



BACK IN HER BIKINI

Sylvia Soo braves breast cancer at the age of 24.

I had finished university and had been teaching overseas in Korea for two years. One night I was taking off my bra and I felt a lump. I went to a doctor and I could see on the ultrasound that there was definitely something there. She said it looked benign, but told me to come back in two months to see if it had grown.

I didn't go back until six months later. They did another ultrasound, and the same doctor said, "Well, it's starting to look malignant — and it has grown." I finished my contract and flew home to Edmonton two months later. My friend had already booked me into a breast clinic, where I had a biopsy. Three days later, a doctor called me and told me I had cancer. After more tests, I was diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma. I have no family history of breast cancer; one doctor said it was probably just a bad-luck case.

I had been so excited to come back to Canada, but I had to put all my plans on hold while everyone around me was getting on with their lives. I tried hard to stay positive, but there certainly were moments of great sadness: I remember being out with a girlfriend once and looking at all of the couples

and kids and families and feeling like I didn't have control over my life, thinking, *I might never be able to have kids*. At 25, you don't think about death or that there are things that you won't be able to do or have. You know that other people will disappear, but you don't think you ever will. You're not used to your body not doing what you want it to. I felt half-dead.

The surgeon had given me the option of having either a lumpectomy or a mastectomy. The idea of losing my breast was terrible: I love going to the beach and wearing a bikini. >>

Since the mid-1990s, every age group of Canadian women has seen a decline in deaths caused by breast cancer.



But the thought of having a lumpectomy and not getting all of the cancer was worse. In the end, I had a modified radical mastectomy — the removal of my left breast — and a couple of months later, I went for three months of chemo.

There was never any question that I would get the reconstructive surgery done. I've been wearing a padded breast (a.k.a. my "fluffy") since my mastectomy (including under my bikini!) and I always know that it's there. I'm constantly checking to make sure it hasn't shifted or popped out. I'm incredibly excited about my upcoming surgery.

As for my future: I'm not opposed to dating, but it doesn't feel like a priority right now — and not just because I only have one boob and short hair! Instead, I want to concentrate on my career right now and make up for lost time. Shortly after my mastectomy, I went to a support group for women with breast cancer. I looked around the room and realized that the next-youngest woman was 45. It didn't feel like the right place for me, so I Googled until I found Rethink Breast Cancer. They have been an amazing support for me. I'm delighted to report that I'm going

The five-year survival rate for breast cancer is 87 percent.

Except for non-melanoma skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer among Canadian women. One in nine women is expected to develop breast cancer during her lifetime. One in 28 will die of it.

to be working with Rethink as the coordinator for the West Coast region; I would love to help spread awareness, and to help support other young women dealing with this disease. ■