

# A NEW DAY DAWNS IN THE **HEARTLAND**

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE THE WAGON TRAIN BROKE DOWN IN **OKLAHOMA CITY** »

**ALSO:** TRAINING FOR THE **NYC MARATHON** / LOVING LITTLE **LUXEMBOURG** / WE AIN'T AFRAID OF NO **GHOST**

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› OCTOBER 2014

# AMERICAN AIRWAYS

AMERICAN AIRLINES + AMERICAN EAGLE



**HEIDI KLUM**  
is a busy career woman and happy mother who shows no signs of slowing down

## *Project Talent*



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MONTHLY

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**HOW TO HELP:** For more information on breast-cancer initiatives and ways you can help, please see "Perspective" on page 8, "Think Pink" on page 34, "Superwoman" on page 64 and "Final Approach" on page 89.

# A Mother's Love

**"HELLO, MY NAME IS KIMBERLY** and I am BRCA2 Positive. I have known I am BRCA2 for five years now."

Heads around the room nod in agreement as if they understand. That's because they do. They are either BRCA2+ or they know someone who is.

This is not an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, but it sometimes feels as if it could be. You are entering a room with a bunch of strangers who will soon become your friends, your confidants, your support system. You are bearing all. You are crying. You are laughing. You are hearing each person's story. Some are similar to yours, while others are better. And others are worse.

The group I belong to and meet with once a month is FORCE: Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered ([www.facingourrisk.org](http://www.facingourrisk.org)). It is a support group for women, men and families of carriers of BRCA1 and 2, which is a genetic mutation that drastically increases your risk for breast and ovarian cancer. I first heard about this group from my breast oncologist, Dr. Beth Anglin, whom I had been seeing for regular exams and discussions on next steps since my genetic-testing results. "A support group for people who don't have anything," I thought to myself. "That is weird."

After a few meetings — and after fully considering my options regarding my BRCA2+ status — I finally got it. No one can possibly understand the decision you are about to make except people

faced with that same decision. People support you and tell you that you're brave for your decision, but they don't get the anxiety associated with knowing you have a choice to someday hear or not hear the word *cancer*. So I know it isn't a sure bet that I will never get breast cancer or some other form of cancer, but I definitely want a seat when the music stops.

Finally, after five years of fear and uncertainty, I scheduled my prophylactic double mastectomy with reconstruction and my oophorectomy (ovary removal surgery). At first, I was really excited, which I know sounds strange. But I am not one to commit to something and then not follow through. So I guess a sense of relief would be a better description of how I felt. I had made my decision and was sticking to it. Call me a control freak and I won't care because I finally feel in control of my health.

Of course, as the first surgery neared, I started to get a little nervous — not about what I would look or feel like, but how to tell my kids without frightening them. The best ideas came from members of my support group. They advised me to let the kids know I am not sick, to let them know that their daily routines won't change and not to explain more than they ask.

The experts say to tell your children when it is age appropriate for the oldest child in the house. That would be our 8-year-old, so one week prior to surgery, my husband Adam and I spent some time with our youngest, who is 5, and then time with our oldest. Both are girls, which you know if you read Adam's column regularly. The talk with our youngest went great. The only question she had was if I was going to be bringing a baby home from the hospital. That was most definitely a "no." I thought, "This is going great so far!" Then we sat down with our

oldest. She did not ask many questions, but the ones she did ask were direct and surprising.

She asked if I was sick. "No," I said. "I am actually doing this so I can stay healthy for a very long time."

She asked where on my body I was having surgery. "On my chest." (Why go into the details of the ovaries? At this point, I don't want to have an added where-do-babies-come-from conversation. This was hard enough.)

She never met her grandmother, who passed away from ovarian cancer at age 55 after a six-year struggle, so this last question was even harder. Our 8-year-old asked if she'll have to have the same surgery that I am having so that she "won't die like Grandma Donna."

Wow. I was not ready for that one. "Oh, honey, that is not something you need to worry about right now," I told her. Probably not the greatest answer but the only one I could think of quickly.

The fact is that our girls will someday also choose whether to get genetic testing for the gene mutation that my mother carried and that I carry. People with an inherited gene change have a 50 percent chance of passing the mutation to each of their children. It makes me sad that they will have to come to that realization someday, but on the flip side, it makes me happy that they have a choice, like I do. I never once felt angry at my mother for passing on a bum gene. The first thought that went through my head when I scheduled my surgery and hung up that phone was: "I am so lucky I have the choice to make sure I get to meet my grandchildren someday."

My mom never got to meet hers, and I know she would have done anything in the world to live long enough to meet them. That's exactly what I've chosen to do.

*Kimberly Ferrante-Pitluk*

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