

NOTES

An Arabian Proverb tells us that he who has health has hope; and he who has hope has everything. In today's society, we must become advocates for our own personal health and well-being. In her dynamic and powerful essay, author Beth Bucher takes us on an emotional journey. After realizing all of the women in her family had a history of health issues, she makes one of the most difficult decisions for any woman—Beth Bucher decides to save her *own* life. This heartfelt essay must be performed by a female and may be entered in either Prose Interpretation or Dramatic Interpretation. This is an outstanding selection for the mature female performer looking for a relevant topic for our times. If performed in Prose Interpretation, the drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performer when to turn the pages in the manuscript.

Ten years ago, I underwent genetic testing for the 'breast cancer' gene, and I did this because when I was five-years-old I watched my mother die of breast cancer. She was 26 when she was diagnosed, and she was 30 when she passed away. And *her* mother had *also* died of breast cancer when *she* was five-years-old. My older sister died of a rare genetic liver disorder when she was only nine-*months*-old, so it seemed only natural for me to try to figure out *why* this kept happening to people in my family.



And the person who had a front-row seat for all of this pain and death was my Aunt Anna. Now, my Aunt Anna took my mother in after *their* mother had died, and she raised her along with her eight children.

Eight children.

Let that sink in for a moment. Then, when *my* mother died, Aunt Anna took in me and my brother. She became a mother all over again, and she *raised* us with her brood of eight *adult* children. She just...*did it*. And she did it *well!* She did it in that—that Irish-Catholic, blue-collar way—where you just put your head down and you *do* what you have to *do* to take care of your family. And she did all of this with '*quiet strength*.' And when I say 'quiet'...I mean *quiet*. We didn't talk about death. We didn't talk about cancer. She *never* talked about what she had seen in her life—until I was older.



Now, when I was in college, I would drive down on breaks to see Anna in Southwest Philly. We would sit around the table, drink bad coffee, and talk about life and family. You know—the juicy stuff. And after enough of that,

GENES: A LOVE STORY

By Beth Bucher

she started to actually—*open up*, and she told me this story about my mom—when she was in the hospital—which was a *lot*.

My mother died a blind quadriplegic with steel rods holding up her skull. She suffered—*unimaginably*.

But that day when Anna went to see her, she went in and my mom was so happy. Mom was excited, and she grabbed Anna’s hand and she said, “Anna! Anna, they’re *doing* it. They’re doing *liver transplants*! They’re doing it! They’re *doing* it!”

A liver transplant: That was the thing that would have saved my sister’s life; but in 1975, they were *not* doing that.



It has really always amazed me that my mother was able to find this— *joy*—and this *happiness*—despite being trapped in total hell. And I tried to remember that when my *own* genetic test results came back. I was positive for the BRCA-1 mutation, which was not a surprise. But this result took my risk from somewhere around 12 % to somewhere around 60-87% risk of getting the very disease that seemed to be getting everyone I loved...



And then around that time we buried Anna, because *she* got cancer. And she didn’t tell *anyone*, because she didn’t want anyone to go through what *she* had gone through. She didn’t want anyone to—*see*—what she *saw*. And so quietly, she died.

At that point, I had had enough! So, I elected to have a prophylactic mastectomy, and I made that decision *ferociously*. In fact, I made every decision after that *fearlessly*—and with *strength*. And I was *resolute*—right up until I was *alone* in a very small room in the hospital that morning with my plastic surgeon. I was completely naked with my hospital gown down around my waist, and my plastic surgeon was making all of these marks around my breasts with this dark blue grease pen, and I got so scared.

I was so alone.



Then, in that *same instant* when I got so scared, I felt that over on the right side of the room there were—*people* there. On the right side of my small hospital room, I felt the presence of *people*—just as much as you all are here