

Cancer survivor Amy Kropp takes life day by day

Written by Darci Tomky



“Take life day by day,” is what cancer survivor Amy Kropp has told herself the past eight months, determined not to let her fight against cancer get the best of her. Of course she had her moments, but Kropp kept her spirits up focusing on the fact that it’s a different day tomorrow.

Life was turned upside down for 28-year-old Kropp when she received that dreaded phone call the afternoon of Dec. 8 last year. “Are you sitting down?” is what they asked her, just moments before giving Kropp the news that she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Two things went through my mind, said Kropp, “Am I going to die?” and “What about my daughter?”

Kropp had been living a normal life, focusing on her 5-year-old daughter Elby and on her job as a flight attendant, working out of Denver International Airport.

“Cancer is a scary word,” said Kropp’s grandma Mardelle York, a breast cancer survivor of 13 years.

One of the things that helped Kropp through her situation was her great team of doctors including Dr. Jody Wagonner from Denver as well as plastic surgeon Dr. Hunsicker.

Kropp learned she had inherited the BRCA1 gene from her mother and grandmother. The mutation of this harmful BRCA1 gene meant she had a much higher risk of developing breast and/or ovarian cancer.

In her case, Kropp was given the option of either having a double bilateral mastectomy or a lumpectomy, the first involving surgery to remove the whole breast while the latter only removes the part affected by the cancer. She chose the double bilateral mastectomy with reconstruction.

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The 8-hour surgery at Sally Jobe Breast Clinic in Denver was scheduled for Jan. 9, a month after diagnosis. Then one month after that, Kropp began chemotherapy on Feb. 13 with Dr. Stone in Greeley. The process included treatments every two weeks totaling eight in four months.

“Mom, you really do look kinda like a guy,” was the only thing Elby could think to say to her mom after she had her head shaved. Because of the chemotherapy, Kropp’s hair began falling out two weeks after the first treatment. Even though the 5-year-old girl was having a tough time with it, Kropp simply said to her “Mom will be sick for a while, but I have a great team of doctors, and we will beat this thing.”

Kropp recalled playing Barbie dolls with her niece some time later. In the innocence of children, the girl wanted to cut off the doll’s hair to be just like her aunt’s. After Kropp explained to her why the cancer made her look like that, the girl simply went back to playing with her dolls, treating her just like normal which is exactly what Kropp wanted out of life.

She continued working through the treatments, trying to keep life for her and Elby as normal as possible. It was nice to get away, she said. The passengers on her flights didn’t seem to care what she looked like, their only concern being their carry-on baggage and their midflight beverage. Kropp noted her airline company was good to her, allowing her to wear hats and scarves while she worked.

A good support system is what Kropp said has gotten her through the last several months. “The whole family was very supportive,” said Kropp. “Everybody had their job.” The support included being able to come home to her parents’ house in Holyoke while she wasn’t working as well as staying with her grandparents in Greeley during chemotherapy treatments. “It takes a village,” said York.

Kropp noted she just needed to focus on herself and sit back to let others handle everything else.

Part of Kropp’s support system included the “amazing community” in Holyoke, noting it has been good to live in a small town. Kropp has also gotten support from the cancer society and her “look good, feel better” classes.

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“Elby is a complete blessing,” said Kropp. She is grateful to have her daughter as she won’t be able to have any more children. Elby is now “number one” in her life. They take hold of their faith to live each day, realizing the cancer could come back.

Now knowing about the BRCA1 gene, Kropp can use the information for cancer precautions for Elby, noting they can begin testing her at age 18. “She is why we fight. She is the future,” said Kropp.

Both Kropp and her daughter are excited to be participating in the Phillips County Relay for Life Aug. 21-22. Elby even raised money for her team and will be making her way around the track throughout the night.

York will also be attending the event with her granddaughter. “I’ll be proud to walk with her in the survivors’ lap.” York said she is especially impressed with Relay for Life’s focus on all cancers, not just pinpointing one kind.

Through all of this, Kropp’s focus is to live life on a day to day basis, and she tries to not “sweat the small stuff.”

“She’s a tough cookie,” said York. Kropp is content with her cancer, which is allowing her to move forward. “I’m alive, doing what I’m doing.”