That Day I was Beautiful

Nancy L. Conyers

Nobody would ever accuse me of being a hottie. I’ve never been one of those people who other people look at and say, “Woah,” who they look at more than once, *if* they even look at all. I’m the kind of person you have to get to know. Then I start looking better.

I’ve always been thick, always concerned about my weight. Even though I’ve worked out and been athletic most of my life, I’m just big.

There has never been a day in my life that I felt beautiful. Until my wedding day. When Libby and I stood at the beginning of the aisle and the Wedding March began to play, I turned to her and said, “It’s finally happening.” As we walked down the aisle together, for the first time in my life, I truly felt beautiful. In all the pictures and the videos from the wedding, we both look beautiful. It’s a testament to what professional hair, makeup and camera angles can do but it’s also a testament to how happy we were to finally be able to get legally married after being denied that right for 25 years, to how much we couldn’t stop smiling and laughing, to how much love we felt coming at us from everyone who was there, and how much our love for each shines through.

Those wedding videos got me through way too many lost and dark days when I had cancer and was cracked out on chemo, sitting in the motorized old lady lounge chair Libby got me because I couldn’t get comfortable, wrapped in the cashmere throw someone had given us for a wedding present in 90 degree heat, freezing because my hair had fallen out. I never realized how warm hair keeps you until I had none.

I’d sit in that lounger that I can’t bear to look at anymore, dozing off, waking up, pushing the button to change my position, dozing off, waking up, changing my position, not being able to stand the metallic smell of the chemo drugs oozing out of me, the drugs that were supposed to be saving me but felt like they were killing me, feeling nauseous, with searing heartburn, fingers and toes screaming because all my nails were slowly, painfully detaching and falling off. I’d put on the wedding videos and watch them over and over to remind myself what it was like to be happy, to have hair, to have energy, to look good, to not know there was a 6cm tumor in my right breast trying to kill me or that cancerous cells were chomping away at my cervix, that nine lymph nodes were cancerous and I was 6-8 months away from not being here anymore.

The day of my second chemo I refused to go. The first one had made me so sick I did not want to put myself through that again. I was crying and yelling at Libby, “I’m not going, it’s horrible, I can’t do it again, just let me die!” Libby’s half my size but she picked me up, put me in the car and told me, “Don’t ever say ‘let me die’ again.” I was too weak to fight her.

A few days later we were watching the wedding ceremony videos together and Libby told me she was glad we’d made the videos. She hadn’t originally wanted to do them, but I’d talked her into it. Chemo brain is a real thing so I don’t remember much from the time of chemo, but I do remember more than once while we were watching the wedding videos thinking *if I die at least Libby will have these and she can always remember me from that day. That day I was beautiful*.

Nancy L. Conyers’ stories and essays have been published in *Tiferet, Alluvium, The Citron Review, NuVoices, The Manifest-Station, Lunch Ticket* and *Role Reboot.* She contributed the last chapter to *Unconditional: A Guide to Loving and Supporting Your LGBTQ Child,* and her story “*Are You Married?” Is Not a Yes or No Question* was published in the anthology *Intimate Strangers: True Stories from Queer Asia.* She has an MFA from Antioch University in Los Angeles and is currently enrolled at Stanford University in the online certificate program in novel writing. She has lived in Santa Fe part-time for 10 years. Her website is: [www.nancylconyers.com](http://www.nancylconyers.com).