



By Caryn Sullivan

**Draftees, all
Warriors in Pink — and blue**

By Caryn Sullivan
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I walked into the Mall of America the day before the annual Susan B. Komen Race for the Cure and came face to face with the registration signs. In the six years since my breast cancer diagnosis, I had never participated in the event. My cancer encounter was successful but was quickly followed by my young daughter's bone marrow transplant. Since our recoveries, I have thought of myself more as the mother of a transplant patient than as a Warrior in Pink.

When I called my husband to say that I was going to register for the walk, he was surprisingly enthusiastic. Unbeknown to me, he had been waiting for me to say, "I am ready," so he could walk beside me to celebrate our survivorship.

On a brisk Sunday morning, I joined thousands of women in pink survivor T-shirts and walked alongside tens of thousands of supporters in varied apparel. I was stunned by the number of walkers who had pink placards on their backs listing those in whose memory or honor they were walking. Far too often, I saw cards reflecting a tragic family legacy. I read cards that stated "I walk in memory of my grandma, in honor of my mother, my aunt and my sister." Wow.

There were young people wearing capes and women sporting pink wigs and scarves on their bald heads. I was awed by the courage and the fortitude of those who have fought the disease. And I was struck by the number of men who participated, walking alongside their loved ones, in tribute to their wives, daughters, sisters, mothers or others. Some carried young children on their shoulders or pushed them in strollers. Others walked alongside teenagers, some wearing T-shirts with photos commemorating those who succumbed to the disease.

I thought of my husband's eager response when I told him I had decided to participate and realized that he is one among thousands of men who suffer silently as the women they love receive a frightening diagnosis, have their breasts removed, and undergo debilitating chemotherapy and radiation treatments, with mixed results.

When word got out that I had been diagnosed with breast cancer, I was overwhelmed with calls and cards from friends and even strangers offering me encouragement. I embraced the support, using it as fodder for my battle. I recall a conversation with a neighbor who had traveled this road before me, who also had a husband and young children. She was one of few who asked how my husband was faring, noting that men are often overlooked when women contract the disease. She was so right.

All these years, my husband's fears remained unspoken, for I was not the one to hear them, and he is not inclined to share with others. His eagerness to walk made me realize that I was not the only one who had joined this band of warriors. So, the three miles that we walked Sunday were as much for him as for me.

The event concluded with a gathering at the Rotunda in the Mall. The survivors stepped into the sea of pink for a group photo and a beautiful song about the soul of survivors. We were invited to stand to demonstrate how many years we had outlasted this disease. One man rose among the thousands of women, raising his fist in a defiant gesture, acknowledging his solitary station among his fellow female survivors. I thought about how lonely his journey must be, one man among a throng of Warriors in Pink. But there he was, with his bald head, thrusting his fist into the air, as if to say, this is my battle, too. It took six years, three miles and a bald man in a rotunda to make me realize that, in the campaign against breast cancer, we warriors wear pink and blue.

Caryn Sullivan of Mendota Heights is a writer (www.carynsullivan.com) whose columns appear frequently on these pages. Her e-mail address is carynsullivan@comcast.net.