

Now I Understand
Barbara Terrell

EXCERPT

I get it. No, I *really* get it. It took almost three years and a bout of breast cancer, but I now understand my mother-in-law, Julie.

I always thought that my husband, Eric, had married the exact opposite of his mother. Julie raised two children and never sat still. Her days were filled with charitable committee meetings, church activities, and Jazzercise; my days were filled with work meetings, church on Saturday nights and dog walks. Julie kept her petite figure by eating nothing but fruits and vegetables and low-fat foods; I believe eating pizza every day covers all the food groups. She raised her kids to eat healthy and stay active; I feed her son Lucky Charms for breakfast. She dressed like she could grace the cover of a fashion magazine, accessorizing with imaginative southwestern jewelry or scarves; I live in blue jeans and turtlenecks and have been known to show up at work with no earrings and two different colored socks. Yup, we were as different as night and day.

Eric and I had been married for about a year and had just spent the holidays with Julie and Bob, Eric's dad. Julie was vibrant and healthy, but had a touch of laryngitis, which she laughed off as being due to too much talking. She'd been hoarse for a month, and after a day of skiing decided she should probably go to the doctor. Then came her phone call. I instantly knew something was wrong; when I answered the phone there was no small talk, Julie wanted to talk to Eric right away. The doctor had taken a chest X-ray and made a grim discovery. She had lung cancer. Eric held the phone to his chest and silently cried.