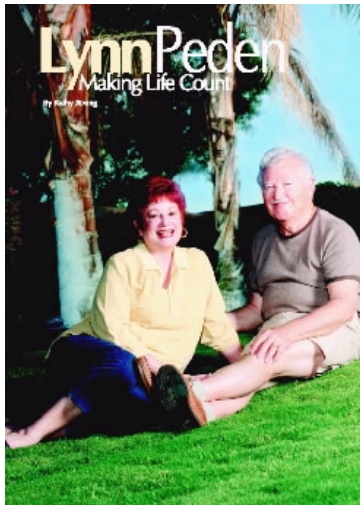


# Breast Cancer Survivor



When Lynn Peden and her husband Ernie finally moved to the desert full time in the fall of 1997, it was a dream realized. The two had their first date in Palm springs over 26 years ago, and since, had gradually moved here part time.

"We knew someday we would live here," Lynn recalls in her La Quinta home. " If you have a dream, you don't give it up -- even if you don't know when it will happen."

The Pedens finally found themselves in a place where they could retire to the desert when they ended long-time careers simultaneously. Lynn and Ernie set out to find the perfect home by, literally, doing their homework. They thoroughly scoured housing areas and found a rare foreclosure in just the La Quinta neighborhood they had targeted. The light, bright and airy home had vistas of the Chocolate Mountains, lots of blank walls for their Western art memorabilia, a wonderful kitchen for Lynn's healthy cooking, and an ample garage to house Ernie's hobby of building exotic cars.

Dream InterruptedGregarious Peden had her dream life interrupted abruptly in October of 2002. During her regular medical exam, Lynn told Eisenhower's Karen Donley, MD, Board Certified Obstetrician and Gynecologist, that she thought she felt a lump in her breast. Dr. Donley ordered a special magnified mammogram, which did reveal microscopic calcifications in one breast. The technician was quick to point out that Peden could not possibly have felt in the miniscule dots, but he related that it happened to women all the time. "It was like magic," Lynn marvels. "I had an angel on my shoulder."

The calcifications were potentially cancerous, and a biopsy was ordered. Dr. Donley referred Peden to Eisenhower's Peter Schulz, MD, Board Certified Surgeon.

Lynn left the hospital that day and sat in her car crying. "I didn't know how I could tell Ernie or my mother," she explained. "I just knew I had to find a way to make myself feel better and it came to me – I would make myself an example to my family and other people on how to handle cancer." Her resolve to handle this news with strength and knowledge also helped her family deal with the events. In fact, Ernie recalled how he never panicked because Lynn seemed to be handling the news so well.

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Peden did not hesitate to begin her search for knowledge and support, in much the same thorough manner she and Ernie had approached house hunting. Ernie researched Web sites and Lynn contacted Eisenhower Medical Center for cancer support groups and doctor referral lines. She purchased books on breast cancer and talked with the American Cancer Society. At the new Eisenhower Lucy Curci Cancer Center, Peden met Alison Sachs, MSW, OSW-C, Coordinator of Cancer Support Services. It was to be the beginning of a wonderful association for both women.

By the time Dr. Schulz performed her lumpectomy in November 2002, Lynn was as prepared as any patient could be. She entered her consultation armed with knowledge and lists of questions for the doctor. "I feel it is a waste of time for both the patient and the doctor not to be prepared," Lynn advises. "We have a responsibility to be proactive, not reactive. After all, nobody cares about your health as much as you do."

Dr. Schulz chuckles about his first meeting with Lynn, "She got the 'List of the Year' Award, but I definitely feel that an educated, prepared patient is a good patient." He emphasizes that with health care time getting more and more limited, it is important for the patient to be educated and come armed with specific questions.

A cancerous tumor the size of a tennis ball was removed from Lynn's left breast, but its "spidery" margins and aggressive tendencies led physicians to schedule a second lumpectomy, and ultimately, to make the decision to proceed with a mastectomy. It was Lynn's decision to schedule a double mastectomy and remove her right healthy breast as well. She learned that this sort of aggressive cancer will often affect the remaining healthy breast tissue. She also knew she did not want reconstructive surgery, but went through all the steps to help her make the decision. She looked at photos of reconstruction patients and decided if she "could not look fabulous naked," she would look great with the help of prosthetics and clothes. "I wanted to make it as easy as possible to go on with my life," she explains. In March of 2003, Peden underwent a very successful double mastectomy, free of any complications and without the need for follow-up radiation or chemotherapy.

In February, just prior to the surgery, Peden began attending the Breast Cancer Support Group led by Alison Sachs, at the new Eisenhower Lucy Curci Cancer Center, as a founding member. "I came back to group two weeks after my surgery," Peden explains. "My experience with breast cancer at Eisenhower was so positive, I wanted to share it with the group." But Peden has gone much further than just sharing with the group. She has taken on several patients as a mentor, personally helping them through the process. She often escorts them to doctor appointments – even helping them pen their lists of questions – and visits them in the hospital after surgery. "Ernie went to every single appointment with me from the beginning," Peden explains. "There are many women who go through this process alone; if you have someone with you, they can give you the courage to ask more questions."

Besides her support group and patient mentoring, Lynn is making 2004 her "Health Year" by joining Weight Watchers, taking yoga classes at the Renker Wellness Center and discovering lots of new healthy recipes to share with Ernie.