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No One Dies Alone

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Healing Breast Cancer

By Julia Chiappetta

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D GET CANCER. I ran six miles a day, and did mini-triathlons and in-line skating; I ate a sensible Mediterranean diet. I managed to take care of myself even while working eighty hours a week and traveling the globe as a successful meeting planner. I thought I was in perfect shape. Then I felt the lump. That was in the year 2000. I was forty-four, single, and living in Connecticut when I detected what felt like a mosquito bite on the outer edge of my right breast.

Since I'd been doing self-exams for years, I knew immediately that this was different. I'd never felt anything like it.

My doctors performed a mammogram, but it came back negative. I wasn't satisfied. My gut told me something was wrong. But when I asked for a biopsy, the doctors gave me

a hard time. "You're fine," they said, but I insisted, so they gave me an appointment for the next day.

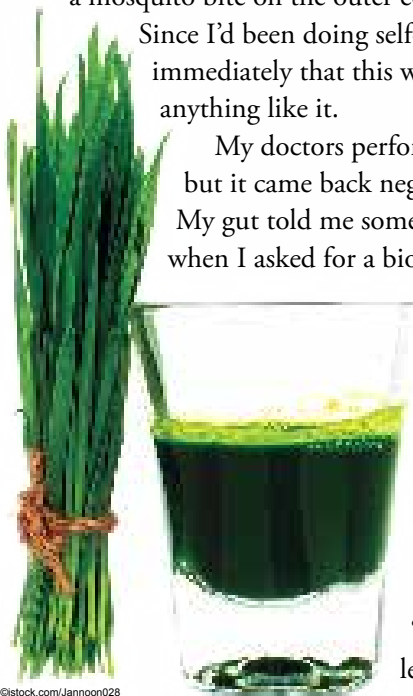
Twenty-four hours after the biopsy, I got a call from the surgeon. His first words were: "I'm very sorry, and I learned a really important

lesson—I need to listen to my patients more." Then he dropped the bomb: "You have stage IIB infiltrative ductal carcinoma. It's aggressive, and you need to do something right away." Everything seemed to stop. It was shocking news. As soon as the call was over, I got down on my knees and began to pray, asking for direction and peace.

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 five or so years 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. I left the oncologist's office in tears.

After I got home, I began to pray again, saying, "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 in Houston. My sister called to say she was sending a nutritional video series she thought would help me. I felt my prayers were being answered through them, and it gave me peace and fortitude.

Once I had regained my bearings, I decided that before I accepted—or rejected—any medical treatment, I was going to do my own research. With no time to lose, and with the guidance of a scientist friend, I pored



Baking Soda for Chronic Kidney Disease

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) affects over 26 million Americans, and often has no medical cure. Instead, doctors generally focus on trying to slow the progression of the disease. Surprisingly, there is a common household substance that can do just that. A daily dose of sodium bicarbonate—simple baking soda—has been shown to significantly slow the decline of kidney function in some patients with advanced kidney disease.

In a study published in the *Journal of the American Society of Nephrology*, researchers gave a small daily dose (1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon) of sodium bicarbonate in tablet form to one group of patients with advanced CKD and metabolic acidosis over a period of two years.¹

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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 of my first moves—inspired by my research—was to chuck everything in my house that contained synthetic hormones, antibiotics, and toxins such as lead, parabens, and sulfates that could have contributed to my cancer. I tossed out all my food, my makeup, my shampoos, and my microwave. I threw it all away and started using only organic products.

“I realize now that stress was one of the top contributing factors to my illness.”

I knew that I needed to slow down, eliminate as much stress as possible, and get good rest, falling asleep well before midnight. I also needed to purge from my life the negative emotions and people that had made things difficult for me. In a way, I had to find Julia again—the girl who had become a woman and, like many, was affected by the stress of “making it” in the business world and surviving as a single business owner. It was a cathartic and difficult process, but, along with fasting to cleanse my body, I needed to cleanse my mind, flushing out all the junk that had accumulated there for over twenty-five years.

Prayer was my foundation and strength during all of this. When I speak with other women who have received a cancer diagnosis, I tell them that they need to find a higher power and have total peace about their plan of care. This peace will carry them through and help them heal faster. The decisions must be their own—not those of their doctors, partners, friends, or families. There is something very powerful in being a part of your own healing platform.

I changed my diet completely, trading my beloved Mediterranean diet of bread, cheese, pasta, fish, and chicken for an organic, raw, vegan menu. I started drinking alkaline water, juicing (carrots, beets, kale, spinach, bok choy, and celery), and doing shots of wheatgrass three times a day (just 1 ounce can provide the nutrients of 2.5 pounds of organic green vegetables and B17 which naturally occurs). Within two months, 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, all my tumor markers and a lot of my blood work showed levels that were back in the normal range. This doctor recommended a lumpectomy, where they remove just a margin of tissue surrounding the tumor site, and a senti-

Nurse practitioners...are nurses first. Patient education, advocacy, and holistic care are at the core of the nursing philosophy. To a nurse, or at least to me, a patient is not the disease she has; a patient is a person first with a complex milieu of physical, emotional, environmental, relational, spiritual (and the list goes on) parts that complete the larger, truer portrait of her health.

—Renaë Wertz, NP-C, in “So, What Is a Nurse Practitioner Anyway?” at <http://momcoloredglasses.com>

nel node biopsy, which removes only the first few lymph nodes into which the tumor drains. This sounded right to me. After I underwent these procedures, he recommended following up with radiation and Tamoxifen, but at this point I didn't want them, as I was sold on a more natural approach—and since all of my margins were clean and there was no lymph node involvement.

I flew home two days after the lumpectomy and continued my new diet and lifestyle regimen, all the while seeking the advice of nutritionists and naturopaths, as well as my oncologist. Was it difficult? It was the most difficult thing I've ever done in my life. Was I scared? Absolutely. I had clients, friends, colleagues, and doctors all saying, "Are you crazy?" But I felt total peace with my decision.

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 thirty, after her third baby. When the doctor suggested she get chemo, she said, "I don't have time for that, I have three young kids." I was six years old at the time. My father had prostate cancer fifteen years before and chose not to have radiation but to completely change his diet instead. At the time of my diagnosis, both of my parents were healthy and thriving—and they completely supported my decision, which was a gift. Dad recently passed away peacefully in his sleep, but Mom is eighty-two going on sixty-two with more energy than anyone I know.

There has not been any other breast cancer in my immediate family, but I have come to learn that 85 percent of all breast cancers are not hereditary, leaving only 15 percent due to genetic abnormalities, and that mammography is only 50 percent accurate at best and does not pick up fast-growing cancers easily. I have not had a mammogram (also a risk factor for cancer, due to the radiation exposure) since, and only undergo screening with 3D Doppler ultrasound (with Robert Bard, MD, in New York City), MRI, or thermography.

Now fifteen years have passed since my diagnosis, and I'm healthier and happier than I've ever been. I'm

still drinking wheat grass, and I add organic egg whites, cheese and wild-caught salmon to my diet on occasion if I feel I need a bit more protein. I still take Chinese herbs/teas and nutritional supplements, and I still exercise five times per week—running, power walking, and cross-training with weights.

I work forty-five hours per week and earn about a

third of what I used to, but I have never felt freer. I've learned to live with so much less. Having a big house and closets full of beautiful designer shoes and clothes means zero when your doctor says the word *cancer*.

I realize now that stress was one of the top contributing factors to my illness. I believe that most cancers (those that are not linked to genetic conditions) are caused by environmental factors, such as poor diet, stress, toxins, unresolved emotional pain, pollu-

tion, pesticide exposure, smoking, and lack of peace and exercise. There is quite a bit of research that shows many of these factors to be present in various types of cancer and other autoimmune diseases. We live in what can be a very stressful, toxic world, and need to make decisions daily to counteract those influences.

As I began making healthy decisions for myself, I started seeing things through completely different eyes. Now I see beauty every day. I see how green the trees are today. I see the little flowers growing on the lawn. But, at the same time, I can also see pain in someone's eyes and have compassion for them. I get the most joy in my life from counseling other women with breast cancer, which inspired me to publish what I'd learned in my book, *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. It helped me find the real me. Δ

JULIA CHIAPPETTA is the author of *Breast Cancer—The Notebook* (Gemini Media, 2006), a reference guide that provides a foundation of facts to the newly diagnosed, survivors, or those wishing to take a preventative view. She is also the owner of Julia Chiappetta Consulting; see <http://juliachiappetta.com>.

*“One of my first moves—
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