

# Like Mother, Like Daughter

By Nancy Fawson

WHENEVER my five-year-old daughter and I are together someone inevitably remarks on how similar we look.

"She could be your twin!" they gush, smiling.

People have been saying this about us since she was born and since that day I have been quick to point out our differences. Sidney's hair is lighter and less curly than mine, her complexion fairer, more like her father's. But this morning, as I watch her practicing her ballet steps through the foggy shower door, it is undeniable that she's the spitting image of me and my heart sinks into my stomach.

It's not that I don't want to look like her. Sidney is tall for her age with long and graceful legs, beautiful wavy auburn hair, large brown eyes and the velvety, perfect skin of youth. She is only five and already quite beautiful.



It's not that I don't want her to be like me either. I consider myself to be a reasonably intelligent and accomplished person. I have a wonderful family and a great group of friends. My fear is that because she looks like me, and even sounds like I did when I was a kid, she will be like me on a molecular level. When I was six years old my mother died of breast cancer despite having a bilateral mastectomy (along with other, equally terrible cancer-fighting treatments) and now, thirty-five years later, I am faced with a similar diagnosis and treatment plan.

Having your breasts removed because of disease has always seemed so barbaric; an affront, not just to your body, but to the core of your femininity. My entire life I have feared and dreaded cancer. It hasn't always been at the forefront of my thoughts but its threat has always been with me; cowardly hiding in the deep recesses of my mind. Until now. When I got the call from my doctor after a recent mammogram I was not surprised. "It's here," I thought. I am lucky; the doctor found it early and my prognosis is good, but just like my mother I will lose both breasts.

I am consumed by worry. I worry about all of the usual things that a person in my position would: my children, my husband, the housework. Then, of course, I think about how my body will be forever changed after the mastectomies. What will my new breasts look and feel like? What will my husband think of my scarred and altered body. Of course I know that he will love me no matter what, but still... Most of all, I worry about Sidney and her path.

When I was a kid people often spoke about how far medicine will have come by the time I grow up; how I will not have to face the same choices my mother did if I ever got cancer because "They" will have found a cure for it by then. I look down at my breasts in the shower and think about the fact that, over three decades later, I am going to have the same barbaric procedure done to me as she did. "They" still have not found a better way to deal with this type of cancer and at this moment it is nearly impossible for me to think about Sidney and not fear that "They" still may not have found a better way to deal with this dreadful disease three decades from now.

I know that I am not my mother and, though we may look alike, my daughter is not me. I know this and I force myself to remember that truth. I cling desperately to the fact that just because Sidney may look like a carbon copy of me, on a molecular level, we are not the same. She has her own unique combination of DNA; part from me and part from her father. Our matching freckles don't necessarily mean that we have the same roadmap in life. I take a deep breath and try to let go of the anxiety, fear and guilt that I feel for possibly passing along this poison to my daughter. For better or worse, she will have her own struggles and I try to take solace in that.

I continue to watch Sidney through the shower door as she leaps confidently into the air making up dance steps as she goes along. She loses her balance and falls and when I step out of the shower to help her up, she looks at me and smiles a completely unselfconscious and happy smile, which looks just like mine when I was her age.



**Nancy Fawson** is a former attorney turned freelance writer. She lives in Belvedere, CA with her husband, son Leo (7) and daughter Sidney (5). She is cancer-free and healthy post-surgery and urges all women to be proactive in their own healthcare, do self breast exams and consider donating to [www.zerobreastcancer.org](http://www.zerobreastcancer.org) or their favorite breast cancer charity this month in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. You can read more of Nancy's work on her blog, [www.nycgirlbythebay.com](http://www.nycgirlbythebay.com).