

COURAGE, LIFE & HOPE

# REFLECTIONS *of a journey*



**ASPIRUS™**  
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## Marilyn Kapter and Terri Witt



Marilyn Kapter and Terri Witt are self-proclaimed “tough broads.” That doesn’t mean they wear leather jackets and carry switchblade knives; it means they are survivors.

Friends for about 35 years, Kapter and Witt have leaned on each other through careers as educators, through family tragedies and through separate battles with breast cancer. Today, Kapter is 18 years beyond her initial diagnosis and Witt is 10 years out.

“We’ve cried, we’ve laughed, we’ve sworn,” said Witt, a teacher of the hearing impaired in Stevens Point. “But you can’t focus on the negative. We’ve both planned our funerals, but you do those things and get on with it.”

One way to face a disease as daunting as cancer is to rely on loved ones. Having a close friend who experienced the same trials is a valuable resource, Witt said. “You can’t begin to define the importance of support,” she said.

Kapter and Witt were able to extend that support to each other’s families as well. Shortly after Witt was diagnosed, her daughter reached out to Kapter for help.

“She said, ‘I have to hug you and feel you and know that you’re here, because that means my mom will be here too,’” Kapter said.

There is seldom much support from the public. Kapter remembers going to the grocery store and seeing acquaintances turn around and push their cart the other way – they simply didn’t know what to say to her. More troubling was how Kapter’s father responded to the disease.

“My own father had a difficult time hugging me because he thought cancer

was contagious,” she said. “He really believed that.”

But in the 18 years since her diagnosis attitudes, treatment and support have improved. And Witt and Kapter have developed their own method of dealing with the disease. They use humor and a positive view of life.

They also have established some enjoyable traditions. After every routine checkup at the Aspirus Regional Cancer Center, Kapter and Witt will celebrate an ‘all clear’ at a local establishment. The two now treat life as one protracted toast.

“A friend told me to look for a gift every single day,” Witt said. In the 10 years since her diagnosis, she has experienced wonderful gifts such as seeing her two daughters graduate high school and college, and witnessing the birth of twin grandchildren.

Kapter, too, takes conscious note of anything that gives her pleasure, and she never forgets the people who enrich her life. “I’ve tried to go out of my way to express gratitude,” Kapter said. “If someone has done something nice, something that influenced me, I’ll write a note. I’ve learned that life is fragile.”

To this day, Kapter sends a letter each Thanksgiving to Dr. Jenkins, her former Aspirus Regional Cancer Center oncologist, expressing gratitude for the past year’s experiences. Without his help, she wouldn’t have enjoyed even life’s most basic pleasures.

Cancer terrified Kapter and Witt. It shook them up, stole their hair and reorganized their lives. But these tough broads survived and still enjoy every day as it comes.

