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October 8, 2011

This is a copy of the speech Ellen Perez gave at the Burning River Fall Lacrosse Fundraiser for Breast Cancer Research. Her heartwarming story really touched everyone in attendance. We cannot thank her enough for taking the time to talk at the event and sharing with us her battle against breast cancer.

"Five years ago – I had to answer 2 of the most difficult questions that I never imagined that I would have to answer. Days before Thanksgiving – I had to tell my children I had found a golf-ball size tumor in my breast that turned out to be cancer. Bobby – my 5th grader at the time- asked me if I was going to die. Katie – my 6th grader asked me if she was going to get breast cancer. Painfully - I had to say that I didn't know the answer to either of the questions but I was going to do everything possible to live and help find a cure..... There is a darkness that a family endures when cancer crashes into a home....deeper than one would ever expect.

At age 37, I was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer. Scientists still really can't figure out this aggressive type as a vast majority of breast cancer is hormone driven. To make my journey even more stressful – I didn't meet another living triple negative breast cancer survivor until I was 4 months into my treatment – at that point I bald, as well as mentally and physically worn-down. At one of my examinations when they were checking to see if I had ovarian cancer .my mom thought I was cold when in fact – I literally was trembling with fear. Continued research is vital for women afflicted with my and all types of breast cancer.

Something that has also happened in the 5-years since my diagnosis is that I met many young breast cancer survivors along the way. In fact, I helped create a support group called "The Young and The Breastless". Many of my Young and Breastless friends are thriving – running marathons, working, doing the 3-day walk and balancing life again. However, I'd like to give a shout out to 3 of my friends that have had to return to chemo due to metastatic breast cancer. Again – their journey hasn't ended and it has become a magnified nightmare.

I have always had a problem with the saying that having cancer was a gift. Cancer is not a gift that I would wish on anyone. Instead I'd like to say that cancer was a catalyst. It changed my view on life – to seize the here and now – and not put anything off because one never knows. Now – I treasure being with my family. Katie and Bobby wave to me prior and during sporting events....and yes – they are in high school. I see the true love in their eyes and the gratefulness that I

am there – it is in earnest. After being diagnosed – I have learned never to assume anything and that life truly is a gift. Cancer has been a catalyst to help me enjoy each day, to love deeper and make daily connections with people that cross my path.

The Spielman family understood that as Chris left the NFL to spend time and support his young wife, Stephanie, and family through their breast cancer journey. They had some years together....however, not enough. She died too young. The Spielman children are missing their mother's loving touch and presence.

I want to read my journal entry at the end of chemo – I still had 26 rounds of radiation –

- i have learned what fear is.
- i have learned that kind words, kind gestures, and kind deeds might last only an instant but will remain in my heart forever.
- i've learned that stares really hurt and prayers really help.
- i've learned that one's marriage can be strengthened in a time like this.
- i've learned to savor my children –
- i've learned that chemo takes away the hair, hurts like hell but I am willing to do anything.
- i've learned that the handicap parking spaces are very necessary to those that need it.
- i've learned not to complain about bad hair days.
- i've learned not to worry about the dandelions in the yard.
- i've learned that human kindness and miracles are out there. there are more miracle then our hurried lives allow us to truly see. slow down - notice them.
- i've learned what it feels like to be loved by so many

Standing here on a lacrosse field speaking as a survivor is very special. While I was in the thick of my treatments, Bobby was asked by a friend to sign-up for lacrosse. To be honest – I had never heard of lacrosse –he was a hockey player.. I really just needed him out of the house while I was in bed....I signed him up... lacrosse families drove him to all the practices and many games. I remember sitting in the car wrapped in blankets during the games that I could make.

But look at us all today..... Lacrosse was a new world that opened up to us during my family's darkest hours. Again – breast cancer was a catalyst for my son to try something new – opening up this special world to us. Lacrosse helped us with the healing process.

It is people like you here today that make a difference for survivors and their family taking a journey on the cancer rollercoaster. I would ask players and fans that if you know a family struggling with cancer to reach out to them – make them a meal, send a card, drive them to lacrosse practice – help them with the long haul. Players - maybe one day you'll be a coach. Make a difference in a child's life that has a parent struggling with cancer like the coaches did in my son's life.

Finally - the dedication through these funds raised will help support vital research to target treatments that will help us one day find a much needed cure for breast cancer. As a survivor I can't thank you enough....”