

## ALL THERE REALLY IS

### Scene 1

Hey, come on in. But first, come over here and look at my flowers. Aren't they gorgeous this year?

You just settle over there and look at these pictures, they've just come back, and I'm gonna do some work in the garden while I tell you my story. I really like having someone around when I'm gardening.

You know I don't believe in putting things off. Though by the look of this flowerbed you'd think I did. But what I mean to say is that I think we should feel free to talk about these things, these kinds of difficult things like colorectal cancer.

### Scene 2

I'm fussy about my health, it's the way I was raised. My mother was conscious about the body and looking after it. So I try my best to do just that.

Oh look at that picture, there's me weeding! I guess maybe I didn't put it off after all!

But you know, when I think, I can almost hear myself telling the surgeon of how I went to the bathroom and then noticed a tiny speck of blood. So small.

### Scene 3

I phoned my doctor and she said, "Come on in, I want to see you." And it's not like I was in pain or anything, or I hadn't lost weight. But taking notice of that tiny speck of blood was key to my being here today.

My doctor made an appointment with a specialist. He examined me and said I needed a colonoscopy, and that I would also need surgery.

### Scene 4

He said I could choose between two hospitals, depending on where the surgeon I saw had privileges. I didn't really understand what he was saying and I asked, "Is it cancer?" and he said, "Why do you think I'm sending you to the surgeon?" But I didn't know why.

And that was like someone hit me over the head. It hurt and then I felt numb. That was my introduction to colorectal cancer. That was very, very hard for me.

Not long after I had my appointment with the surgeon; I wasn't looking forward to it. But it turned out this guy was so warm, he had a human touch.

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### Scene 5

The word cancer is pretty horrible for anyone to face, but the way the doctor told me made it bearable. He sat beside me and he took my hand in his. It was the first time we'd ever met and he had to sit beside me, and say, "It's cancer." I don't know how he does it.

His touch made all the difference in the world. He told me I was strong ,too. I asked him how he might know that on our first meeting. He just said, "Give me a bit of credit, I've been meeting people for a long time." I trusted him.

### Scene 6

I think the strength that he saw helped me through the treatment. I had radiation first, and finished that on Christmas Eve, then surgery in February, and I think I ended chemotherapy in October.

Oh look, this picture, I love it. I'm by the lake—it's so peaceful. There I am all alone, the horizon behind me. And, you know, even going through all of this, all of these tests, some part of me still didn't think I had cancer.

### Scene 7

It took me a while to accept it. I knew I had it, but it was like the knowledge just stayed in my head. There are days when it still feels unreal.

I went through the war, I've had tough times, there's been anxiety in my life, all kinds of things. But this is different, it's so personal.

### Scene 8

This picture is really important for me to show you. It's also one of the more difficult ones. So, here I am over the toilet, dealing with my ostomy.

The surgeon thought he could save my bowel functions, but it turned out the tumor was too big. Then we thought I could have a temporary colostomy. But once he got in there and saw everything he told me straight up that because of the way the cancer was situated he wouldn't be able to reverse it. It was something I'd have to live with. And that's what I'm doing.

### Scene 9

I'm out in my garden every day. Sitting or weeding. Some friends recently came over for tea and we sat out here. I'm fortunate to have friends like you, like them, who are good listeners. I have to talk about it. And it's not that I want answers, I just want to tell the story. I need to talk about it.

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### Scene 10

I had to weather a lot of complications. I kept getting infections. Every time one would clear up, another would occur. And at that time I didn't cry. I think I was a little low, but I thought I was basically OK. And I think it was the third infection.

I was on antibiotics for seven weeks. And then I got a bladder infection. During that time I really got down. You know, you go over one hurdle and somebody hits you over the head again and you get something else. It took me a while to realize just how down I was.

### Scene 11

Deep down I still have moments when I think I can't handle it.

And I think ... my mother never thought that I would be a strong person. Yet, I've become one. I'm becoming one.

At that point when I was really down, my doctor gave me antidepressants, plus she gave me a mild sleeping pill, and she said, "It's not habit-forming, but you need your sleep, that's when you heal." So I had to listen to her. And let me think, how many of those pills did I take? Not many. I just didn't want to.

### Scene 12

My husband thought I was pretty far down, too. I thought I could ... I really wanted to fight it on my own. It wasn't until I could have a really good cry that I started feeling stronger though. The whole thing just gave me a feeling I wasn't good for anything anymore.

Nothing to look forward to, always thinking, "what's coming next?" And now I know these kinds of feelings are normal when you're adjusting to this new kind of life, this kind of life with cancer. But for me it was a change, it wasn't like me or who I had been.

### Scene 13

But once I made it through the first year, I felt a lot less scared. My doctors told me that they're happy and everything's clear.

Now, I've put it behind me. A few days ago I was lying in bed thinking about the good things ahead.

Look over there; it's a shame really, all the trees are dying here. Not a bud on that one this year and we already took one down. We had to ... . But, anyway, I want to talk about the family.

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**Scene 14**

It was an adjustment and a worry for them, for the whole family. Our son was quite shaken, and he talked with his children.

We see his kids a lot, they have sleepovers maybe once a week, and at first I wasn't sure about the whole thing. I mean, me with cancer and not sure about how these little ones understood it.

**Scene 15**

But it's a good thing I'm not shy, 'cause there are times when I have a lot of gas in this bag and, well, sometimes you can hear it. It always seems to happen when the youngest stands beside me, and the first time her eyes got bigger and bigger, and she looked at me, she didn't want to say anything. So I said, "Can you hear that commotion? That's me."

And she fell down laughing! It's something we can have a giggle about! It's a strange world. You forget the human and it's like there's no room for it. But really, that's all there is.