

HEAVY ARTILLERY

I lay in bed almost six weeks after my radical hysterectomy, dreading the next morning, the start of radiation and chemotherapy. *Ignorance is bliss.* I kept repeating it over and over in my mind. *Which was better: knowing what to expect or not knowing?* I wasn't sure any more. I usually planned things out, researched all the facts and angles before making any decision, but not this time. I didn't think I wanted to know any more. The little bit I did know about radiation was from my family—Nanny, and it scared the hell out of me. I was terrified I would end-up without a bladder. The doctors tried to reassure me but nothing they said made a bit of difference. I knew someone who suffered permanent damage from radiation. It was the only thing I could think of. I didn't want the radiation but felt there was no other choice.

Chemo was a different story. I wasn't as scared of it. I didn't know anyone first hand who had experienced chemotherapy. I had only seen stories on television and in movies. The actors get sick, throw-up and lose their hair. It didn't sound like a walk in the park but at least the nausea went away and the hair grew back. I was pretty sure I could handle it.

I pondered losing my hair. Demi Moore's face flashed in my mind. She shaved all her hair off for that military movie and yet she was still beautiful. I tried to tell myself I was strong enough to sport a bald head. *It is only hair after all, right?*

I thought about the last week, the many doctors appointments, the CAT scan and my new semi-permanent pelvic tattoos—marks the radiologist had drawn on me to identify internal organs not to radiate. These marks/tattoos needed to remain visible for the entire treatment period. No washing them away. I thought about how silly I looked. My anxiety grew while my mind played out a thousand-and-one endings to my story. I tossed and turned all night. Tomorrow was the start of treatment, and the outcome was unknown.

Monday, August 9, I arrived at eight with a full bladder. Mark and I sat in the waiting room with the other patients. No one made eye contact. Instead, they all read or looked down at the floor. I drank a quart of water before coming because I was told I needed to have a full bladder while receiving the radiation. I really needed to pee and hoped it wouldn't be much longer.

A few minutes later I heard them call, "Michelle Whitlock." I walked to the nurse slowly, still unsure of my decision to proceed. "Ready to get started?" she asked in a chipper voice. "Sure." I walked behind the curtain and waited some more. My bladder was beginning to hurt, and I wanted to pee my pants. I squeezed my muscles tighter trying to hold it in.

A technician led me into the radiation room and instructed me to lie on the table. I undid my pants and slid them down, exposing my entire pelvic region—mid thigh to navel. The machine was placed over me and a

'protection plate' was slid in place to guard the organs inside my tattooed lines. The protection plate looked like a clear plastic tray with metal blocks in varying shapes bolted to it. There was one for each view of my pelvis: front, back, left and right. The machine was then lined up and the technician left. I held my breath for a minute or so but didn't feel a thing. Then the technician entered, changed out the 'protection plate' and repositioned the machine to another view. The process repeated until the radiation was fired through me from all angles. The entire process took less than ten minutes, including pulling my pants up and down. It was quick and painless. *That wasn't so bad.*

I left and headed out to work.

I repeated this exact process Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday as well. The plan was to give me five and a half weeks of radiation, five days a week. Sunday and Saturday were my only days of rest. Thursday morning was different. I started with radiation, followed by my first chemotherapy session. Chemo was scheduled one day a week for six weeks. It sounded easy enough, or so I thought.

My Chemotherapy was only one day, but it lasted seven or eight hours. Many patients have a catheter, a semi-permanent IV line installed so they can receive regular chemo without being stuck with a new needle each time. I didn't; each day I had to endure the prick of the needle. I arrived

and went to the lab first. An IV line for the day was placed in my arm. Blood was drawn and I was led to an exam room.

Dr. D entered and reviewed with me what I should expect. He offered me the name and number of another patient, Joyce. He told me Joyce was a few years older than I but she had already been through a similar treatment protocol and was willing to share. I took the number and shoved it into my purse. "I've decided just to shave my head now, instead of waiting for it all to fall out," I declared.

"Don't do that!" he yelled. "You're going to take a drug that shouldn't make you lose your hair."

I was shocked by his response. I was ready to do this, embrace the baldness. Now he was telling me it wouldn't happen. I was confused.

Doesn't everyone's hair fallout with chemo?

I learned every chemo drug is different. They can be used alone or combined together, depending on the type of cancer. The drug chosen for me didn't cause hair loss. It could cause thinning, but not total loss. On the other hand, it did cause severe nausea; it was one of the worst for this side effect. The greatest risk for me was kidney failure so staying hydrated was crucial during treatment. *Great. I hate to drink or hold cold liquids.*

Sometimes I have the same soda all day.

Eventually, Mark and I were led into the chemo room. The room was bright, with many windows and blue leather reclining chairs. I was shown to

a chair, given a blanket and hooked to my first bag of fluids. My nurse explained the first bag was saline to hydrate me. She said it would take about two hours. Then a bag of steroids and anti-nausea medication would be given to me, taking another hour. Finally, the chemo would be given followed by another bag of saline fluids, again for hydration. Each bag could take about two hours. "Get comfortable sweetie, you're gonna be here all day," she smiled.

Mark sat with me all day. He climbed into my recliner, and I laid on him. Later, I sat up and flipped open my laptop. I wasn't able to go to work, but they couldn't stop me from bringing work to the chemo room. I was determined to keep life as normal as possible. With my cell phone and laptop charged, I had plenty to do. The bright side was I could count it as an office day, and I didn't have to use sick leave. I could have chemo, work and still get paid.

Before leaving I was given steroid pills and additional anti-nausea medication. They reminded me to drink lots of fluids—hydration was the key.

The first weekend the effects kicked in. I woke up Saturday and felt like I had run a marathon. I was thirsty and my eyes felt too heavy to hold open. I closed them and laid there for a bit, wondering how this had become my life. It felt so surreal. I had no motivation. I didn't want to get out of bed or even eat. Mark entered the room. "Are you up sleepy head? I've got a big, tall glass of juice here." I cracked my eyes, looked at him

and rolled over. "You have to force fluids. Just take a sip, please." Reaching for the glass took all my strength and will. Mark smiled, "Hungry?"

"I don't have an appetite. I'll just lay here a bit." I closed my eyes and tried to conjure up images of food, but nothing appealed to me. Instead I found myself feeling sicker.

"Will you call that other patient and talk to her?" Mark asked. "I'm worried about you."

"Fine. The number is in my purse; please dial it. I can't move."

Mark handed me the phone. "Hello." I heard.

"Is Joyce there?" I asked. I explained who I was and why I was calling. We didn't know each other and yet instantly we were friends, sort of kindred spirits. I rattled off a list of questions and she answered them all. There were no boundaries. We talked for some time; each sharing our different and yet similar stories. I found comfort, realizing someone actually understood my pain—emotional and physical.

Unfortunately, it wasn't long before the radiation-inspired diarrhea kicked in too. I raced back and forth between the bed and the toilet. While sitting on the toilet during another bout with diarrhea, I noticed the blond peach fuzz on my stomach and thighs was disappearing. Even my pubic hair looked thinner and lighter. *Oh shit! Is my hair falling out after all?* I

reached for my head and pulled my hair. "OUCH!" *That still hurts.* It didn't seem to be falling out. I was confused.

The second week of treatment was much the same as the first week. I arrived for my radiation every morning, Monday through Friday. The doctor visited with me for a few minutes Wednesday, checking on my developing symptoms. I complained about the constant diarrhea, my raw behind and recent hair loss. The doctor sat on his round blue stool in his white jacket jotting down my complaints. He never really looked up at me. Then he simply wrote out another prescription to help with the diarrhea. He quickly acknowledged that radiation does cause hair loss in the immediate region and exited. I tried to think of the bright side. *At least I wouldn't have to shave for a while.*

The chemo session was exactly as the week before, long but uneventful. I climbed into bed as soon as I got home. I passed out, and with the exception of my strolls to the restroom, I didn't move until the next morning.

Friday was tough. I woke and struggled to make my radiation appointment. The fatigue was killing me. Putting one foot in front of the other was such a chore. I wanted to go home and sleep, but I refused to give in. I pushed my way through the day by focusing on the sunny side. I hadn't vomited yet, although I was now prone to gagging.

The weekend was the one time I didn't try to push myself or pretend I was stronger than I knew I was. I just gave in. Besides I wanted to be near my new best friend—the toilet. The diarrhea was becoming more than I could handle. It was out-of-control. The balance between what was going in my body and what was coming out was way off. It was unbelievable. I was hardly able to swallow any food. I lost my appetite, developed a metallic taste, and loathed the smell of food. I established a new house rule—no one could cook around me. The odor of food, especially food cooking, made me gag and my stomach turn.

When I did find a bit of energy I'd call Joyce. She listened intently and let me complain. I never worried she'd get tired of listening to me, as I did with my other friends.

Monday, I got out of bed and climbed into the shower. I stood in front of the mirror to dry. I looked at myself. I mean, really looked at myself. My face had sunk in and my skin was yellow, except where it was red and burned from radiation. I slowly turned sideways, taking in the view from every angle. I closed my eyes. It couldn't be true. I had to be having a nightmare. I looked again, this time through sheets of tears. My ass was gone! *My perfect, heart-shaped ass was gone—I had been robbed!*

I slowly made my way in a towel to the kitchen. Mark was standing in front of the fridge stirring a protein shake for me. "Tears...What is it, Baby?"

"My ass is gone! Gone! I'm just a bag of bones. All my curves are gone!" I fell into his chest. My tears drenched his shirt.

He held me and rubbed my back. "Oh Baby, don't be silly. You look fine."

"Stop lying. You don't understand. This cancer has taken everything—fertility, womanhood, hope, strength, even my ass. What will be left? I'm drained and out of body parts to give." I pulled away, crawled into bed, and cried.

Within minutes, my phone rang. "It's work--I'll take a message," Mark yelled.

"No, no, give it here." I wiped my eyes and took the call. That call was exactly what I needed to stop feeling sorry for myself. I needed to stay focused, busy, and feel needed. Work helped me to do that. I dressed and headed out for week three of radiation and work.

Hell as I knew it, began Friday morning of week three. I woke very ill. I barely made it to the toilet before vomiting. I sat on the toilet with a trash can in front of me. I had it coming out both ends. Mark called the doctors and reported the severe symptoms. Within an hour he had a new prescription and vomiting stopped. *Thank God!*

I was still feeling like a train wreck, gagging and having runny bowels. Mark encouraged me to stay home and rest today. "Baby, you can't keep pushing yourself."

I ignored him, unwilling to accept my own limitations. I dressed as quickly as my bathroom breaks allowed and went to work anyway. I spent most of the day running for the restroom. I wasn't fooling anyone about how ill I truly was. It took me all day to complete a few simple tasks. This was the first day it dawned on me I wasn't Superwoman. I think I had actually fooled myself into believing she and I were one. Apparently, I was wrong.

That night, I came in the door and fell on the couch. Mark had dinner ready—spaghetti. He cooked it before I arrived in accordance with my “no cooking rule.” Mark put the food down in front of me. I pushed it back. I hated eating by this point and struggled just to force fluids down my throat.

“Please eat a few bits. Your body needs fuel to keep fighting.” He stared at me with sad eyes. “Please?”

“Fine, I'll try.”

I struggled with every bite. I didn't want anything in my mouth. I disliked the smell, taste and texture of the food. I practiced an old trick my dad taught me to get the food down. I held my nose and put the food in my mouth. It was so silly. Here I was at 29 holding my nose just to swallow each bite just like I was in kindergarten.

When I couldn't force another bite, I asked him to take it out of my sight. I laid back and flipped through the stations on TV. My stomach was turning and growling. I started gagging and heaving again. I suddenly

sprang from the couch and threw my hands up to my mouth. I ran for the bathroom desperately trying to hold the vomit back. I bent down; sticking my face into the toilet and began uncontrollably vomiting. Mark tried to hold my hair back.

I heaved again and felt sudden panic. I waved my arms about. *Help, Help, Help I can't breathe!* I reached for my mouth and violently thrust my stomach muscles. Mark rubbed my back in an attempt to comfort me. *I can't breathe, fuck my back, HELP!* I rammed my hand into my mouth and feverishly scooped the partially digested particles of spaghetti. *This can't be it. I will not die face down in the toilet.* I forced my hand deeper into my throat and shoveled out more, freeing my airway. I coughed and choked up the remaining spaghetti as I gasped for air. I collapsed on the floor frightened, weak and crying.

Mark called the hospital. Within in an hour, I found myself in the emergency room waiting to be admitted. The resident, concerned about possible kidney failure due to dehydration, felt I needed to stay the night. Once I was given my own room, Mark and I squeezed into the single bed. I didn't want to be alone. The nurse hooked me up to IV fluids. Next, she injected my IV with anti-nausea medication. I screamed! "It burns, it burns, fuck!" I darted her, the most evil look I could conjure.

She grabbed a vial of saline and prepared another injection, attempting to relieve the burning by flushing out the line. But the pain was already inflicted. The vein was dark and puffy halfway down my arm.

In the morning, Dr. D arrived. "Good morning!" I didn't give him time to speak. "I will not do any more chemo. I can't take it," I cried to him.

He acknowledged the terrible experience of my previous night and reviewed the benefits of continuing treatment. I cried and shook my head no. He looked at me in silence for several minutes, hoping I'd change my mind.

"Take the next week off of chemo. Come see me Thursday and let's talk then. No decisions have to be made today. You've had a difficult night," he said.

After a few more hours of fluids I was released. Mark drove straight home. I immediately climbed into my bed and stayed there until Monday morning. *Well, except when I was shitting my brains out!*

Monday brought with it another week of radiation. I reluctantly went. I wanted to bail. I felt terrible, but I knew this course of treatment was my best shot at survival. I tried to focus on the long-term benefits. I found it extremely hard in light of my current agony. I tried giving myself a pep talk before entering the radiation center. *You can do this. You can! You've completed three weeks already. That's more than half way done; just two-and-half more weeks to go. Chin up!*

The technician asked, "How are you feeling today?"

Big mistake buddy. "All my pubic hair is gone, my skin is very sensitive, and the diarrhea never stops...Great! How about you?" I blurted out.

He just smiled, realizing I wasn't in the mood for small talk. He jumped right to starting the radiation. He said nothing, but I felt his stare penetrate my skin. His pity was written all over his grin, and I hated it.

I insisted on seeing the radiation oncologist before leaving the building. I complained about the extreme symptoms: constant diarrhea, rectal bleeding, burning, terrible pain and the most fun—incontinence. *Most twenty-nine year old women are either on the career path with their briefcase in hand or on the mommy track with a baby on one hip and a diaper bag in the other. Not me— my brief case now holds my spare panties and wet wipes for when I shit my pants in public. Every girl's dream!*

He prescribed yet another medicine and gave me all the reasons I needed to continue with this treatment. He assured me things would get better as soon as the treatment was over; all these symptoms would stop. *Easy for you to say...try it sometime!*

The exhaustion was kicking my butt. It took all I had to climb out of bed and make it into work each day. My boss insisted I cut back on my work hours. Since I couldn't put limitations on myself, he decided he'd do it for me. I was already working from my home office on Mondays and from

the chemo room on Thursday. I'd given up traveling out of town during treatment and just visited the local locations. Now, my boss insisted I work from home on Fridays, too. "You have plenty of administrative things that can be done from the comfort of your own home," he continued. "I don't want a repeat of last week with you in the hospital again." I reluctantly agreed.

I knew I was driving myself too hard, but couldn't admit it. I was afraid of missing out, giving in, or allowing this cancer any power in my life. I kept pushing forward and insisting I could keep everything normal while I went through this process. Unfortunately, this treatment was taxing me mentally, emotionally and physically. Even if I didn't want to see it, others did.

Thursday immediately following radiation I headed for Dr. Jacob's office. The lab work was drawn first. Then he asked all the basic follow-up questions, and I answered them. He suggested I pick-up again the next week and finish out the last three treatments of chemo. He cited statistics trying to reason with me. As I listened to his words, the reality of them seeped in. My eyes filled with tears and overflowed onto my cheeks. He stretched his hand out, waving a fluffy white tissue. I grabbed it and he hugged me, once again reminding me why I had chosen him as my surgeon. When I was calm again he asked, "Tell me what you are feeling. I want to understand." I shared all my issues. The hot flashes and night sweats,

exhaustion, constant nausea and the runs. My new fear of dying on my toilet either by suffocating on vomit or bleeding to death from my ass. "I can't bare the thought of taking a crap, and yet I have no choice. None of the medicine has helped with the pain. I find myself screaming, crying and fleeing from the toilet to the tub, just for some mild relief." More tears poured. I was emotionally raw and exposed.

"May I examine you?" he asked. *He actually asks for permission, another great character trait.* He didn't assume his position gave him the right. His simple act gave me a sense of dignity and respect—feelings I hadn't felt in quite a while.

The examination uncovered the source of my pain—a long fissure, a tear in the rectal tissue. He told me radiation can thin out the tissue as it burns both good and bad cells alike. The constant diarrhea and wiping caused the already sensitive tissue to tear. He applied numbing Lidocaine® with a large Q-tip and gave me a tube to take home.

"One more thing, the test shows you are in menopause. The radiation has damaged your remaining ovary." *I fought so hard to hold onto that ovary...all for nothing!* Then he dropped another bomb on me. Hormone replacement therapy wasn't an option because the type of cancer I had could be triggered by estrogen. He feared hormone replacement would cause another recurrence. Instead, he recommended a low dose

antidepressant, explaining it affects the brain and reduces the symptoms of menopause like hot flashes.

“How about your chemo? Will you please continue?”

I sat there silently considering my choices. I tried thinking about the future benefits of today’s agony. I took a deep breath in. “I’ll start again next week and do the last two sessions. I won’t make up today’s session, two more that’s it. OK?” I looked directly into his eyes without blinking. He smiled, “That’s better than nothing. Go get some rest, and please try to eat more protein; your body needs it to heal. I know this has been tough; radiation is especially hard on thin people. Keep fighting!”

Mark took me home and tucked me into bed before returning to work. I had no energy or motivation left. I spent the afternoon feeling sorry for myself in bed. Mark called after work to inform me he was going to happy hour with this brother. He promised to be home after two drinks. I hated the thought. Usually, when they got together two drinks turned into a late night. I feared tonight would two. “Ok,” I said in a tone letting him know it really wasn’t.

“Baby it’s two beers—please don’t be like that.”

“I said it was fine. Go have fun.” *I didn’t mean a word of it and he knew it.*

I wasn’t being fair, but I couldn’t help it. I was miserable, scared and lonely. I felt extremely vulnerable. This was very unfamiliar territory for me.

I just wanted him home with me. Mark, however, needed to get out and talk with someone in the real world. He needed an escape from my cancer, so he could relax and have a bit of time for himself. Rationally, I knew he needed this time, but my rational mind was no longer in control of my emotions. I feared he would like it better out there at the bar than home with his ill wife. I knew he loved me, but I was sick and needy these days—not much of a turn on. I knew he was devoted and faithful, but we hadn't had sex in two and half months—not even a blow job. I was feeling pretty low, insecure, unattractive, and I was acting crazy. I kept thinking you're the sick one, not him. He's still a healthy, handsome, sexy man with desires and I wasn't meeting any of them. Men joke about their sex life ending when they get married. His really did. I felt bad for him. I wanted to erase these thoughts, but they kept haunting me.

There will be some pretty girl at the bar. She'll flirt with him and throw herself at him. He loves you, but he's still a man and you aren't putting out.

Plus, I knew what always happened when Mark and his brother got together...two drinks, sure! The only time Mark and I ever fought was when he went out with his brother. It almost always happened the same way. Mark would claim he was meeting his brother for only a drink or two, maybe an hour or two. But when those boys got together, one drink led to the next and, before long, a game of video golf. Then a rematch at video golf, and so on. I'd call. Mark would ignore the call and the night would grow late.

Inevitably, we'd end up in a fight. I'd end up mad because he didn't keep his word and come home after two drinks (or because he drank and drove). He'd miss the point and feel I never let him have time with his brother without picking a fight. It wasn't about his time with his brother, but instead about him keeping his word.

I just lay in bed waiting, feeling stupid, hoping tonight he'd really come back after two drinks. He surprised me two hours later. He'd even stopped for movies! A rush of relief surged through me.

Week five was ugly. Mark made arrangements for his mother, Terri, to come mid-week and stay with us for the rest of my treatments. His work schedule was filling up fast, and I was getting sicker by the day. I hated all food and weighed merely 112 pounds now. *Not a pretty sight.*

Tuesday morning at 11, I was scheduled to meet with my boss. As a district manager, I met with my boss only three or four times a year. It was mid-year performance review time, and I hadn't seen him since my promotion back in early June.

I went to radiation as scheduled and returned home to get ready for my meeting. Lori came to help me out that morning. Another bad bout of the runs hit and forced me into the bathroom. "Lori!" I screamed. "Please come quickly." I was doubled over crying when she appeared in the doorway. "Run the tub, please hurry!" As soon as the water was two inches deep I hobbled from the toilet to it.

I stayed there while she sat on the floor listening to me cry. I felt so helpless. It wasn't long before my stomach turned again. I leapt like a frog out of the tub and hurried back to the toilet. Then back into the tub. I instructed Lori where to find my boss' number. "Please call him and push my meeting back one hour. If he asks questions, be vague." Just as I thought, he asked a million questions. Lori handled him perfectly and gave out little to no details. He offered to cancel the meeting but Lori did as I requested and insisted we just move it back. I really wanted to be my normal, career-oriented self. I wanted to make that meeting. My body, on the other hand, didn't care two cents about the meeting, work or anything else except stopping the intense pain.

Despite my will, my body had a different plan for the day. The pain worsened, and I found it impossible to leave the bathroom. Eventually, Lori called and canceled the meeting. There was no way I could make it.

The next morning I rolled over looked at the clock and then covered it up. My mind was made up; I wasn't getting up or going back to radiation. My body was done. It needed rest. I couldn't handle another day. I called and informed the doctor of my decision. The nurse suggested I take the day off and return the following day for the last few sessions. She didn't understand what I was saying. I was done. I didn't want to hear about the benefits or anything else the nurses or doctors had to say. As far as I was

concerned, I wasn't living. I was a prisoner to my bathroom and it needed to end now!

Terri arrived late that evening. She settled in and went right into taking care of us. She was great. She went grocery shopping and planned meals. Mark broke the news about no cooking to her. Terri loved cooking and making sure everyone was fed. She understood of course. Setting plan B for meals in motion, she didn't miss a beat. She was just what we needed: help for me and stress relief for Mark. I couldn't think of a better person than his own mother.

She accompanied me the next morning to radiation and chemo. Yes, I gave in and went back after having the day off, telling myself it was just one more week. "I can do anything for a week," I repeated over and over to myself.

Mark went to work. This was my first chemo day without him which made me a bit uneasy. I was grateful his mother was along for support.

The session went south from the beginning. The nurse searched my arms for a vein. She needed to start the IV line. I was so dehydrated and thin now, finding a vein was a tougher job than normal. I had been poked and pricked so many times over the last few months that most my veins hid now. Finally, she found one—on my forearm. She prepped the area, "Take a deep breath." As soon as the needle hit my arm the vein rolled away from her. *Not today, lady!* She moved the needle around under my skin

attempting to reach and penetrate the vein. I flinched with pain. "I'm sorry," the nurse said. "Let me get someone else. I don't want to hurt you again."

Moments later another nurse sat before me. "I always get the tough ones around here," he joked. He grabbed both arms and pulled them straight out, turning them to side to side. "You are difficult, aren't you?"

"Chemo and radiation will do that to a person." I replied sarcastically.

He tapped on my arm. "Ok, I've got one." He wiped the spot with an alcohol swab and pressed the needle beneath my skin. I pulled back. "Got it," he exclaimed, obviously proud of his accomplishment. *Great, let's all clap now.*

An hour into the first bag of fluids I felt my bowels turn. *Shit, quite literally.* I closed my eyes and hoped the feeling would stop. It didn't. Instead, the feeling got worse. I motioned the nurse, telling her I had to go to the bathroom, NOW! Terri came to my aid, helping me push the IV pole into the bathroom. I closed the door just in time. The diarrhea began again. I screamed, "Oh, God, please make it stop!" Tears poured from my eyes. Knock, Knock. "Are you ok, Michi?" I heard Terri call.

"Yes," I responded, followed by several more screams.

"Honey it's the nurse; may I come in?"

"Yes."

She held a syringe. This is pain medication. It should give you some relief. I nodded, so she injected the medicine into my IV line. Then she

handed me the Lidocaine.® I asked for an empty cup. She handed me one. I reached over and turned on the sink; ran the water until it was warm and placed the cup under the faucet. When it was full, I poured it down my butt-crack. The water stung as it hit the open sores and rectal tears. There was no way I could wipe anything dry or wet across my ass now. *It was torn up!*

I emerged from the bathroom, and with help, made my way back to my chair. I crawled into the lazy boy and curled up on my side. I could not sit on my bottom any more.

I spent most of that session in the bathroom than in my chair. Each time I entered the bathroom, the chemo room was filled with sounds of sobbing. I felt drained and knew I looked the same. I couldn't imagine this continuing for another week.

I spent the weekend in bed. I didn't want any visitors. When I wasn't in the bathroom, all I wanted was sleep. My whole body ached. The moments when sleep found me were my only escape from the pain.

Monday, I went to radiation, and then came home, climbed back into bed and drifted off to sleep. I woke suddenly with sharp pain and stumbled out of bed. I found myself doubled over on the toilet. I screamed, "Mark, Mark, please Mark!" He didn't come. Shooting pain radiated from my ass down my legs and through my abdomen.

"Michi, what is it?" Terri yelled from the bedroom.

"Get Mark, please find him."

I was too weak and in too much pain to move. Mark came running in, "What's wrong?"

I reached up for him, "I can't do this. I can't take anymore. Please make it stop, make it stop." Tears filled his eyes. He knelt down and kissed my head. "What can I do?"

"Fill the tub and lift me into it."

He did just as I requested. I pulled my knees to my chest and put my head down as the tub filled with warm, soothing water. "I'm done, Mark," I cried. "I'm done!"

"What?"

"I'll finish the last chemo but no more radiation. It's destroying my body. I will not go back for another dose. I won't do it."

Mark was silent for a minute. I waited to hear his response. "But, you'll do the chemo."

"Yes, I'll do the last chemo."

"I'll call the radiologist and let him know we're done. You did fine, Baby. There were just two sessions left anyway. You don't have to go back. I support you."

I breathed a sigh of relief knowing he could see my pain, and he knew I did all I could.