

2004 seemed to start, end with talk about breasts

The year 2004 seemed to start and end with lots of talk about breasts.

It all began early last year with Janet Jackson's infamous Super Bowl "wardrobe malfunction." In less than a second, the world was exposed to a lot more skin and a lot more controversy than we ever knew was possible as part of a halftime show. We may never agree about whether the incident should be categorized as edgy entertainment or punky

publicity, but it was definitely something that got a lot of people talking about breasts.

Eleven months later, I was diagnosed with breast cancer and since then, I've never discussed that part of my body more often or with more people.

While no one seems to be replaying my mastectomy on the Internet like they did Janet's big breast moment, my diagnosis has made me painfully aware of the fact that many, many women are affected by the same life-threatening disease I am. It makes me wish I had a way to get on some half-time stage this year and flash my large, raw, smirky scar and really give people something to talk about.

Maybe it could be a public service notice that people would really listen to as I try to drive

home the message that this can happen to you.

It seems ironic to me that in this age of incredible technology and more information about breast cancer than ever before, it was my intimate knowledge of my own body that led me to learn more about the lump that wouldn't go away. The mastectomy showed nothing. The ultrasounds were inconclusive. My doctors were knowledgeable, attentive and completely competent. Gratefully, I was not ignored and my concerns were not dismissed. But in the end, it was my womanly instinct and sense of self that led to my persistence for more answers.

So women, perhaps it's time to rethink how often we pay attention to our own breasts.

Perhaps each time we have to look at some buxom bimbo on television, we should remind ourselves that in this case, size truly doesn't matter. It's all about knowing one's body and paying attention to the changes and signals it routinely gives you.

Perhaps instead of simply enduring all those commercials on late-night TV for "Girls Gone Wild" highlighting women who seem to enjoy baring it all for the camera, we should counterattack with "Breasts Gone Wild" and show the ugliness that can happen when disease takes over.

Perhaps it's time for a new breast cancer campaign. Instead of quietly wearing the pink ribbons and participating in awareness walks, maybe we need to

start flashing our scars to get attention. Perhaps the millions of us who are either in the middle of their cancer fight or have survived it need to gather together at Mardi Gras to flash our flesh in the same spirit of those enthusiastically chasty girls who routinely trade their privacy for beads.

It seems that exposure to breasts is not a problem in our society. Women routinely spend millions to make their chests bigger while ad agencies never seem to tire of using them to promote a variety of products. There appears to be a lot of evidence proving the selling power and monetary value of breasts. Therefore, it seems that there should be a way to use the very

part of the body that seems to demand the most media attention to get the health care we need. Where is the disconnection between our country's obsession with breasts and our high rates of breast cancer?

The good news for folks around here is that I don't plan to start flashing anyone any time soon. I'll start my chemo this week, focus on getting better, and then perhaps try to change the world with my unconventional women's health campaign. In the meantime, perhaps the best new year's resolution any woman can make is to spend at least as much time analyzing her own breasts as she is forced to look at those of so many others.

Amy Meyer, a Muscatine teacher, foster mom and free-lance writer, welcomes your

PERSPECTIVE



The Good News

Amy Meyer