

Part I

~

HEAR US

"Tiny tumors staked out their territory..."

Joan Thomson

Nancy Ryan

PERMISSION TO BE ANGRY

"By the time you can feel a lump in your breast, it has been there for at least eight to ten years. It takes that long before a tumor is large enough to feel. We know this based on the average doubling time of a cancer Cell." My support group friends and I squirmed in our seats as Dr. Susan Love's presentation unfolded. We didn't want to know that this cancer had been in our breast so long.

Dr. Love had made a rare foray out of Massachusetts to speak at an American Cancer Society Reach to Recovery conference in Durham, New Hampshire. I had just made my own foray through the maze of breast cancer treatments. Diagnosis, second and third opinions, research, phone calls, surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation had just consumed eleven months of my fortieth year. Why was I just now hearing the truth about breast cancer?

At age 39, near the end of a routine physical exam, I had asked my family physician to schedule me for a mammogram. I knew how to take care of myself. I knew the breast cancer screening guidelines. I knew the mammogram would be normal. It was. Two months later I found the lump.

Fourteen months, two more mammograms and three doctors later I was diagnosed with invasive lobular carcinoma. So much for early detection. Fourteen months gives cancer cells a long time to double. And double they did. My breast was full of cancer and eight lymph nodes tested positive too.

Nancy Ryan chairs the New Hampshire Breast Cancer Coalition.