

“What matters is inside”

Widowed at 25, Cathy Bueti had just begun to feel like love might be possible again. Then cancer stole her hair, her breast and her confidence. No one will want me now, she told herself. But she hadn't met Lou . . .

Taking a deep breath, Cathy Bueti's fingers flew across the keyboard.

Just minutes earlier, the Brewster, New York, occupational therapist had “met” a cute guy on an Internet dating site. And he seemed so nice.

But if there was one thing Cathy knew, it was that life was short—too short to waste. So, though she wished she didn't have to, she began typing her next message:

There's something I need to tell you . . .

Six years earlier, Cathy's life had changed in one horrifying blink when her husband, Paul—her high-school sweetheart—was killed in a car accident.

Numb with pain, Cathy somehow forced herself to return to work and—as weeks became months—even tried to date again. But things never worked out, and sometimes she'd find herself holding Paul's picture and weeping—you promised you'd never leave me!

Then, six years after losing Paul, Cathy discovered a soft, marble-sized lump in her left breast.

It has to be a cyst, she told herself. How much can one person take? Besides, she was barely 31.

It couldn't be cancer, she thought. But it was.

“Who'd want me now?”

Soon, Cathy was undergoing a mastectomy, breast reconstruction and months of chemotherapy.

I'd almost begun to believe I could someday build a life with someone else, she thought. But staring in the mirror—at her bald head and the

scars on her chest, at her drawn-on eyebrows—she cried: Who would want me now?

Still, when a friend told her about it, Cathy couldn't resist checking out the Internet dating service update.com. And soon she was dating again, hiding the effects of chemo with makeup and wigs.

But always it was the same—when she revealed she had breast cancer, Cathy's dates all seemed to politely disappear. Will I be alone forever? she wondered sadly.

So the night after her last chemo treatment, Cathy decided to venture online once more—this time noticing an intriguing new profile.

Lou was 28 and a mechanic. We like the same music and movies, Cathy thought. And he lives

only 20 minutes away!

Noticing he was online, too, she tapped out a greeting. And soon, they were talking as if they'd known each other their whole lives!

But Cathy was wary. I have to know now, she thought. Because if he's like most guys . . . if he can't handle what I'm going through . . . I can't risk the rejection later.

I just finished chemo, she typed. I have no hair. I lost a breast . . .

As soon as she pressed “send,” Cathy's heart sank. It was too late to turn back. And suddenly, she felt more alone than ever. Maybe I shouldn't have told him. Maybe if I'd given it more time . . .

“How did I get so lucky?”

But moments later, a message flashed onto Cathy's screen:

I lost my mom to breast cancer a month ago, Lou had responded. My aunt is a seven-year survivor, too. You must be a very strong person . . .

It was just one more thing they shared: the pain of losing someone they loved. Yet Cathy also realized: He understands!

The messages kept coming—the next night, too. And when Lou called a few days later, they felt so at ease, they decided to go to dinner.



“I'm so glad I haven't let anything stop me from loving again!” says Cathy Bueti, with her husband, Lou, and Bosco.

“You look really nice!” he smiled, and Cathy's heart leapt a little. But when he said goodnight with a handshake . . .

Maybe he only likes me as a friend, she sighed.

But Lou kept calling. And a few weeks later, when Cathy surprised him by cooking his favorite meal for his birthday, he finally kissed her.

“You're beautiful,” he told her as sparks flew between them. “And even if you weren't, what matters is inside.”

How did I get so lucky? Cathy marveled.

Soon, they were spending every free moment together, strolling hand-in-hand, cuddling and watching movies. And six months later, as waves crashed on the beach, Lou dropped to one knee and pulled out a ring.

“Yes, yes!” Cathy wept, overwhelmed with joy.

And on the two-year anniversary of her cancer diagnosis . . .

“We've replaced a bad memory with a perfect day!” Cathy whispered, her eyes shining at their wedding.

Now, almost six years later, Cathy remains in love with Lou—and also their “sweet boy,” a pug named Bosco!—and is still cancer-free! And she's written a book about her survival, *Breastless in the City*, to show other young women how they can cope with loss—of love, of a breast, of whatever matters most.

“There's a reason I'm here,” she says. “I rediscovered happiness. And I want others to know they can, too!”

—Nanette Woitas Holt

Did you know?
Regular exercise can reduce breast cancer risk by more than 25%!