

*We Don't Dance Alone*  
Patricia McKenna

**EXCERPT**

Mom had talked to us about her cancer, but she never talked to us about dying. It was 1995, Mom was 54 years old, and she had fought the disease for eight years. In 1987, she had a mastectomy and tests showed that the cancer hadn't spread. We were all relieved that her physician had concluded that radiation and chemotherapy weren't necessary. But in 1993, Mom began having back problems. She saw a chiropractor, went to physical therapy, and even took a leave of absence at work because of the pain before anyone diagnosed the problem: the cancer had returned, this time metastasized to the bones.

Mom never told us that her disease was terminal. My sister and I found out during a private appointment with her new oncologist (it was years before the strict confidentiality laws had been enacted, and this doctor was very receptive to talking to patients' families, even going so far to say that he "treats the family as well as the patient").

"At this stage, 50 percent will live less than a year, and the other 50 percent may live a little more than a year," the doctor advised.

My sister and I listened quietly and then, softly, nervously, I asked, "Does she know this?"

"Yes," he solemnly replied. "It was the first question she asked me."