

October Is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Judy Hails 10/4/18

Mammogram. Women cringe at the word. There is moderate pain if you have a well-trained technician. A less skilled worker can create excruciating pain that adds to your understanding of the old saying "Don't get your tit in the wringer."

I've had mammograms yearly, religiously, since 1984. That was the year I discovered my first lump. The doctor did a surgical biopsy. I remember the day in detail. My husband was in Algeria because the Algerian government, who funded his visa to study in the United States, demanded that he return home. Immigration laws prohibited his return for two years. The twins were turning 2 the following week. I hired a friend's teen-age daughter as a live-in nanny to take care of my girls. I took a taxi to the hospital. As I lay there on a gurney, in the hall waiting for the surgery suite to be ready, I felt alone. Totally alone and afraid. I went home with a compression bandage so large I could not wear my clothes. A week later I got a letter saying the tumor was benign.

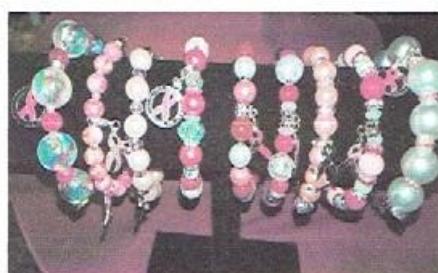
In the years that followed, I have had 4 thin-needle biopsies – all benign. I've developed a fatalistic attitude about having biopsies. But try as I might, I cannot avoid the anxiety that builds while waiting for the results. I cannot imagine the horror of finding out I had a malignant tumor.

I see my oncologists several times a year, but not for cancer treatment. Jose, my son-in-law, is a radiation oncologist. I love him dearly but hope to never see him professionally. He has two sites – lungs and breast. The year he finished his residency and took a faculty position at The James Cancer Hospital of Ohio State University I decided to use one of my hobbies to make a meager contribution to breast cancer survivors. I made 12 bracelets with pink beads and pink ribbon charms and sent them to Ohio. I received a thank you saying there weren't enough to give to the patients, but the staff loved them. Since then I have sent 50 bracelets each year. The pink ribbon charms

say "Survivor." The thank you note that was the most touching was from The Monday Morning Group. The image of a group of ladies, waiting for radiation treatments, forming a support group was powerful.

Last year a friend who works at the Student Health Center at Orange Coast College asked me to make bracelets. She asked for 20. This year she wanted only 10. Surprised, I asked why. My friend said they had 10 new people. All of the people who still worked there had kept the bracelets they received last year. I was touched. I asked my daughter about it, thinking of all the buttons, stickers, and wrist bands I receive for awareness events and throw away. My daughter surprised me with her answer, "That's different. People don't throw away the things you make."

I made my 2018 Ohio State Collection of nine styles of bracelets (50 total bracelets) in September this year because that was when I went to Ohio to visit my daughter and son-in-law. I just completed my 2018 California Collection of six styles (32 total bracelets).



2018 Ohio Collection



2018 California Collection

I have 21 left, so I want to share them with my OLLI Memoir Writing Class. I hope you will support those who have had breast cancer.