



Diane Martin, seen here with her dog Dot, is a two-time breast cancer survivor and will participate in the CIBC Run for the Cure. She is also co-run director for the CIBC Run for the Cure Prairies/NWT region.

Photograph by: Colleen De Neve, Calgary Herald

Active, healthy and a hardworking career woman in her late 40s, Diane Martin had always avoided mammograms, figuring she was too young to worry about breast cancer.

In May 2000, her doctor finally convinced her to go for a routine ultrasound as part of her annual physical, which revealed swollen lymph nodes under her arm, near her left breast.

A biopsy soon after confirmed stage 3 breast cancer, and Martin's breath was taken away.

"I remember my doctor came into the room and sat down, pulling her chair very close to me," she said.

"I knew something was up. But you can never prepare yourself.

"When she said the two words 'breast cancer,' I lost my breath. I didn't hear much of anything else she said after that."

About two months before her diagnosis, Martin had lost her own father to lung cancer. He died just two weeks after checking into the hospital, worried about pneumonialike symptoms.

"I thought I would end up the same. I thought, that's it, I have two weeks left to live. What am I going to do?"

But the next few weeks brought on what Martin likes to call her "warrior face" and she took her battle head on, realizing she had too much to live for.

"I thought, 'I want to live, I want to meet more people. And I want people to meet me, because I'm a pretty special person,'" she said.

A lumpectomy, followed by six weeks of chemotherapy and one month of radiation left her exhausted, shaken and plagued by constant nausea.

But a life once devoted to career, collecting money and material wealth, changed completely for Martin.

She still remembers one night during her recovery "I was sitting outside one summer night. It was 4 a.m. and I couldn't sleep. I looked around at the trees and the flowers and I thought, 'have these always been here? Because I'd never really noticed them before.'"

She quickly became involved in volunteer work, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation CIBC Run for the Cure, and helping other women battling breast cancer.

But her difficult road wasn't over.

A year later, a small cut on her left hand led to massive, painful swelling all along her left arm.

Because lymph nodes had been damaged during her surgery, lymphatic fluid was building up as it reacted to infection in her hand.

It wasn't cancer, but a case of lymphedema few doctors were able to help her with.

After hundreds of phone calls, Martin was able to finally find a lymphedema therapist that was able to massage the fluid out of her arm and into the rest of her body.

Although the ailment is typical in breast cancer survivors, help is hard to find. So Martin and her therapist created the Alberta Lymphedema Association to provide support for sufferers and better education and awareness within the medical community.

Over the next several years, Martin continued her volunteer work and also helped her sister battle kidney cancer.

But, by 2007, Martin found another lump near her left breast as she lathered up in the shower.

It was only days before her annual check up.

A mammogram, followed up by another biopsy confirmed, again, stage 3 cancer.

And while Martin, "warrior-face" on was ready to fight once more, it was her husband Doug, that found the news really hard to take.

"I could tell it was really hurting him this time."

Her second bout of chemotherapy was much more difficult than the first, forcing her to lay in bed for up to eight hours at a time, connected to an IV, being fed an even harsher concoction this time.

"The pain was like my bones were being squeezed together, three or four days at a time," she said. "It was terrible. Every time I came back for the next round, I knew how bad it was going to be."

After her final round in late 2007, Martin found yet another lump in the same area and was sent straight to surgery.

But this time doctors confirmed it was benign.

The good news and her clean bill of health since has Martin now working as co-run director for the CIBC Run for the Cure for the Prairies and NWT region.

Up to 5,300 runners are already registered for this year's run, eager to beat last year's fundraising total of \$1.7 million.

Martin looks forward will be run alongside other survivors like her, ready to lend a helping hand, and a supportive ear.

"When you go you have to just stop and look around. It's a sea of pink," she said. "And everyone is there to support each other."

"It's a wonderful feeling."