

Robin Roberts: Making My My Message”



Don't call Robin Roberts a cancer survivor. "I'm a thriver," proclaims the vivacious, 49-year-old co-anchor of ABC's "Good Morning America." More than two years after she was shocked by a breast cancer diagnosis, especially since she has no family history of the disease, Robin wants other people who have gone through cancer treatment to know how important it is to stop and smell the roses. "I take all my vacation time now," she says. "I never did that before my diagnosis—I'd just let it expire."

Once famous for "soldiering on"—she missed very few days of work during treatment—and working late, stretching herself beyond her limits, Robin is now taking a more laid-back approach. In addition to eating well and exercising—as she has always done—Robin is choosier about how she spends her time and energy. "I used to try to do everything and please everyone," she says. "I've accepted that I can't do that anymore. I feel good knowing that I don't have to. I discovered I need to say no more often," she adds, "and that I don't need to explain that no."

Finding a lump

Robin's breast cancer journey began in July 2007. That month, Robin interrupted a rare, two-week vacation to attend a memorial for movie critic Joel Siegel, her friend and colleague, who had succumbed to colon cancer earlier that month. The night of the service, Robin found a lump in her right breast. "I had driven to Connecticut to

“I’m Mess

After cancer, one of America’s best-loved TV personalities finds her ‘new normal’

resume my vacation. Exhausted, I fell asleep on the couch. I woke up much later and started changing into my pajamas. And then I stopped. I felt a lump in my right breast.”

On July 31, 2007, an ultrasound led to a biopsy that confirmed her worst fear: She had breast cancer. In her

memoir, *From the Heart: Eight Rules to Live By* (Hyperion, 2008), Robin admits that she was “frozen” from shock. Although her first impulse was to keep the news private, she soon decided to go public with her diagnosis on “GMA.”

“My mom said that by sharing my story, I would save other women from the pain and suffering I was going through,” explains Robin. “She told me to turn my mess into my message, and that’s what I did.”

Robin underwent a partial mastectomy, eight rounds of chemo, and six and a half weeks of daily radiation. She could not have coped with cancer, chemo, and wigs, she says, without her family and friends. Her mother, Lucimarian, and each of her three siblings took turns staying with her in New York while she recuperated from surgery. “It’s hard to put into words how much their love meant,” Robin says.

Faith and family

Robin has always relied on the love of those closest to her. As the youngest of four children growing up in

Pass Christian, La., Robin developed a deep-rooted commitment to faith and family. “They’re my rock,” she says simply.

Robin’s family supported her rise to national prominence, as she went from being a standout college basketball player at Southeastern Louisiana University to working as a sports commentator at ESPN before joining ABC in 2002. At ABC, she began as a reporter before quickly ascending to the “GMA” co-anchor chair in 2005.

These days, Robin is still passionate about her career. Her approach, though, is more relaxed. “I’m not as tense or stressed,” she says. When she’s tired or needs a break, she takes it. “If I’m slammed, I’ll go home and go to bed early instead of working late,” she adds. “I never would have done that before my diagnosis.”

She also makes it a priority to speak out about breast cancer awareness. This past October, for example, Robin traveled to Nashville to mark National Breast Cancer Awareness Month at the Grand Ole Opry. She served as a guest announcer on a special “Opry Goes Pink” performance along with Opry



Robin Roberts’ 8 Rules to Live By

Here are the strategies that have helped Robin throughout her life—and that she now wants to share with others:

1. Position yourself to take the shot.
2. Dream big, but focus small. “Dreams are vague and far away. Goals are tangible and achievable.”
3. If at first you don’t succeed, dive back in. “It isn’t always the smartest, most talented, prettiest, or most charismatic person who has the most success. Don’t let rejection hold you back from your achievements.”
4. Never play the race, gender, or any other card.
5. Venture outside your comfort zone. “To stop growing is to stop living.”
6. Focus on the solution, not the problem.
7. Keep faith, family, and friends close to your heart. “My faith, family, and friends are the foundation upon which everything else rests.”
8. “Make your mess your message.” It’s what Robin’s mother always said.

Cover Story

member and 2005 “American Idol” winner Carrie Underwood and a host of other celebrities.

A new normal

Robin has advice for other women undergoing breast cancer treatment: You can’t expect your life to go back to normal when the last drop of chemo falls. “You need to cut yourself some slack and give yourself time,” cautions Robin. “There’s a lot of attention on diagnosis and treatment, but no one ever talks about what life is like when your hair grows back. Life changes,” she says, “and people need to know that.”

Robin says she was lucky that the people in her life—including her “GMA” family, former co-anchor Diane Sawyer, former news anchor Chris Cuomo, and weather anchor Sam Champion—understood that she wasn’t “immediately back to normal just because treatment was over.”

Soon after finishing treatment, the team went on assignment on an anti-gravity plane. Robin, who was still bald and whose immune system was still compromised, was shivering in her seat. “Diane was as cold as me, yet she wrapped her blanket around me and said, ‘We’re going to get back home.’ She’s always looked out for me,” Robin shares.

One of Robin’s best memories during her recovery period occurred when Diane Sawyer swapped her “mothering gloves” for her “friend gloves.” “When we fussed at each other, I knew I was really healed,” says Robin. “I knew that if Diane was fussing at me and not walking on eggshells, I was really back.”

Appreciating life

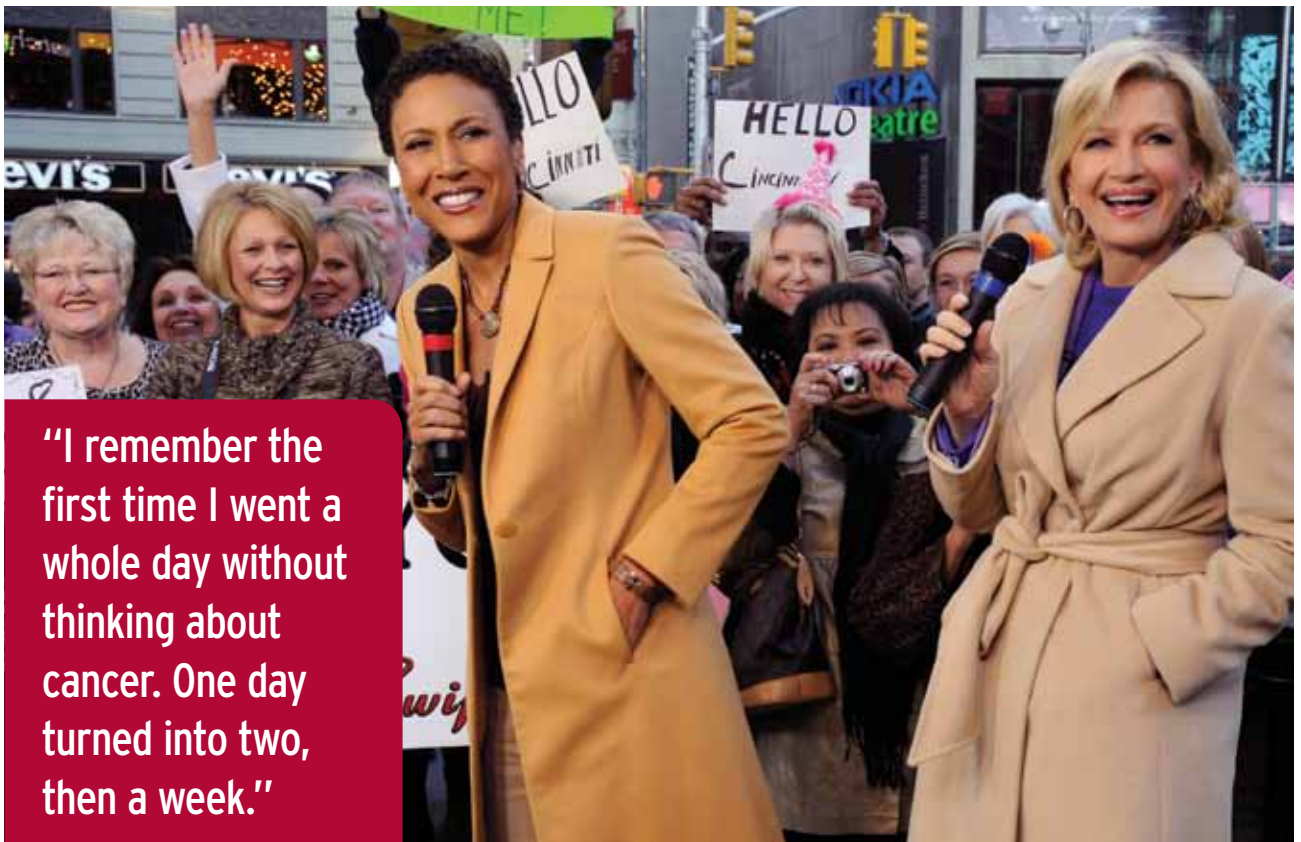
Despite the physical scars, follow-up screenings, and general disruption Robin has had to endure, she says her experience with breast cancer had a

positive effect. “In a lot of ways, my life changed for the better,” Robin notes. “I was racing through life, and cancer taught me to take a breath, relax, and enjoy. I appreciated life to begin with, but boy, do I appreciate it now!”

Robin continues to look to the future. “I won’t let cancer define me,” she says. The possibility of recurrence crosses her mind, but she doesn’t dwell on “what ifs.”

“I remember the first time I went a whole day without thinking about cancer,” Robin confides. “One day turned into two, then a week.” Now, she says that, other than going for routine six-month checkups, there are long periods when cancer doesn’t even enter her thoughts. “My mother says we all have something to overcome,” concludes Robin. “And my something was cancer. But I’m not looking over my shoulder. I’ve got my eye on new, exciting chapters of my life.”

—Gina Roberts-Grey



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