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# Lifestyle

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# MAKING HER LIFE COUNT

## Honesty key in mom's fight with breast cancer

By JIM LEGG  
Calgary Sun

Ginny Mitchell fights for every minute she can get — her life depends on it.

The Calgary mom has metastatic breast cancer.

There is no cure, but with treatment, she's buying time and a chance for herself, her husband Jeff and their three children — Shannon, 13, Allison, 9, and Ian, 5.

"I may not live to see how they do," says Ginny.

"I want you (Jeff) to make sure my feelings, values and goals are met if I'm not here."

Jeff nods his head in agreement. There are no tears.

But there is a wondrous supply of smiles and optimism.

"I want them to go to university, be well-educated, make wise decisions. I want to be there to guide my children," Ginny says.

"We all want our children to grow up and make wise life decisions."

"I'm frustrated to think I may not be a mother at a critical time."

And there have been many critical times for the family.

About 18 months after Ginny's sister died of cancer, she was diagnosed with the disease.

"I gave birth to Ian three days after my sister died."

The couple have always kept their children informed about their mom's situation.

"Right now, it's a treading water game. They (scientists) are close to a breakthrough. I hope I buy enough time until they find a cure," says Ginny, who enjoys participating in Calgary's annual summer Dragonboat Races on Glenmore Reservoir.

"I'm stable now. Four or five years from now, there could be a cure. But I can't promise I'll always be here."

"I have the gift of time with my children — to prepare them and talk to them openly and honestly about it."

One topic involves the possibility of a step-mother.

"What if dad marries someone



— JIM WELLS, Calgary Sun

**FAMILY COPES WITH CANCER ...** Ginny Mitchell, centre, is surrounded by her family — husband Jeff, left, and daughter Shannon, 13, (in the back row) son, Ian, 5, and daughter, Allison, 9.

else? They (the children) didn't want me to be replaced, but I tell them it's all right to love someone else, as well," says Ginny.

"It's a case of giving my children permission to accept someone else, as well."

Still, with all the potential for negative feelings, Ginny stays strong.

"Depression is a big thing for cancer patients, so they don't live."

Religion is another difficult topic.

"I do not believe in a God who chooses to give cancer to mothers of young children."

"I do not believe in a God who only gives one burdens we are capable of carrying."

"I am still confused about my

feelings on God and the spiritual side of myself," says Ginny.

"I believe in a God who created the game and the rules, and we decide how to play the game."

"My mother died of cancer when I was a baby, but I still feel like she has walked beside me all my life."

"At certain times I have felt her presence so strongly that I have felt like I could reach out and touch her."

"Do I believe in life after death?"

"Yes. My soul will live on in the people I love, waiting until we are together again, wherever that may be."

"I will always be part of my children and will walk beside them on their journey through life, whatever form that may be."

But Ginny says things sometimes go wrong: "Some children will pray really hard, 'Please God, take my mom's cancer away.'"

"I don't want my children to have guilt. If I die, I don't want them to think God disappointed them."

Ginny's husband is a pillar of strength and knows how poorly "society deals with death ..."

"As inevitable as it is, we speak not its name, perhaps fearing its conjury through voice," says Jeff.

"We strongly feel there is a lot we can do to prepare our children, and greatly hope when it happens, they will be able to move on with their lives — bearing scars, but not debilitated by the experience."

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