**When Life Is Not a Lifetime Movie**

**By, Kim Sorrelle**

Lifetime movies show us how it happens.

First, the phone rings.

Somber music plays as she answers. “The doctor would like to meet with you and your husband.”

The next scene has the dreary doctor sitting at his desk, the nervous couple across from him with chairs and hands together, fearfully anticipating the news yet to come.

“You have breast cancer.”

The couple gasps, tears flowing from their eyes as they switch their gaze from the doctor to each other. In a tender moment of unknowing, their future forever changed.

A few scenes later, the woman is alone in her large master bathroom, about to disrobe in front of a mirror for the first time since her double mastectomy. The camera moves to focus on her face ready to capture the pending emotions. With a look of trepidation, jaw tight, muscles tense, steeling herself for what she was about to see, she slowly pulls her plush pink velour robe apart just enough to expose her shoulders. After a deep breath held just for a second and then exhaled with gusto, she is ready to reveal more. As the camera moves even closer, she drops the robe completely. Shock takes over, horrified by the sight, her mouth drops down, her eyes seem to double in size, and the audience knows that her scarred, flattened chest is too much for her to bear.

Then there is real life.

The phone rings at 4:00 on a Friday afternoon, late enough in the day to be unable to call back and ask questions.

“You have breast cancer.”

After the word “cancer,” all words that followed sounded like Charlie Brown’s teacher, “Wah wah wawah wah.”

I immediately call my husband; my sobbing makes speaking nearly impossible.

“I . . . have. . . breast . . . cancer . . .”

The real-life scene switches to Steve holding the panic-stricken limp rag that I’d become. Unlike the actor in the movie, my husband’s love and compassion are genuine, overflowing, and ever-growing.

On the third day home after surgery, recovering and watching hours of Grey’s Anatomy re-runs, I finally work up the courage to look.

Alone in my large master bathroom, I’m about to disrobe in front of a mirror for the first time since my double mastectomy. First, noting that a pillow for a hairdresser didn’t quite measure up to the onset hair and makeup team who glammed up the beautiful actress in the movie, I get over my shortcomings and prepare for the shock. Staring straight ahead, I slowly pull my blue terrycloth robe down past my shoulders. “It’s going to be alright,” I try to convince myself. One deep breath later, I drop the robe entirely. Hmmm . . not so bad. My doctor has Mrs. Lifetime’s beat by a mile. I can live with this.

Unlike the movie couple, breast was not the only cancer that invaded my family. Unresolved stomach pain, three doctor’s appointments, and four months after the dreadful Friday afternoon phone call, my husband got news of his own. This time we were that couple sitting with the doctor, holding each other, preparing ourselves for what we knew we didn’t want to hear.

His words turned our world upside down. “Pancreatic cancer.”

Six weeks later, I became a widow at 47 years old. Certainly not the dream I had when I said, “I do,” nearly 29 years before.

Control.

I learned quickly that there are many things we can’t control; a challenging diagnosis, losing someone we love, being alone after being a couple for so many years.

But, there are many things we can control; how we live each day, our mood, our joy, how we treat other people, and what we do with our lives.

At the end of that year, finally healthy enough to return to “real” life, I take a volunteer position as a part-time bookkeeper for a humanitarian organization. Twelve days into the job, an earthquake killed 200,000 people in Haiti. My part-time job turned into a 24/7, all-in, all of the time passion. Within two weeks, I hit the ground in Port au Prince.

Working mainly with medical clinics and leaders of tent cities that popped up all over the capital, I worked to get donations and ship much-needed supplies into the devastated nation, supplies that were not available in the country, supplies that were necessary to save lives.

I spent at least part of every month in Haiti for the next several years. Between packing, traveling, returning to the whirlwind that had become my work, then back again, I hardly had time to think, much less grieve. I knew I was not following the seven stages recommended by family and friends, who feared I would someday crash and burn. But, I also knew I was exactly where I was supposed to be doing exactly what I was doing.

It took some time, but then I realized that in serving others came healing. Because I got outside myself and gave, I received much more than I ever thought possible. My heart still has that hole that only Steve could fill, but the rest of my heart overflows with love for those I get to serve.

You don’t have to go to Haiti to help people. There are opportunities to serve others everywhere. Serving can be as simple as helping an elderly neighbor unload their groceries, bringing a casserole to a sick friend, or writing a note of encouragement to someone who needs it. It doesn’t matter what it is, but if you are looking for ways to help others, your heart changes, and you begin to think of others before yourself. That is where healing begins.

Kim Sorrelle is the director of a humanitarian organization, a popular speaker, and the author of two books. Her first book, *Cry Until You Laugh,* is about her breast cancer journey and her husband's battle with pancreatic cancer after being diagnosed just four months apart. Her second book, *Love Is*, chronicles her year-long quest to figure out the true meaning of love. This sometimes funny, sometimes scary, always enlightening journey led to life-changing discoveries found mainly on the streets of Haiti.

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