

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DISCLAIMER

Please note that this book is written about *my* diagnosis, treatment, and recovery from breast cancer and how this journey affected *my* life and *my* family. The intent of this book is to inform and educate others about *my* experiences and *my* experiences solely. Maybe the insights I present in this book will help others affected by or diagnosed with breast cancer; however, any person affected by or diagnosed with breast cancer should seek the advice of a medical professional. You and only you are responsible for your actions if you choose to follow or not follow a course of treatment based on what you read in this book. I am not a medical professional. It is also not my intent to prescribe any medical treatment or advice. It is not my intent to defame medical professionals or make them look incompetent, but quite the opposite. I would like to support all the skilled medical professionals, drug manufacturers, and researchers who helped me to survive and conquer this scary diagnosis of breast cancer.

God Bless,
Marci A.Schmitt

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to recognize, acknowledge, and commend the individuals who helped me survive my diagnosis, treatment, and recovery from breast cancer. Many friends, family members, acquaintances, and even strangers helped me *March Forth*. I could never list everyone in this short space and even if I tried, I would probably forget someone. You know who you are and my family and I thank each and every one of you. You were and are my angels!

I especially want to thank my oncologist and nurses. Every week I walked into the doctor's office and infusion room and depended upon your care. Thank you for your professionalism, encouragement, and support. You truly are unsung heroes.

I want to thank the people behind two wonderful websites that were very resourceful and informative during my journey: Pam Stephan's www.breastcancer.about.com and www.breastcancer.org. These websites provide educational and practical information for anyone affected by breast cancer.

I want to thank the people who put me in their prayer

chains and prayed for my healing and support. You all were powerful. I prayed with you and for you each night as well. I also prayed for comfort and healing for others as well as myself who were and are facing any life-threatening disease or situation.

I want to thank the meal crew for keeping my family fed. Believe me, that task was so appreciated. I also want to thank the car pool crew, who transported my sons to and from their events. In addition, I want to thank my sons' schoolteachers, who gave the extra effort to keep my sons focused on their studies.

I want to thank those individuals who were directly involved in helping me publish this book—especially my editor JoAnn Learman. Thank you for editing my book.

I want to thank Mom and Dad for instilling the fighting spirit within me. I love you both and I know you can hear me Mom.

I want to thank my sons Corey and Clay for being strong and helping the family when we were hit by this crisis. You both had to grow and mature faster than most of your peers. The reality of life hit both of you in the face and you both passed with flying colors. I love you and I am proud of you.

I want to thank Lindsay for being there for me in spirit. She also had her own mountain to climb during this ordeal. I love you and I am proud of you, too.

I want to thank my husband Steve, who was my main caregiver. You were there for the whole journey. Honey, no one can deny your effort and desire to keep me focused on surviving this scary journey. I love you.

Finally, I want to thank God. Just as you promised, you were there for me every time. Thank you for helping me to *March Forth!*

Marci A. Schmitt

Please visit my website at www.4marchforth.com.

INTRODUCTION

When I began writing this book, my intention was to help others who were affected by breast cancer. I had hoped to reach out and convey an understanding of what one experiences through diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. I thought if I could help at least one person with my thoughts and experiences, this book would be a success for me. Little did I know when I began writing, I would be the first person it helped.

Writing this book was positive and massive therapy for me. It allowed me to face and vent a number of feelings that I felt during my cancer diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. My good friend Ruth once told me that when we reach out to help others, God allows us to become the first benefactor. She was correct. I became the first benefactor from this book. Throughout its writing, it was my rehabilitation. Writing allowed me to begin my journey towards healing mentally and recovering physically.

To all families and survivors affected by cancer,
March Forth!

Marci A. Schmitt

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FLASHBACK



It was Friday, December 31, 2004—New Year’s Eve. I began my day before dawn. It was cold and rainy. The foot of snow we’d received the previous week had melted into a muddy flood. My children were sick. It also was the beginning of the fourth day that my family was keeping a vigil over my mother.

Things were progressing very quickly for Mom. Her illness was about to win the battle. Mom was dying from breast cancer. Although breast cancer would win this battle, my mom was about to win the war. She was close to leaving us and going home to God.

Four days earlier, Mom sat in her chair at the retirement home. She and Dad had downsized, moving from a dairy farm to the retirement home just last month. Her hand cradled her face as her elbow rested on the arm of the chair. She sat in disbelief. Hospice workers had arrived. “I just can’t believe I am this sick,” she said. She tried valiantly to do as much as she could but was now faced with the reality that she was losing her battle to breast cancer.

Things were hectic for my family that week. We’d

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had one of the biggest snowstorms that I could remember since the Blizzard of 1978. With over a foot of snow in our driveway, my vehicle was stranded in the garage. My husband Steve and I had to dig a path from our garage to the main road—approximately 50 yards. The driveway slanted uphill near the main road, creating an obstacle for our vehicles whenever we had the smallest amounts of ice or snow. I knew I had to get my car out because Mom was getting worse. I wanted to be there for her.

I also was exhausted. Dealing with Mom, my sick kids, work, my parents' move, and the holidays had spent all of my energy. *How much more hectic can things get?* I thought. I felt guilty that I could not help my mom more and that I had neglected my children enough that they were very sick.

Yesterday, Mom had suddenly started an erratic breathing pattern. I'd held her hand and repeatedly whispered into her ear, "Mom, go towards the light! Mom, go towards the light! God is waiting for you!" After two hours, she began to lie peacefully, breathing rhythmically but abnormally. I believe Mom's spirit left her during this incident.

I had gone home late Thursday night knowing my mom's spirit had passed. I wanted to tuck my young children into bed. After all, they were about to lose their grandmother and both sons were very sick.

Finally, it was Friday morning, December 31, 2004. Again, my mom lay peacefully, breathing rhythmically but abnormally. The hospice nurse came to check Mom. She stated Mom was very close to passing. I talked with

FLASHBACK

the nurse briefly about the incident that had happened yesterday. I truly believed Mom's spirit left her during those few hours. The nurse agreed with me. She stated that she usually keeps those thoughts to herself but since I mentioned it, she felt others had passed that way as well. She explained that Mom had a tough, strong heart. It was like a machine that was still running but had no driver. She said we had to wait for the machine to stop.

When the doctor's office opened, I called my six-year-old son's pediatrician. Clay was very sick. He needed to see the doctor before the weekend came. His cough and cold had worsened. The doctor wanted to see him immediately. I needed to take him to the doctor but I didn't want to leave my mom. I called my husband Steve and told him I would take Clay to the doctor so he could stay with our nine-year-old son Corey who had a fever and chicken pox again.

I knew Mom would want me to take care of Clay and Corey. She loved them both, as she did all her grandchildren. She would understand if I left her. She and Clay had a special bond. Something told me to take him to the doctor. Therefore, I left to get Clay.

Clay had pneumonia, the doctor said. Treatment and medicines were given and he was to be looked over with a watchful eye. As Clay and I were walking out of the doctor's office, the call came from my sister. "Mom is starting to pass," she said.

I did not make it back to Mom's home in time to "officially" be there when she died. However, I believe I

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was with her when her spirit left this world to be with our Heavenly Father. She passed peacefully on Friday morning December 31, 2004. *March Forth*, Mom, *March Forth!*