Finding “Wholeness”: My Mother’s Journey

More than a dozen times in my life, my father has looked me in the eyes and said, “Son, your mother is an amazing woman.” I’d reply in the typical fashion, “Yeah, I know.” I did know my mother was quite a special person, but before sitting down and contemplating the prompt for this essay, I had never attempted to fully comprehend the depth behind my father’s words.

At the age of just eighteen years old (my age now), my mother was diagnosed with osteogenic sarcoma after a soft tumor had been discovered attached to a bone in her hip. After chemotherapy failed to shrink the tumor in the slightest and radiation proved to be ineffective, my mother’s leg was amputated on August 4, 1988, in a procedure known as a “hemi-pelvectomy,” the highest amputation of a lower extremity that can be administered. My mother gradually adjusted to life as an amputee, and eventually her and my father got married and, despite the doubts of a variety of doctors, had me and eventually my little sister. My mother had once told me that when she lost her leg she did not feel “whole” as a human being, but when she had me and my sister, she felt a greater sense of “wholeness” in her life. She always stresses to us how much of a blessing we are to her and how much she has learned from us. However, I can safely say, after eighteen years alongside my mother, I have learned much more from her than she will ever learn from me.

Growing up with a mother who only has one leg was difficult for me. As my mother’s son, I always felt the need to protect her from danger, from the world in general. I often grew angry
and confused, because it seemed to me that she had already been burdened by the terrible monster of cancer as a teen, and now she was still being punished by the disease (through her amputation) many years later. Striding into a grocery store (or any other public place) on crutches alone with me shortly behind, my mother often received looks of surprise and confusion. Kids would often stand back and occasionally snicker; full grown adults would, many times, stand where they were and gawk. From where I stood as a young child, it was as if my mother was living in a world that was not accepting of her; a world that doesn’t have room for anyone different. That didn’t seem fair to me. However, as I grew older, I also grew wiser. I came to the realization that the perspective I possessed in relation to my mother’s disability was entirely different from the one that she held. My mother doesn't view her amputation as a curse, but rather a blessing that allowed her to grow as a person. She doesn't see impolite people staring rudely, but rather curious human beings that are interested in her story. When she looks down at where her leg used to be, she doesn’t see a burden, but rather a challenge to be conquered. When I had this epiphany, it not only changed how I viewed my mother, but how I viewed myself. I started to try to live more like my mother. To me this meant hating less and loving more; it meant being thankful instead of asking why; it meant being kind, gentle, and understanding despite how bad of a day I was having. Most importantly, it meant living every day to it’s fullest; appreciating everything for what it’s worth, taking nothing for granted, and getting out of your bed every morning with a kick-butt attitude, even if you're sick, tired, hurt; heck, even if you are MISSING A LEG. If my mother can face the worst of this world with a smile on her face, what’s my excuse for complaining because I have a test, or I have to run, or I have to wake up early? The answer is, there are none.
Growing up with my mother has taught me that life isn’t always going to go how you want it…it’s going to knock you down more than once. However, if you have the right attitude; if you view life as a crooked but blessed journey, and possess drive and passion and a heart full of love, there is nothing in this world that can keep you from happiness; there is nothing that can stop you from feeling “whole.”