

My Little Secret

The first mammogram's the hardest.

by **Sativa Peterson**

I am sitting in the waiting room of a diagnostic center, waiting to have my first mammogram. The image that keeps popping into my head is that of a Panini press. I imagine my boobs being squished like a Cubano sandwich. And sure, this worries me, but it pales in comparison to something else on my mind.

I feel like I'm about to do something really personal—and not just showing a stranger my boobs. What I'm about to do is confront a secret that I've been keeping. The secret is this: I've been ignoring my health.

I lost my mom to breast cancer last August, after she waged an epic battle to try and remain with our family. And somewhere during the early days of this war, I stopped going to the doctor. I didn't see a dentist, dermatologist, or gynecologist. I didn't see anyone.

I think I ignored my own health for a couple of reasons. One was definitely that I felt like we couldn't deal with One More Thing as a family. Better not to know, to avoid the possible truth rather than have another medical issue, regardless of how small, on our plates.

Secondly, I kept telling myself, *I don't have time!* There was always someone who needed something from me. When

my mom became sick, my place within the family shifted. I had a two-year-old daughter and a 55-year-old mother, and needed to take care of them both. They had very different requirements; one wanted to nap and one wanted to play. One had nausea and one was potty training. One particularly overwhelming day I called a friend and said, "Poo-poo and cancer—that's my life right now."

But perhaps the biggest reason I stopped going to the doctor was plain old fear. Fear that we somehow failed my mother. Chose the wrong treatment, the wrong path, ate the wrong foods, lived in the wrong place. Though I was in doctors' offices

ly, in April I picked up the phone. I felt my eyes welling up. I don't think until that moment I knew just how much I'd been avoiding this.

Once it was time to do the deed, the technician was really nice. We talked about my mom, my fears, and the importance of early detection. I contorted this way and that with my breast pinned down to a glass plate. Afterwards, she gave me a cookie. I took a big deep breath. *There. Done.* Pictures of the insides of my breasts have been taken. A baseline has been established.

Before my mom passed, she would have been the first person I would have called to dish about the mammogram experience. I wish she



The author with her mother, circa 1978.

frequently with my mom, I avoided them for myself altogether during her treatments, and even after she was gone.

But in January, for my New Year's resolution, I vowed it was time to face the fear. Still, months crept along without my scheduling any appointments. Final-

were here with me now. But even without her, I'm actively taking a step, making a choice that I will stay on top of my health. ♪

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