

# Colon Cancer? Me?

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By Connie Potts

This is such a serious word of warning, a heartfelt true story that brings to bear just how very close this killer stalks each and every one of us. Connie Potts flirted with this quiet assassin and basically got really, really lucky. It missed her “by that much”. Today, I am celebrating her courage in coming forth with her story. And just think, she wasn’t going to have a colonoscopy because someone would see her bottom, now the whole world knows she has one! Thank you, Connie; you may have saved a life. Arlene

**There is nothing wrong with procrastination in certain circumstances. In fact, if you are buying a car or a computer it usually works out to your advantage. But, when it comes to your health, I found out the hard way that your body is a little less predictable and a lot less forgiving. As a direct result of my “superb” ability for making up excuses and using stalling tactics, I found myself facing a situation that was totally preventable, had I scheduled that colonoscopy at age 50.**

**Here are my excuses for postponing the test. See if yours measure up.**

- **I’ve had a couple of surgeries the past few years and I’m just not ready.**
- **It will be expensive.**
- **I don’t know how I’m going to work that into my schedule.**
- **No one in my family has had colon cancer.**
- **My son was seriously ill and hospitalized for three months.**
- **My father had just died of cancer.**
- **Some people have been known to have complications.**
- **Embarrassing – Everyone will see my butt!**

**Here is what convinced me to have the colonoscopy.**

- **About two years ago Arlene Evans-DeBeverly, who works in gynecology, asked if I’d had a colonoscopy yet. I said no and she told me I really needed to have one.**
- **A few months later my P.A., Debra Brockel, asked if I’d had a colonoscopy. Again I said no, but I’d been thinking about it. (Only because Arlene had mentioned it and they had been running those colon cancer commercials on T.V.)**
- **My good friend Nancy paid us a visit at Christmas. She brought some green tea. Some people think it helps ward off cancer. She had been battling colon cancer for more than a year. She asked me if I’d had a colonoscopy yet.**
- **The next summer I saw Arlene and she asked, “Have you had a colonoscopy yet?” I told her, “No, but I was thinking about it.” (I hoped she didn’t**

remember asking me last year.) She said, “I have an appointment myself to have the procedure done next week. Would you like to have my appointment?” (*I’m thinking to myself – What? Is she serious? Then I realized she wasn’t joking.*) She asked me, “Why don’t you want to have this done?” I told her, “Well, I’ve heard of some people who have had bad experiences with it.” She said, “Go to a good surgeon who does ‘the procedure’ a lot”. Then she told me a story about how recently she and some friends went out and there was one person kind of isolated from everyone else. As she got nearer she realized why this person was alone. They had an odor about them. She realized they must have an “ostomy bag”. O.K., I’ll have to admit, she got my attention with that. Then she basically told me she didn’t want me to come back next year for my check-up unless I had done “the procedure!” I thought about making an appointment right away, but put it off. I would wait; after all, I did have a year until my next appointment with her.

- I saw Debra that fall and she brought up the subject again. She told me about a friend of hers who put the test off for several years and then, did indeed, end up having colon cancer. I sat there and thought to myself, “*It’s a conspiracy; they are all ganging up on me – practically insisting on a colonoscopy. I feel like I’m between a rock and a hard spot.*” I told Debra, “I guess I had better do it, but if I’m going to do it, my husband will need have it done also because he’s a couple of years older than me.” (Misery does love company!)

I remember being pretty groggy after the colonoscopy and opening my eyes, then seeing my husband. He held my hand right away, but I could tell something wasn’t right. It was his “guilty look”. Then I knew he didn’t want to tell me something. He said Dr. Durett had found some polyps and removed them, but there was a larger one that would require some additional surgery. I still didn’t “get” it. Maybe it was the anesthesia. It wasn’t until Dr. Durett came in later and explained that the larger one was very large. He had some pictures that, quite frankly, looked horrible. I found it hard to believe that growth was inside me and I had no symptoms. He believed the growth had probably started about 5 years ago. He said he thought I had about a 50/50 chance of it being cancer. (*What! I hadn’t even considered anything might be wrong with me – much less that I could have cancer!*) He said they had made an appointment for me to come and discuss the pathology results and surgery. He then asked what made me decide to have the colonoscopy and I told him, my friend Nancy who has colon cancer had mentioned it a few times, my P.A., Debra, and my gynecologist, Arlene. He said, “Regardless of the pathology results, you need to be sure and thank them because they likely saved your life.”

It was difficult to make it through the next few days. Waking up thinking about it, going to sleep thinking about it. I just wanted it out – tomorrow. I knew it was my own fault – I could have prevented it if I’d had the test when I was 50. Looking back on it, they practically had to hit me over the head and drag me in to have the colonoscopy. But, I guess that’s why they say hindsight is 20/20. Really, how could I have been so incredibly stupid?

Just a few days later at school, I received a phone call from Dr. Durett. He wanted to tell me the pathology report was back and there were no signs of cancer. Relief washed over me like it had been poured from a bucket. I was drenched in it from head to toe. He sounded as happy about it as I was. How could I be so extremely lucky?

My surgery was performed Wednesday, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010, at Clara Barton Hospital in Hoisington, Kansas. Dr. Durett, being assisted by Dr. Arnold, performed a right hemicolectomy, laproscopically. The tumor measured 9 centimeters and there was a smaller one on the appendix. When you have a right hemicolectomy, it includes removing the appendix too, since it's attached. It's kind of a two for the price of one operation. Since I'm a bargain hunter, that did make me feel a little better.

Normally, I'm a bit reserved, but having this close encounter has made me want to inquire of people and ask if they've had their colonoscopy, yet. Obviously it wouldn't be proper to walk up to a stranger on the street and ask. So, when Arlene asked if I would write an article for her web site about my experience, I felt I should do it even though writing is not my 'forte.'

I feel deeply indebted to the people who played a part in the great conspiracy against me. Thank you to my friend Nancy, my P.A., Debra Brockel, and my gynecologist, Arlene Evans-DeBeverly, PA-C. I'm also thankful we have such adept surgeons as Dr. Durett and Dr. Arnold available in rural Kansas, who are capable of performing this type of surgery in a small hospital setting. Be proactive when it comes to your health. Don't be afraid to ask questions and discuss issues and fears with your doctor. Some of us just need a little more guidance than others.

Some good internet sites for more information on colonoscopy or other health issues are:

<http://www.webmd.com>

<http://www.wikipedia.org>

(Connie's growth was a very serious and large pre-cancer, a high grade dysplastic tumor. She assures me that she will have her next colonoscopy right on time!)