

**T**wo months before my wedding I received shocking news. I had cancer. I didn't feel sick. I was 33 years old, athletic and didn't smoke. My sweet darling, Joey, married me right away. There'd be no Jamaican dream wedding as we had planned. No walks on the beach at

them, including my wacky aunt Mary from the Bronx and the ladies from my grandmother's Friday night bowling league. Since hormone replacement was not an option for me, I found a sense of humor to be my best weapon. When that failed, I could be located in front of an

Later that evening, through tears of shame, guilt and inadequacy, Joey and I discussed my strange, new feelings. "We're infertile," he reminded. I realized again that we fought cancer together. My husband valued me as a person, not a utilitarian womb. Because of it,

## Living Through Menopause and Infertility



by Michelle Miller

sunset. No 'Hey mon.' No Reggae music. No smiling poolside waiters to bring us delightful coconut drinks decorated with tiny paper umbrellas. The only cocktails I'd get that year were the chemo kind, dripping through an IV from a sweet-faced nurse named Tammy.

I had Hodgkin's lymphoma. Along with the cancer diagnosis, menopause became an unwelcome third party in our marriage. With it, we'd soon discover that our hopes for children

open freezer. I didn't feel pretty, but still, no matter my bald head and scars, Joey always told me that I was beautiful.

Despite my husband's love, the teachings of culture and religion left me confused about my purpose in the world as an infertile woman. Steeped in time honored tradition, both had instructed me since girlhood that a woman's worth is measured by her ability to produce children. This dutiful obligation

I felt like the most desirable woman on earth.

A year later, a bone marrow transplant sealed the fate against any encore performances of my monthly visitor. I'd never need another maxi pad again. We grieved our losses and accepted that life is not always as planned.

At 39, I am still discovering my feminine worth. I am more aware that self-acceptance is an important step in reclaiming health, hope and

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the old fashioned way were kidnapped forever with no ransom note.

Joey and I had every hope to reclaim life as we had known it as soon as cancer treatments were over, but as soon as chemo began, menopause became another unbelievable reality. Volcanic hot flashes woke me up at all hours of the night to soaked pajamas, and during the day my mascara lost its waterproof claim. I could now swap veteran menopause stories with the best of

was again expressed to me when a co-worker cornered me in the bathroom to ask if my husband would divorce me if I 'couldn't have a baby for him.' As I repositioned my brastraps and checked my lipstick in search of a comeback reply, I envisioned the progress of women's rights sliding into an eternal canyon of ignorance. There, in the ladies bathroom, humiliation and self-doubt seared through every cell worse than any chemo cocktail ever could.

purpose. And our spare bedroom is now a nursery as we happily look forward to realizing our dream of a family through adoption.

**Editor's Note:** Michelle Miller is the founder and executive director of the Cancer Monument, Inc. She is an author, television and radio producer, and host of the "Monumental People Coping and Living With Cancer" radio show and "THRIVE," a weekly Dallas cable talk show about cancer. Visit [www.TheCancerMonument.org](http://www.TheCancerMonument.org) for more information. ■