



WHEN ROLES Reverse

Every once in a while, a few simple words can completely change our lives.

"I do" comes to mind. "We're moving" has the same powerful effect. "You're hired." "You're fired." "It's a boy." "It's a girl." Small phrases can instantly alter the course of our path in big ways.

Fifteen months ago, I discovered a new one. "Positive for cancer," the radiologist spoke all too audibly on the other end of my cell phone as I wilted onto a cold chair in the teachers' lounge at school. Despite the spinning walls and my suddenly shaking hands, I scribbled a few things on a spare napkin ... something about breast cancer statistics and the name of an esteemed oncologist in our area. Once again, life had changed.

Looking back now, I'm thankful for the unexpected benefits a tough situation

can bring. Somehow major trials have an odd way of simplifying our lives. Things that truly matter come rapidly into focus. Priorities are unmistakably clear. Love is the goal.

When someone close is hurting, we reach out in love. When we see pain in another's life, we put 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 into action. We're patient. We're kind. We're not boastful or prideful. There is no time for anger, no room for self-seeking. We forget wrongs of the past. We rush to our loved one's side, protecting, trusting, hoping, and persevering.

This kind of love naturally surges in the midst of difficult circumstances. It's what kept me going through three surgeries, multiple complications, and more than a few dark days of depression. Receiving this love from my husband, family, and friends

was a gift from God, but perhaps most valuable to me as a mom was receiving it from my kids. Our roles were reversed in the most spectacular way.

For years I sat by my children's bedsides through tummy aches and sore throats. Now they sat by mine. Daily I cared for their bumps and bruises. Now they were caring for mine. For two decades I held their hands when they were sad or scared, hurt or heartbroken. Now they held mine. Consistently I have prayed for their fears and frailties. Now they prayed for mine.

This surprising role reversal allowed me to see the love of Christ modeled in my kids, the love I desperately hope they've seen growing up in our home. My cancer showed me God's mercy and love through my children.

by Kathryn O'Brien