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Greenwich Sentinel



My Breast Cancer Journey: From Diagnosis to Healing Part 1

By Julia Chiappetta

When I found a lump during my monthly self-exam at the age of 44, I knew something was different. It felt small and hard, like a mosquito bite, but it was March and I lived in Greenwich. It also had a cold, slippery feel, like a small pellet. I had felt nothing quite like it before. My gut told me, "This is not good."

I went to see my doctor the next day. She agreed, it was different, and she sent me for a mammogram at the hospital. It came back negative, as did the one I'd had three months earlier as part of my annual physical. When the surgeon gave me the good news, I asked about a biopsy anyway. He brushed me off, saying I was fine, come back in six months. A strange ringing in my head told me to persist. In six months I could be really sick; somehow I knew I needed a biopsy that day. With tears in my eyes, I pleaded with him to schedule one.

The doctor gave me a hard time, insisting that I was fine. "I really believe something's terribly wrong," I said. Finally he relented, and I was back at the hospital the next morning for my outpatient biopsy.

That was a Saturday; I will never forget it. The sun was

shining and I was standing in my living room, looking out my large glass sliders to the trees, when the phone rang. It was the surgeon. He said, "I am sorry, I learned a very important lesson yesterday. I need to listen to my patients more diligently." Then he dropped the bomb: "You have stage IIB infiltrating ductal carcinoma, a very aggressive, fast growing cancer. You need to do something immediately."

I never thought I'd get cancer. I ran six miles a day. I was an athlete, I ran races, did in-line skating and ate what I thought was a healthy Mediterranean diet. I took care of myself, even while working 80 hours a week and traveling the globe as a successful meeting planner. I thought I was in perfect shape.

But now everything stopped. I thought I was going to die. And when I met with an oncologist, he told me that I would die—if I didn't have a double mastectomy followed by radiation or chemotherapy and a year of Tamoxifen. But I'd watched five people close to me die from what I believed was an overuse of radiation and chemotherapy. I saw them suffer slow, painful deaths—not from the cancer, but from the treatment. Was there another way?

When I got home I prayed. I said, "God, I don't know what to do. You're going to have to help me." The next day, my cousin called to recommend a

top breast cancer doctor at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. My sister called to say she was sending a nutritional video series she thought would help me. My prayers were being answered rapidly, and it gave me peace and confidence.

I decided that before I accepted—or rejected—any medical treatment, I would do my own research. With no time to lose, and with the guidance of a scientist friend, I pored over medical journals and abstracts, watched videos, and surfed the Web to learn everything I could about my condition and how it could be treated.

One critical thing I learned: 80 percent of cancers are environmental, caused by the foods we eat, the products we use, and the air we breathe. So my first move was to chuck everything in my house that contained pesticides, hormones, antibiotics and toxins like lead, parabens, and sulfates that could have contributed to my cancer. I tossed out all my food, my makeup, my shampoos, cleaning products, and my microwave. I threw it all away and started afresh, using only organic products.

I made over my diet, too, trading my beloved bread, cheese, pasta, and chicken for an all-organic, raw vegan menu. I started juicing—carrots, beets, kale, spinach, bok choy

and celery—and doing shots of wheat grass three times a day (just one ounce provides the nutrients, antioxidants, enzymes, and superfoods of 2.5 pounds of organic green vegetables). Within two weeks, I felt amazing. Everything was stronger—my hair, my skin, my nails. I could feel my body healing. I felt so much better that I couldn't even believe I had cancer.

By the time I saw the Houston oncologist my cousin had recommended two months had passed, and all my tumor markers and a lot of my blood work showed levels in the normal range. This doctor recommended a lumpectomy, which removes just the tumor and a margin of tissue surrounding it, and a sentinel node biopsy, which identifies the lymph nodes involved. This sounded right to me. He also recommended following up with radiation and Tamoxifen, a drug used to treat breast cancers by blocking the female hormone estrogen. But at this point I was sold on a more natural approach. I had read in many abstracts that Tamoxifen is banned in other countries due to risks of secondary cancers.

I flew home two days after the lumpectomy and continued my new diet and lifestyle regimen, all while constantly seeking the advice of my team of experts, consisting of an

herbalist, a nutritionist, a doctor, a naturopath and an oncologist. My oncologist was very open to my approach and said at the time that about 15 percent of his patient population had implemented an alternative approach similar to mine.

Was it difficult? It was the most difficult thing I've ever done in my life. Was I scared? Absolutely. I had clients and friends and colleagues and doctors all saying, "Are you crazy?" The standard treatment for cancer is surgery, chemo, radiation and drugs; if you deviate from that course, people may go so far as the accuse you of being stubborn or reckless. Or crazy.

But my months of careful research, combined with my faith in God, set me at peace with my decision. I knew this was the right path for me. I remember saying to my parents, who totally backed my decision, that if this was the way I was going to die I wanted to die living life to the fullest and feeling as good as possible.

Next week: Healing the cancer using alternative protocols.

Julia Chiappetta is the author of "Breast Cancer: The Notebook" (Gemini Media, 2006) and is also the owner of Julia Chiappetta Consulting. She lives in Cos Cob.

My Breast Cancer Journey: A Protocol for Healing Naturally Part 2



By Julia Chiappetta

Last week I told of my breast cancer diagnosis at the age of 44 and of my decision to reject a recommended double mastectomy, chemotherapy and Tamoxifen in favor of a lumpectomy and a natural/alternative protocol.

It was a very difficult choice, but through prayer and intensive research, I came to believe it

was the right one for me. I knew that many others would have chosen to do otherwise. I also knew that both of my parents had beaten cancer without radiation or chemotherapy. My mother had uterine cancer and a hysterectomy at age 30, after her third baby. When the doctor suggested she get chemo, she said, "I don't have time. I have three young kids." Much later, my father had prostate cancer and instead of the recommended radiation, he chose to completely change his diet.

Meanwhile, I've learned a great deal about breast cancer, and I continue to do research. Some things that stuck out were: Mammography is only about 50 percent accurate and mostly picks up slow growing cancers, and 85 percent of all breast cancers are not hereditary, but rather "environmental"—caused by the products we use every day; the foods and drinks we

consume; stress; lack of exercise; and pesticides.

Many of these were in my power to change. I tossed out my food, my toxic cleaning solutions, my cosmetics and my microwave. I radically altered my diet, eliminating my beloved Mediterranean foods, such as chicken, pastas, bread and cheese, opting instead for a raw vegan diet consisting of vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds and wheat grass.

Wheat grass is one of the most potent healing supplements on the planet. Just two ounces daily offer the antioxidants, superfoods, enzymes, vitamins, minerals found in five pounds of leafy green vegetables. It's like a mini-transfusion of wellness and condensed sunlight energy for your body to soak up. Immediately I began feeling much better, with dramatically improved bloodwork to show for it. (My new regimen was overseen by a nutritionist,

herbalist and by my oncologist.)

Fifteen years have passed, and I'm healthier and happier than I've ever been. I still drink wheat grass and remain close to my mostly raw, now vegetarian diet, adding in some cooked foods like quinoa and wild caught salmon or other protein on occasion. I take Chinese herbs and supplements based on what my body needs, as determined by blood work and testing.

I live an active, healthy life—running, power walking, cross training with weights, and enjoying all types of sports. My consulting business is exciting and fun, in comparison to my old 80-hour, stress-filled workweek. I've learned to live with much less, because having a big house and a closet full of designer shoes and clothes means zero when your doctor says the word cancer.

I now see things through

completely different eyes. I stop to take in the beauty that each day affords. At the same time, I easily recognize needs, which is why I spend a good chunk of time giving back as a volunteer advocate for other women with breast cancer through The Annie Appleseed Project. This is where I find my balance; this is what inspired me to publish what I'd learned in *Breast Cancer: The Notebook*.

Cancer didn't kill me. It woke me up to who I really am and empowered me to make my own choices. Was it a gift? Yes indeed. It helped me find the real me. When people say to me, "Great, you're in remission!" I reply, "No... I am healed." The mindset is quite different; I'm not waiting for the next ball to drop. I found a vision for my life and it does not include cancer.

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