



Interview Transcript: Anju

Anju works full time and teaches Indian cooking classes on the side. She is married with two sons.

Type of Cancer: Ovarian Cancer (Peritoneal Cancer)

Age at Diagnosis: 43

Year of Diagnosis: 2009

Treatment: Surgery and Chemotherapy

Date of Interview: January, 2010

I just felt like the most unlucky person on the face of the earth and it was like the rug was pulled from under my feet, and I just didn't know... what had hit me, how it had hit me, and it was hard to digest.

My name is Anju Sarna and I'm 44 years old. I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer last March. Despite having a complete prophylactic surgery, a complete hysterectomy, I was diagnosed with this disease, and I was told that this is peritoneal cancer, which is treated exactly like ovarian cancer. I've been through a surgery last year and based on the surgery he suggested aggressive chemo as soon as possible, so within two days of coming out of the hospital I was going for my first chemotherapy treatment to Princess Margaret.

Family history

My mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer when she was 38 and she passed away with ovarian cancer, and after her two of her sisters were diagnosed in their 40s with the same ovarian cancer and they passed away with this disease as well. So, after my first child I was very concerned about the family history and I wanted to keep on top of my genes and take all precautions so that I don't experience or go through that disease. So from the very beginning, it's been in my mind that it's genetic and I have a strong family history.

It takes some time

I needed the time to grasp what had happened because everything happens so quickly, from me going to the doctor for a physical, or just the fluid building up, to the surgery, to being diagnosed with ovarian cancer, to getting through chemo. It was just too much, too soon, happened in my case so I had no time to even accept the disease or to get the courage to fight it because it was just one thing after the other. So I took the time to just mentally accept the disease and tell myself that I'm strong and I can fight it, even though whatever happens, happened with my mother or the family history, I am not going to let that interfere with me fighting this disease and staying positive. I have a cousin who is fighting ovarian cancer in India

and knock on wood, she's doing well for the last five years, and so that's what keeps me going. If she can do it, I can do it as well. Gives me hope.

What I need to know

I didn't want to know anything about my cancer, what kind, pathology, even though I have family who are in the medical field and they wanted me to find out more. I don't want to know about it. I want to know how I can keep it under control with my diet, exercise, yoga, supplements that I can take that keep cancer cells down. I'm doing it for my family as well because apparently the boys are also prone to genetic cancer, so this is something I found out. So I'm trying to make the changes in our lives. My grocery bill has gone through the roof; my husband is complaining, because I'm making him buy broccoli, avocado, watercress, whatever I think is good for fighting cancer in our bodies, I'm doing that.

Brain fog

While I was going through chemotherapy I was only dealing with myself, so my world was a little bit more narrow. As you get better and better, there are other things that start falling on your plate as well, so coping with them. It is very challenging because you don't really realize that you wipe out your past to deal with the present and adding back things in your life takes a toll on you mentally, because there is just so much information that is coming in to you, and I find that I... sometimes thinking something, and I know I am supposed to tell my kids or my husband something, and he will tell me, "Remind me to do this," and I have to turn around and tell him, "You have to remind me to remind you because I can't remember myself if I've even eaten lunch today."

It's a very, very strange feeling because you're talking and you just forget what you were talking about. I had read about brain fog and I'm experiencing brain fog and it's not a good feeling at all. It makes you feel like you're starting a new job all over again, or the conversation. Nobody wants to talk to somebody who can't even finish a sentence without forgetting what she is talking about.

One little step at a time

But every day I tell myself that I have to do a little bit extra, more, so that I am getting back to my normal life that I used to be. I don't like to be sick. I don't like the feeling of being... depending on others, so I have to do this for myself. Just going back to work is probably the hardest decision one has to make because you have to be ready mentally as well as physically and the physical strength comes in due course of time. But the mental strength... you need to get yourself, your thoughts, together and just tell yourself that you've got to do one more step, which is going closer to your normal life again. I was working full time before.

So just one day at a time, one little step at a time, get closer—it's a lot of healing that needs to happen inside emotionally as well as mentally because you may look OK, you have your hair, you have makeup on, you look like anybody who's walking outside, a healthy normal person, but you know inside you that you need to heal.

The question that cannot be answered

I was very, very upset. I was angry at God, believe it or not. It was hard for me to even imagine that I've always been a religious person, I've always done good things, I don't believe in hurting other people. Why did this happen to me? Why—that answer nobody can answer, give

me an answer to my “why.” But I was told by somebody who came into my life and showed a part of belief in God that you don’t ask God why because it’s something that’s coming—good out of a sickness or an illness or anything that negative happens in your life, there’s always a plan.

So I stopped asking why. I don’t want to know anymore because nobody can give you that answer and I’m just focusing on how I can help others deal with this in a positive way. The anger has gone; you just let go of the angry feeling or being so mad or upset and then you just experience this calmness that comes over you, which gives you strength, and strength is the only thing that I think helps you keep grounded and deal with this disease.

Don’t wait for tomorrow

I want to do everything that you want to experience and I don’t want fear to hold me back because you don’t want to try this, you don’t want to try that. If my boys go skiing, I want to go skiing with them. I want to go for a walk every day, enjoy everything in the cold weather, which I never used to do. Just trying different things. Going to Wellspring, being in a peer support for somebody is a courage that I’m getting now because I’m afflicted with this disease. The interview, this is a huge step just dealing with your feelings. And healing yourself inside. And there’s an endless list of things that I want to do in life and this has made me just realize you... do it, don’t wait for tomorrow, just do it and enjoy it.