

BE A THRIVER!™



# Breast Cancer Wellness



What is Core Strength?

What is YOUR Healing Habit?

The Power of Saying  
**NO**

**10** Road Lessons

— LINDA CRILL

Meet the  
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Bloggers



# 10 ROAD LESSONS

BY LINDA CRILL

**The middle of the road is where the white line is — and that's the worst place to drive.** — Susan Taylor

## Inner Mayhem

Driving home after hearing those startling words that I had breast cancer, I processed a chorus of many chattering voices inside of me. One hopeful voice questioned the cancer diagnosis and suggested it might be a mistake. An angry one demanded to know why me and reminded me that I didn't need any more life lessons about cancer. Another rehearsed the best way to tell my family and friends. Other voices in my head repeated words like: chemo, surgery, my breasts, my life and what now?

## My Whole-Me Promise

However, it was the message of a single powerful voice that I focused on as it traveled from the base of my spine, expanded as it moved up through my navel and heart, and continued to the top of my head. This voice radiated calmness and spoke with conviction: "All you ever truly have is this moment; how are you going to experience it?" With the power of its delivery the other voices faded.

In that moment, I was more fully myself again and NOT solely a breast cancer patient. I was a businesswoman, athlete, family member, astute problem-solver spiritual seeker, and resilient lover of life. On this new journey before me, I promised myself that I'd not lose touch with all of these and many other significant parts of myself that create the whole-me.

## My Gift of the Moment

With this newfound calmness, I expanded my view beyond the road I was driving on to take in the broader scene in front of me. A



smile spread across my face as I noticed the deep teal sky that served as a quiet backdrop for the billowing cumulus clouds in front of it. I thought I don't want to miss this eye-candy, and I will if I try to imagine an uncertain future for my life or lose myself into a cancer identity. This moment, this now, is where all of life happens.

## Cancer Detour & Recalculating GPS

And that's how my breast cancer journey began. Like many others before me, in a single moment this breast cancer diagnosis changed everything—my calendar brimming with plans, life over-flowing with expectations, beliefs that my body would keep me safe from dangerous diseases. Now I was questioning all of these and more.

I knew too well how deeply my life would be affected by this abrupt detour that forced me off the interstate and onto winding back roads—some that I discovered weren't on

any map. Even my former destinations with planned stopovers along the way would need to be recalculated daily, monthly, and yearly as this new road trip progressed.

In 4 months I had planned to publish my newly finished book. Now with pending surgeries, treatments and endless medical protocol crowding onto my schedule, there'd be little time or energy for such an ambitious undertaking.

I had just signed up on Match.com. What was I supposed to tell any man who wanted to meet me? Saying I have cancer on a first date is hardly a come on.

Now I was on my way to who knows where, but I would at least have this moment of gorgeous sky and most importantly—the whole of me to savor it.

## My Blind Curves Story

Why was this present moment so important to me after receiving a diagnosis of



cancer? My answer has 2 parts. First, I am a widow who lost my husband Bill 6 years earlier to an incurable cancer. On that journey with Bill and in the years that followed, I dug deep and processed so much about life, death, health, disease, healing, fear, forgiveness, and what really matters.

Even my spiritual beliefs had been turned upside down as I held conversations with God about how any grand creation plan could have allowed this kind of abrupt and probable separation of two people so deeply in love and meshed together in one spectacular union.

Secondly, I had spent the previous 3 years writing a book titled: *Blind Curves—One Woman's Unusual Journey to Reinvent Herself and Answer "What Now?"*

It's my true story how after 18-months of over-achieving and following one-size-fits-all advice for a 57-year old widow, I was still miserable. Needing something to shake up my life, I traded my corporate suits for motorcycle leathers and signed-up for a 2,500-mile motorcycle road trip down America's Pacific Northwest coast. The challenge was I didn't know how to ride a motorcycle and had only thirty days to learn.

In *Blind Curves*, I tell how I learned to handle my fears, survive situations that were beyond my skill level and most of all discovered the sources of true joy and resiliency. Unknowingly, I had spent the last 3 years writing about the skills I would now need to navigate this new breast cancer blind curve.

I'm no Pollyanna about cancer. I don't want to diminish the difficulties of any cancer diagnosis. I've seen its horrific side. My late-husband Bill had mesothelioma cancer. It was incurable and average life expectancy when he was diagnosed was forty days.

I was constantly at his side as his caregiver, wife, healing partner, and advocate watching his weight plummet, daily pain increase, sleep fade to no more than fifteen minutes at a time and the physical unwinding of a powerful body.

But I also saw how Bill extended a 40-day journey into 11 months using diet, exercise, laughter and most of all love, enjoying as much as he could while he was still here. He became an incredible diplomat, teacher, and even a saint in my eyes as he healed himself and so many people around him.



## I Chose a New Label: Thriver

I am uncomfortable with the word survivor—a label we receive the first day we're diagnosed—because it sounds too heroic. When I hear the word survivor, I always want to say: What about those who don't live? Aren't they just as valiant and maybe even braver than those of us who continue living?

Then I also ponder: Is mere survival enough? Yes, cancer changes most of us significantly, but is survival the entirety of what I want? Isn't it the quality of our lives that should become greater because we, more than most, understand the volatility of life and that death is a given for everyone at some point?

## Ten for the Road

Everyone's journey is different and there is no such thing as one-size-fits-all advice, but what I learned from being a caregiver and from Bill's and others' experiences helped me better handle the unexpected curves in my own life.

### Treasure this moment; it's all anyone has.

From my experience with Bill, I realized that life is precious and not to wait to live it fully until later. Every moment is precious and there are no guarantees that there will be a tomorrow, next week, or next year. I learned in any situation especially ones that are unwanted—what I can control is my own attitude and how I choose to perceive what's happening.

### Do what I can, while I can.

Immediately after my diagnosis, I lined up my support system of friends and professionals to be ready to help me later as I needed them. I reviewed my finances, called my insurance company to learn what was covered and to explore financial aid availability. I knew these chores would be more draining and even more difficult later, when I would need my strength for my personal recovery.

### Don't let life turn into a waiting game.

I didn't want to wait to make plans or hold my breath until the next update about my health. There is always one more test, another anniversary or a new health hurdle to be cleared.

### Fear is not my compass.

I learned not to let fear control my life before, during or after my cancer journey. The biggest thief of life isn't cancer; it's fear!

### Dig deep for my hidden strengths.

I knew we're all much stronger than we think and that if I dug deep, I'd not only find many hidden strengths, but I'd find more of it than I thought I had. By strength I don't mean denying when I'm exhausted, in pain or physically less able to do things I used to do with ease. What I'm talking about is inner spirit and fortitude. I've discovered even my anger and fear can be converted to fuel and used to take charge of my life and healing needs.

### Manage energy, not time.

We all only have so much energy so I knew to spend it where it counts. Every exertion (physical, mental and emotional) requires ample recovery time. I needed to schedule recovery and renewal time and not just events and appointments.

### Hope is a welcome and necessary friend.

People do recover from every stage of cancer—even when the medical community has said there's no more they can do. We are each a study of one, and miracles happen every day.

### Processing what's lost before what's gained.

It was easy for me to see all the disruption and changes my breast cancer was causing when I was first diagnosed. If someone else had tried to point out a multitude of benefits of this journey early on, I would have shut them out. Most of the deepest gains from involvement with our own or someone else's cancer aren't fully understood or recognized until we are ready to see them from a new perspective.

I still miss Bill. But I also treasure the many wondrous ways I've changed during these last 8 years. I'm more resilient, compassionate of others and accepting of my own shortcomings. I never would have gone on a motorcycle trip, written a book or left my former career for this one as an author, speaker, and reinvention expert.

### Healing vs. Curing: There's a difference.

Everyone (family, friends, caregivers and others around us) can be healed, even

when it's not possible to cure the cancer. Healing includes simple things like erasing old boundaries that no longer serve us by appreciating, loving, and forgiving others and ourselves.

### Every ending is also a new beginning.

When I talk with women who have left the breast cancer side trip behind them, I always hear that they now live with greater vigor, gratitude and conviction to make each day count. These women helped me realize we are able to do more with our life because of the newly acquired strengths that we developed during this significant detour.

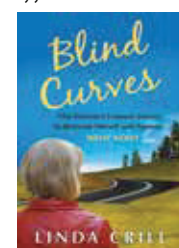
## My Current Journey— Interstate Travel Resumed

Even though I was exhausted with adrenal fatigue the year following my radiation treatments, I was able to revise what I thought was my final manuscript to include more insight gained from this new blind curve in my life, the diagnosis of breast cancer.

My journey today continues to be deeply committed to doing all I can to reduce the fears associated with cancer and adding my voice to a chorus of others wanting to make life richer for care-givers, thrivers, medical staff, family, friends and the wider community affected by all cancers—including breast cancer.

I look forward to meeting many of you on the 2014 Thrivers Cruise where I will be delivering a lively and fun presentation titled: "Vroom! Rev Up Your Life." And I'll continue to stay in touch with all of you as a BCW Blogger, on the Breast Cancer Wellness social media pages, and my website and blog. ■

Linda Crill is a sought-after speaker, trainer, and thought leader on mastering the new leadership skills: reinvention, resiliency and chaotic creation. She is the author of *Blind Curves—One Woman's Unusual Journey to Reinvent Herself and Answer What Now?* A story of reinvention where Crill trades her corporate suits for motorcycle leathers in a moment of rebellion on a quest to answer "What Now?" For more information visit <http://www.BlindCurves.com>. This book is available in both softback and eBook versions from all major online booksellers as well as orders placed by your favorite bookseller.



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