

Breast Cancer Awareness 2024

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"I could see a path for healing and a path for my future."

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"This whole process has helped me learn how to ask for help."

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"My outlook on life is a lot different, I would say."

Nikki Simpson



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How to conduct a breast self-exam

Catching cancer in its earliest stages, when it can be treated most successfully, can increase the chances individuals who develop the disease go on to live long, healthy lives. Doctors are not as familiar with their patients' bodies as the patients themselves, so it is vital for people to be aware of anything that seems out of the ordinary regarding their physical well-being.

In regard to breast health, familiarizing oneself with how the breasts look and feel can help women detect breast cancer sooner rather than later.

The Mayo Clinic says breast self-exams encourage breast awareness. A self-exam is a visual and manual inspection of the breasts that people perform on their own at home.

Opinions on the efficacy of breast self-exams are



mixed. For example, a 2008 study of nearly 400,000 women in China and Russia reported that breast self-examination does not have a meaningful effect on breast cancer survival rates and may even lead to unnecessary tissue biopsies. In response to this and similar studies, the American Cancer Society stopped

recommending breast self-exam as a screening tool for those with an average risk of breast cancer.

Still, other organizations, such as Breastcancer.org, advocate for breast self-exams when they are part of a comprehensive screening program that includes regular physical exams by a doctor, mammography,

and ultrasounds and MRI testing.

The National Breast Cancer Foundation says a breast self-exam can be performed at least once a month. Establishing a baseline early on can help women detect abnormalities that much sooner. The exam should be done a few days after a menstrual period ends. For those who have reached menopause, the exam should be performed on the same day of each month to establish consistent results.

There are a few different ways to conduct a breast self-exam. The Cleveland Clinic offers these three options and instructions.

► **While standing:** Remove your shirt and bra. Use your right hand to examine your left breast, then vice versa. With the pads of your three middle fingers, press on every part of one

breast. Apply light pressure, then increase the pressure to firm. Feel for any lumps, thick spots or other changes. A circular pattern often helps you ensure you check the entirety of the breast. Then you should press the tissue nearest your armpit. Check under your areola (the area around the nipple) and squeeze the nipple to check for any discharge. Repeat these steps on the other breast. A standing exam is easily performed in the shower.

► **While lying down:** Breast tissue spreads out more evenly while lying down, so this is a good position to feel for breast changes, particularly for women with large breasts. Lie down and put a pillow under your right shoulder. Place your right arm behind your head. Using your left hand, apply the same technique as

described in option 1, using the pads of your fingers to check the breast. Change the pillow to the other shoulder, and check the other breast and armpit. Remember to check the areolas and nipples.

► **Mirror examination:** With shirt and bra removed, stand in front of a mirror. Place your arms down by your sides and look for any changes in breast shape or any swelling and dimpling of the skin. Look for changes in the positioning of nipples. Next, place both hands on your hips and flex your chest muscles, once again looking for any changes while the muscles are in this position. Remember to look at both breasts. Breast tissue extends to the armpit, collarbone and the top of the abdomen, so it is essential to look at all these areas, not just the cleavage and nipples.

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North of Boston Cancer Resource a guiding light

For more than eight years, North of Boston Cancer Resource has been making the journey of people diagnosed with cancer and their families a bit easier to navigate. What started as a dream of five local women, professionals in the health and wellness field, has become a valuable and growing resource for people seeking additional support and services after receiving a cancer diagnosis.

NBCR's vision of enhanced well-being and survivorship for people with cancer in our community by offering support that cares for the whole person has been its driving force. Funded solely by donations and grants, NBCR has enriched, empowered and educated thousands of people affected by cancer, as well as provided access to healing services that are often not covered by insurance.

"A cancer diagnosis can be devastating and disorienting, not to mention a financial burden," said Dina Crawford, NBCR board president. "We want to be here for people to help them through the emotional distress, as well as the physical toll of the disease and side effects of treatment."

Since 2020, NBCR has provided hundreds of sessions of healing therapies and supportive services that go hand in hand with conventional treatments through a network of experienced practitioners who have been vetted through a cancer-focused application process. These services include oncology massage, acupuncture, yoga therapy, guided imagery, Reiki, health coaching, nutrition counseling and more. Research has shown that these practices, known as "complementary therapies,"



can help with the fatigue, anxiety, pain and nausea that are often associated with cancer and treatment, as well as enhance recovery and survivorship.

NBCR has also offered over 40 free "Speaker Series" sessions on Zoom on a variety of topics of interest to people living with cancer. Topics have included meditation, chair yoga, healthy

eating, mindfulness, journaling for health, acupuncture, "Ask the Nurses," managing fatigue, essential oils, nontoxic living and expressive arts.

"Our goal is to share empowering information and practices that people can incorporate for their well-being and healing in the long term," Crawford said. "Cancer treatment can

be grueling. However, the period after completion of treatment is also a very vulnerable time, as well as an opportunity to bring body, mind and spirit back into harmony. Our experience is that our self-care topics help people move forward in a powerful way."

Since its inception in 2016 as the Greater Newburyport Cancer Resource, NBCR has worked closely with local cancer centers to ensure that patients are informed about and have access to these important services while undergoing treatment and after.

"Most patients can't afford beneficial services such as oncology massage and acupuncture, which are typically not covered by insurance," said Dr. Colleen Yavarow, an oncologist who joined the NBCR board while practicing at Anna Jaques Cancer Center.

"NBCR has been instrumental in funding and guiding patients to receive these important therapies at no cost.

"As an oncologist, I see the ongoing benefits of this support. Patients more effectively complete chemotherapy, they have better symptom management and improved overall well-being," Yavarow said. "I can't thank NBCR enough for these gifts, which have vastly enhanced and improved the quality of life for patients and their families."

NBCR maintains an online guide that is a comprehensive directory of cancer-specific programs, supportive services, organizations and resources available to people living with cancer in the communities north of Boston. For more information, go to nbcancerresource.org or email info@nbcancerresource.org.



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The healing power of music

Learning bass and playing with her family helped Amanda Clemenzi cope

By Angelina Berube

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Amanda Clemenzi, 44, doesn't see herself as cool enough to be the bassist in her family's band, but her journey to learn the instrument makes her a rock star.

The Groveland resident began playing bass guitar three years ago in what became a coping mechanism as she underwent treatment for Stage 1 breast cancer. It became a therapeutic distraction as she became more concerned about where her fingers were placed on the bass's neck than what was going on in her body.

"Music has been such a part of my finding myself and a part of my journey back to normal life," Clemenzi said.

In 2019, early detection and preventative measures helped find Clemenzi's breast cancer and keep it from spreading. The mother of two said that the time in her life was scary given her family's history. It's something she still worries about for her own daughter in the future.

Support from her immediate and extended family, friends, and other survivors — along with encouragement from one health care professional in particular — allowed her to see a path forward after cancer.

"I took it very seriously when someone said to me, 'We could catch it sooner than we caught it for your mother,'" Clemenzi said.

Breast cancer was a term she was all too familiar with when she was diagnosed in 2021. Both her mother and grandmother had breast cancer. While her grandmother survived the disease for many years, her mom died in 2008 when the cancer came back after years in remission.

Clemenzi tried to be proactive in her 20s, knowing her family history. Along with her sister, she scheduled an appointment with a geneticist but recalled being brushed off. She was told she didn't qualify for genetic testing and was instructed to wait until age 35 to get a mammogram.

She began getting 2D

mammograms around age 34, after having her two children.

A conversation with her OB-GYN nurse practitioner was a lightbulb moment that led to the early detection of Clemenzi's Stage 1 cancer a few years later.

In 2019, Clemenzi remembered being asked why she wasn't seeing a breast care specialist or getting 3D mammograms and breast MRIs every year, given her family history. The nurse practitioner encouraged her to begin taking preventative measures.

Clemenzi took her health into her own hands at that point. She sought out a breast care specialist and found out that she didn't have the breast cancer gene. She got her first 3D mammogram right before the pandemic hit.

But COVID-19 forced scheduled appointments and scans to be postponed, and she had to wait to get her first breast MRI. In 2021, she started the process over again in the spring with a 3D mammogram, which yielded good results.

She waited until the fall for the MRI.

"This was supposed to be a baseline MRI," she said. "I was supposed to just get it an 'all clear' and carry on."

That's when they found Stage 1 breast cancer.

"I owe the early detection of my own cancer to my mother's journey and struggles and process that she went through," Clemenzi said. "But I also owe it to the amazing support I had from this doctor that I had started seeing, who encouraged me to go ahead and go through this intensive screening process."

Clemenzi went back to her nurse practitioner and told her she owed her everything. Her nurse practitioner in turn thanked her for actually going to get the tests done.

Clemenzi underwent a lumpectomy at Anna Jaques Hospital a month after her diagnosis. Her doctors successfully removed the cancer along with some lymph nodes. That was followed by 21 rounds of radiation in Newburyport. She will take Tamoxifen for the next 10 years to prevent



Amanda Clemenzi is surrounded by her family, husband Eric and children Xavier, 15, and Olivia, 10.

KERI CIOFOLO/Courtesy photo

hormones from getting to her breast tissue.

Throughout radiation, Clemenzi continued to homeschool and care for her son and daughter — and they helped her.

"We didn't always share every detail, but I was never deceitful about what was going on," she said. "They did see me upset and struggling, and they offered hugs."

There were the little moments when her son helped around the house or would take out food from the freezer and warm it up when Clemenzi didn't feel good. Or the times when her kids would get Clemenzi's dad and sister on the phone when she needed someone to talk to during her recovery.

She feels that her children learned about compassion seeing their mom heal from cancer. Clemenzi didn't hide what was happening but explained it to them in a way they could understand and process.

As she recovered, she began reaching out and building her support system.

Her mother's sister, her own sister and dad, her husband, her mother-in-law, and her uncle's wife were some of the family who

helped her through difficult times. Clemenzi was able to relate to her uncle's wife, who underwent the same type of surgery and treatment route as she did. She also connected with other survivors and found solace in hearing about how they came out the other side and created lives beyond cancer.

"I could see a path for healing and a path for my future," Clemenzi said.

That path also included a therapeutic journey that she didn't know she needed.

The diagnosis, surgery and treatment had unearthed some anxiety for Clemenzi.

"I started to really struggle, and my husband recognized this," she said. "He said to me, 'You need something, you need to learn a new instrument.'"

Her husband is a guitar teacher and said he saw how much music helped his students cope through difficult times.

He sat down with her that winter and taught her the bass.

"It took so much of my focus," she said. "I had lost trust in my body, but it's hard to think about your body when you are worrying about learning new songs."



Courtesy photo

Amanda Clemenzi learned how to play bass guitar while recovering from treatment for Stage 1 breast cancer.

Together, they learned some of their favorite Foo Fighters songs, which they listen together to as a family. Her son and daughter began learning the same songs.

They formed the "Foo Family" and started performing music together.

The goal of learning bass guitar gave Clemenzi a new confidence and a vision of what life would look like after her treatments.

"I'm continuing to grow and change and better myself while spending more time with my family," Clemenzi said.

She continues one-on-one therapy as she copes with life after cancer. It has made a difference being able to talk to someone when emotions reignite each time doctors want to recheck things. Checkups can lead to flashbacks of her mom's cancer, and fear creeps in while waiting for results.

But one of her biggest takeaways is that she has learned how to self-advocate. Now, if she doesn't feel comfortable with a doctor, she moves on and finds who will give her the best care.

Clemenzi considers herself a private person, but she said she hopes her story will encourage someone putting off a mammogram or MRI to get it done.

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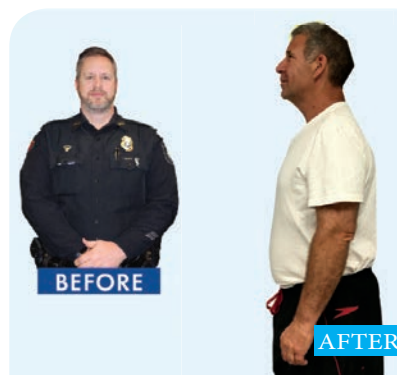
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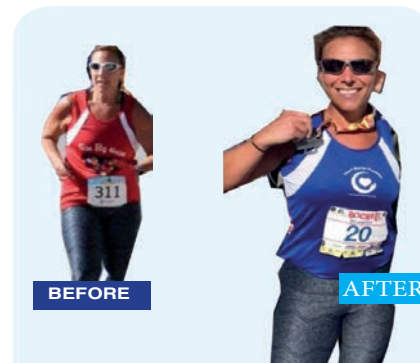
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Erica King fights for survival and dignity

By Teddy Tauscher

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Erica King, 49, lives to be a mother.

King, a Methuen resident and breast cancer survivor, has traversed chemotherapy, multiple surgeries and now a series of treatments that have forced her to face something alongside death: insecurity.

"My daughters say I am a warrior," she said. "Now I just have to be kind to myself."

Her two children, 19 and 25, are what keeps her going. "I need to be alive for them," she said. "I really believe I have a purpose here."

King admits that she went six years without having a mammogram.

"Life got busy for me," she said. "I seem to have fallen off the radar for a mammogram."



CARL RUSSO/Staff photo
Erica King reflects on her breast cancer journey after a recent appointment at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

According to the American Cancer Society, women between the ages of 45 and 54 should get mammograms every year. Other guidelines recommend starting at age 40.

Three years ago, a pain

under her left arm persuaded King to seek medical help.

One nurse believed it to be ingrown hair, while another had deeper concerns. An ultrasound confirmed that King had breast cancer.

She was diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma, which has a high rate of recurrence. The cancer had spread throughout her breast into her lymph nodes. King was at stage 2B.

"It was absolutely terrifying," she said. "The powerlessness that I felt in that time period."

Soon she was on chemotherapy, around six rounds' worth. After that came a lumpectomy, a surgery to remove the part of her breast with cancer. But there were problems.

"They didn't get clean margins," she said. "It all needs to be cancer free around the perimeter of it."

So a few weeks later, "they went in again" and then a third time with no clear margins. This meant there was more cancer in the MRI scan than had been detectable.

All of her lymph nodes were removed.

"My whole goal in all this is to live," she said. "I have never been more afraid to die."

While the cancer is now gone, King is looking at getting a second mastectomy, as a preventative measure.

"It gives me some comfort," she said. "There are no guarantees."

King also finds comfort in helping animals, having volunteered at Animal Rescue Merrimack Valley for the past 16 years.

"There is always a need for it," she said. "I connect on a level with a helpless animal."

Her work includes feeding

feral cats.

"It's a wonderful, fulfilling job," she said. "It changed my life."

Despite being cancer free, King is still undergoing treatment. For the last two years, she has been on hormone therapy, which has caused her emotional pain.

The hormone suppressants and the injections King takes to trigger menopause cause her to gain weight. The medications ensure that King doesn't produce estrogen and progesterone.

"Those slow down my metabolism tremendously," she said.

These treatments are also lesser known than other procedures she has had.

"It's tedious, and nobody really wants to know the whole story about what goes on behind the scenes," she said.

These physical changes

cut her deeply.

"Some things are very embarrassing to me, and I have to get past that," she said.

Having a supportive husband and family helps, she said. She hopes to connect with other survivors so she can talk about her unique experiences.

King also hopes to improve her mindset.

"I would like to shift my focus onto spiritual things rather than live in anxiety," she said. "It take a lot of practice."

King's youngest daughter attends Salem State University, and her oldest daughter recently graduated with a master's degree from Simmons University.

"I have aspirations, I don't think this is as good as it gets," King said. "I say in my mind, the best is yet to come."

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Running toward the future

Jeannine Pelkey determined to stay strong through another diagnosis

By Buck Anderson

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When Jeannine Pelkey arrived at her Danvers apartment on one of the last days of summer, she was driving a fire-engine-red Jeep with a large Red Sox emblem on its spare-tire cover.

She was smiling despite the large orthopedic shield on her right leg. It was there to protect the incision the doctor had made the previous day to remove a melanoma, the worst kind of skin cancer.

Her smile speaks tons about the person she is and how she is living her life, a breast cancer survivor and avid runner ready to knock out cancer again.

Pelkey first started running about 15 years ago after she and a friend decided to sign up for a 1-mile race.

"It was really not a great showing for either of us, so we decided we would take a Couch to 5K class," she said. "We were shocked when we did (the 5K) and felt so good. We were pretty slow, but we just kept working out from there."

For the next seven years, she ran more and more races. In late 2016, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"I had surgery right after Christmas, and then in 2017, I did 16 weeks of chemo and a month of radiation," she said.

Pelkey ran a 5K every week of chemotherapy, then did a 10K during radiation and a Spartan Race right after.

"I never really quit," she said. "I have a really good support system and team that would pull into the driveway; say, 'Put on your shoes, we're gonna walk down the driveway'; and then they would have me walk a tiny bit of the park



Jeannine Pelkey has an extensive collection displayed at home of all her medals for different races she has run over the years.

BUCK ANDERSON/Staff photo

and we would come home. The next day, we would walk one lap around the park, and then they just kept adding."

Chemotherapy was not that bad, she said.

"They do a lot now to keep you from getting sick, a lot of anti-nausea medicine and allergy medicine," she said. "But you definitely don't feel good that day."

She said one of her friends, a nurse, "kept saying to, 'Drink as much water as you can and flush it out,' so I would have chemo on a Tuesday and be able to run on Friday."

Everybody has a sad day or a bad day while going through recovery, she said.

"No matter how bad you feel, you have to get up and go outside and get some fresh air or take a walk — you have to keep pushing," she said.

By the end of that August, she was through with her

treatment, "but it takes a lot out of your system, so you really don't feel like yourself for about a year," she said.

During that period and after, she signed up for a lot of different programs through the American Cancer Society and found a business in California that paid for anyone who had breast cancer to go to CrossFit for a year.

Now, she is a member of Treehouse School of Fitness, a CrossFit gym in Danvers.

Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, weather permitting, she and fellow members go down to the park for what they call their "I hate to run" run and walk or jog for 30 minutes.

"Three times around is a mile," she said. "The dog goes, I go, there's a group of older ladies who just walk, and some people come who really run. You don't have to do anything, people just show up."

With her new battle against melanoma, Pelkey said that she is having a lot of the same reactions and feelings she had seven years ago with her breast cancer diagnosis.

"I definitely had my bad days, and I think when they told me what was going on, I definitely cried," she recalled. "I cried about what was going to happen, I cried because I didn't want to die from it. I cried because I wasn't going to have hair, and was hoping I didn't have a weird-shaped head."

"And here we are, so many years later, with the melanoma on my leg," she said. "I'm having the same reactions and the same feelings, but I don't think we're at the same stage yet with how we're going to deal with it."

She remembers feeling the best she had ever felt before she was first diagnosed. She was running a lot of races that year and was really



Courtesy photo

Jeannine Pelkey stands behind a large banner for the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer fundraiser that she recently hosted at the AOH Function Hall on Lowell Street in Peabody.

blindsided by the mammogram results.

One thing that has helped throughout her journey is participating in the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk in Boston each year. She recommends it to anyone facing a similar path.

"You can have lots of things wrong with you, but just about everybody can walk," she said.

Another thing she suggests is not to listen to other people.

"Don't talk to other people, and don't talk to Google," she advised.

"You and I could have the same body type and the same diagnosis, but we're not going to feel the same and we're not going to feel the same about it," she said. "We're not going to have the same treatment and we might not even have the same surgery, so don't look for other answers."

Instead, she said, you need to rely on the people who are trying to get you out of the house and on to the next thing.

She said there's really nothing anyone can say to make you feel better, so if someone cares about you and is reaching out, make a list of the little things you do need.

When she was in the

hospital after surgery, someone texted and asked what she needed. She said she needed her phone charger. Then someone else called, and she asked for her pajamas. Another request was for an iced coffee in the morning.

Pelkey said the American Cancer Society has been there for her in many ways, starting with its 24/7 hotline that will encourage you and work with you in multiple ways. She said she just accepts "every advantage they give me and tries to help them out on the other side by raising a little money."

Pelkey said that she wants to tell anyone who is experiencing what she went through that they are not alone.

She has had 11 plastic surgeries, and it's probably not over, she said.

"There's always a dark cloud over the bright spot, so I would say to someone, 'You can do it,'" she said. "If you need some motivation, hit me up, find me, I'll come walk with you, or you can meet me down at the park and I'll walk with you, or we can sit and have a coffee, and not talk about it at all, because I get it, I've been through it, and I've made it to the other side, so they can, too."

The different types of breast cancer

The term “breast cancer” does not describe a single type of cancer, but rather several forms of a disease that can develop in areas of the breast.

The American Cancer Society says breast cancer type is determined by the specific cells in the breast that become cancerous. There are many different types of breast cancer, and the medical community’s understanding of the disease is based on decades of research and millions of patients treated.

In 2001, Dr. Charles Perou first classified breast cancer into subtypes based on genomic patterns. The Breast Cancer Research Foundation says breast cancer is broadly divided into two types: noninvasive and invasive.

Noninvasive breast cancers are called Stage 0 breast cancers or carcinomas in situ. These are thought to be the precursors to breast cancer, according to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. While noninvasive breast

cancers are not initially life-threatening, if left untreated, they can develop into invasive breast cancers, which can be fatal.

Here is a look at some of the different types of breast cancer.

► **Invasive ductal carcinoma:** This is the most common type of breast cancer, advises the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Invasive ductal carcinoma accounts for 70% to 80% of all breast cancer diagnoses in women and men. This cancer forms in the milk ducts and spreads beyond.

► **Invasive lobular carcinoma:** This is the second most common type of breast cancer, accounting for 10% to 15% of diagnoses, according to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. Invasive lobular carcinoma originates in the milk-producing glands of the breast known as lobules. Tumors that form due to invasive lobular carcinoma more commonly grow in lines in the breast rather than in lumps, so they present differently on a mammogram.



► **Inflammatory breast cancer:** Inflammatory breast cancer is a rare, fast-growing type of breast cancer. The inflammatory name comes from the appearance of the skin of the breast. It looks red and inflamed, which is caused by

breast cancer cells blocking lymph channels in the breast and skin, according to Breast Cancer Now, a research and support charity.

► **Triple-negative breast cancer:** The National Breast Cancer Foundation says a diagnosis of

triple-negative breast cancer means the three most common types of receptors known to cause most breast cancer growths are not present in the cancer tumor. These receptors are estrogen, progesterone and the HER2/neu gene. Since the tumor cells lack necessary receptors, certain treatments like hormone therapy and drugs that target these receptors are ineffective. Chemotherapy is still an option.

► **Metastatic breast cancer:** This type of breast cancer is also known as Stage 4 breast cancer. Metastatic breast cancer originates in an area of the breast, but spreads (metastasizes) to another part of the body, most commonly the bones, lungs, brain or liver, indicates BreastCancer.org.

Individuals hoping to learn more about breast cancer should be aware that there are various types of the disease. Which type an individual has is an important variable doctors consider as they plan a course of treatment.

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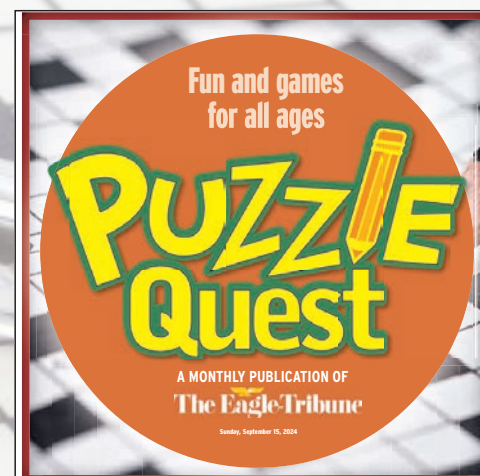
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'I am never by myself'

Sandra Ocampo gets by with support from classmates and a positive attitude

By Jill Harmacinski

» jharmacinski@northofboston.com

"You're alive and you're fighting!"

That's the mantra Sandra Ocampo is living by as she battles breast cancer and works to become a registered dietitian at the same time.

After undergoing radiation, chemotherapy and surgery, Ocampo graduated with magna cum laude honors from the University of Massachusetts Lowell in May 2024.

She credits her Catholic faith, family, classmates and neighbors, as well as assistance she received from the Ellie Fund, a Massachusetts

nonprofit that assists breast cancer patients, with helping her achieve her goals — both with her health and in the classroom.

"Throughout the whole process, I never felt alone," said Ocampo, 50, who was born in Colombia and immigrated to the United States in 2000.

In September 2023, Ocampo felt sharp pain in her left breast.

"It felt like something was poking me," she said.

She then discovered a lump that felt like a hard ball. A diagnostic mammogram and biopsy ordered by her doctor confirmed that the mass was two tumors.

Her breast cancer diagnosis came at a time in her life when she was reinventing herself. After a successful business management career, Ocampo had refocused her career path. She wanted to become



Courtesy photo

Sandra Ocampo celebrates her birthday while battling breast cancer.

a registered dietitian and completed her prerequisite courses over seven years.

In 2022, she started the accelerated Master of Public

Health in Dietetics, a coordinated program at UMass Lowell.

Halfway through the program, Sandra received the aggressive breast cancer diagnosis. The tumors in her breast and the cancer had metastasized to a nearby lymph node. Her cancer was HER2-positive and estrogen-positive.

"One of my first thoughts was, 'How am I going to finish my program?'" Ocampo said.

Her treatment was aggressive and intense. It included chemotherapy, a bilateral mastectomy, reconstruction and radiation.

Ocampo said that her support system was invaluable. Even classmates she had just met were willing to help her in any way, she said.

"As soon as I connected with my classmates, everyone was so supportive," she said. "At that moment, I realized I am never by myself."

She said that the students and faculty at UMass Lowell were committed to supporting her in both her treatment and her educational goals.

One of her professors told her, "I will make sure you graduate and become a registered dietitian."

Classmates, many who are in their mid-20s, jumped in by creating a Google calendar to ensure that Ocampo had transportation to all of her appointments. Her refrigerator was well stocked, and most importantly, she had friends by her side. A professor even offered to deliver Ocampo's medication from the pharmacy if she was unable to go. She was constantly cared for by her classmates and teachers, she said.

Ocampo's parents and brother made several trips to Lawrence from Colombia to support her during treatment. But even when

A place to turn

The Ellie Fund is available to all women and men undergoing active breast cancer treatment who reside or receive treatment in Massachusetts.

Services include grocery assistance, transportation to medical appointments, light housekeeping, child care reimbursement, prepared meal delivery, and funding for acupuncture and oncology massage therapy.

The fund was founded in 1995 by brothers Jeff and Eliot Popkin in honor of their mother, Eleanor "Ellie" Popkin, who died at age 49 in 1987 after a 15-plus-year battle with breast cancer.

The Arbella Insurance Foundation is a strong supporter of the Ellie Fund.

"Receiving a cancer diagnosis is one of the hardest moments of a patient's life. The Ellie Fund's commitment to ensure breast cancer patients do not go through the journey alone is extremely admirable," Executive Director Robin Jones said. "The Arbella Insurance Foundation is honored to support the Ellie Fund's efforts in transporting woman to mammogram appointments, providing their families with meals during the treatment process and doing so much for those struggling to live with this new normal in their lives."

"Just like the Ellie Fund, Arbella recognizes how important a support system is, and our team is dedicated to stopping social injustice issues in Massachusetts," Jones said. "As we reflect on Breast Cancer Awareness Month this October, Arbella applauds the Ellie Fund for easing the stress of breast cancer patients and offering care to underserved women of color in Gateway Cities."

To apply for help or for more information, visit elliefund.org.

they were thousands of miles away, her family had peace of mind because of the amazing support system that grew.

The Ellie Fund also became a critical part of that support system. The organization provided nutritious fresh meals and gift cards for three months. While Ocampo lives in Lawrence, her breast cancer treatment was at Mass General Cancer Center in Danvers, a 32-mile round trip.

"Thank God I had those gift cards," she said.

Ocampo said that the treatment she has received at Mass General Danvers has been wonderful.

"Everyone is so nice," she said. "No one is ever in a bad mood."

Her oncology team scheduled her surgery with her graduation date in mind. The postoperative drains were removed just in time for the ceremony in May, joined by the supportive classmates who now feel like family.

"I don't know how I did it," Ocampo said. "It was so hard. ... But I was able to do it."

Ocampo is now finishing up her radiation treatment. She plans to take her board exams in the spring and open her own private dietary practice. She hopes to work with breast cancer patients and guide them through their nutritional needs in the future.

To others battling cancer, Ocampo said that her best advice is to "take one day at a time."

And if you need support, don't be afraid to ask for it.

"For me, the biggest thing was having the support without having to ask," she said. "If you don't have the support, don't be afraid to ask. This whole process has helped me learn how to ask for help."

And no matter where life takes you, stay positive, she urged.

"Right from diagnosis, I always tried to see the positive side," Ocampo said.

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WE BUY GOLD

A new outlook on life

Nikki Simpson faced cancer as a pregnant newlywed

By Matt Petry

» mpetry@northofboston.com

At 33, pregnant and just married, Nikki Simpson was entering the happiest point in her life in October 2021 when a breast cancer diagnosis at the end of the month changed everything.

"Everything kind of happened all at once," Simpson said.

Simpson, a Merrimac resident, said that she had initially been diagnosed with a benign tumor in July, but she returned for another diagnosis when the tumor grew.

"They diagnosed me with invasive ductal carcinoma in like three different spots," Simpson said.

The situation was nothing short of shocking and devastating.

"I thought I was in the clear, and so then to get that dropped on me was heart-breaking," Simpson said.

After getting the news, Simpson said that she knew she needed a plan.

"I'm a very analytical person. I needed to know like what was the next step after the initial crying and thinking I'm going to die and all those negative, scary thoughts," she said. "Seeing the doctors and getting a plan made me feel so much better."

She went to the oncology team at Lahey Medical Center in Peabody.

"I cannot say enough good things about how compassionate and caring they were throughout my journey," Simpson said. "They made me feel at home and as comfortable as one can be in an infusion chair surrounded by others hooked up to IV machines."

She is especially grateful for her oncologist, Dr. Andrew Piper-Vallillo.

"I was very lucky that I found him," Simpson said.

While at the hospital, she



KEITH SULLIVAN/Staff photos

Marc and Nikki Simpson play with daughter Penelope, 3, in the yard at their Merrimac home.

was introduced to a group called Hope for Two, which connected her with a breast cancer survivor who was also pregnant when she was diagnosed.

"It was super helpful, and I'm still in contact with her now," Simpson said.

She said that being pregnant at the time was a double-edged sword, worrying about how the treatment might affect her baby while also drawing strength from the life growing inside her.

"She was such a gift, like I called her my emotional support baby," Simpson said. "I tell people all the time, I don't think I probably would have gotten out of bed or been able to smile or laugh through this whole process if it wasn't for her. She brought such a sense of joy every day, no matter how I felt."

Her daughter, Penelope Skye Simpson, was born on Dec. 17, 2021, and has grown into a healthy toddler.

Simpson received more than 18 months of chemotherapy and radiation, as well as a double mastectomy,

completing her treatment in June 2023 and having remained cancer-free since.

"My outlook on life is a lot different, I would say," she said. "I mean, I have my own struggles still with day-to-day stuff, but I'm so appreciative to have her, to have my husband, just to wake up every morning."

Simpson's mother, Cheryl Shackleton, said that through it all, her daughter has faced this challenge with strength and courage.

"We are so proud of the woman she is and the bravery she continues to exhibit every day, not only for herself but for those starting out on the same difficult journey," Shackleton said.

Noting that her entire family has been incredibly supportive of her through her journey, Simpson said that her husband, Marc Simpson, was her biggest cheerleader.

"My husband was wonderful," she said. "Find yourself a great support system because that's huge, someone who's going to tell



Nikki Simpson was newly married to her husband, Marc, and pregnant with their daughter, Penelope, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

you that you're beautiful every day when you're bald and have no eyelashes or eyebrows."

Asked about what advice

she would give to those going through something similar to her own experience, Nikki Simpson said that it is important to stay

positive, a tip she got from her mother-in-law.

"Allow yourself to feel your feelings, but don't stay there," Simpson said.



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WOMEN'S HEALTH

The mammography units are licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health - Radiation Control Program.

Bushels of benevolence

Local friend groups deliver hope and healing products to patients

By Stacey Marcus

» Correspondent

It's no secret that the power of friendship can light up the darkest days. The Beatles expressed its wattage in their iconic song "With a Little Help From My Friends." Who can forget clasping hands with their bestie and belting, "I get by with a little help from my friends"?

We talked with three local groups built on the foundation of friendships that are doling out baskets and bags brimming with healing products and messages of hope for people with all types of cancer.

Tough Warrior Princesses

In 2006, Sherri Ziomek was diagnosed with breast cancer. She was 37 and had a 5-year-old son and

2-year-old twin daughters.

"I did what every woman does. I turned to my girlfriends," Ziomek said. "They supported me and were amazing."

Ziomek and two of those friends, Patty Mellon and Cheryl Woodsom, founded Tough Warrior Princesses in 2010.

They started by putting together baskets filled with products and information and setting a goal to give to local woman.

"We wanted to show them love," Ziomek said.

The baskets started small but are now valued at \$650. Along with healing essentials, the baskets contain gift cards for gas and groceries and places like CVS, fuzzy blankets, candles and lotions from Amesbury business Farm + Sea, and mandala coloring books.

In the first years, they started small, curating and distributing 20-25 baskets. Last year, they gave out 200 baskets. This year, they are on track to distribute 300 baskets. All in all, they have gifted over 1,600 baskets.

"It's TWP magic. It just happens," Ziomek said.

"We love what we do," she said of herself and her fellow warriors. "It keeps getting bigger and bigger."

Their focus is on the North of Boston region along with southern New Hampshire and Maine. The all-volunteer group is governed by 10 board members and welcomes more volunteers to donate, plan a fundraiser, attend a fundraiser, drive someone to chemotherapy, jump aboard meal trains or otherwise pitch in.

Tough Warrior Princesses recently rented space

on Market Street in Amesbury, where they hold monthly warrior meetings that feature coffee conversations and connections. Board member Vicky Sherwood leads a monthly restorative yoga session in Newburyport.

"Cancer doesn't discriminate, so we don't," Ziomek said.

For more information, visit toughwarriorprincess.com.

Friends for Friends

Friends for Friends originally began as an offshoot of the Relay for Life in Boston and became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2022. President Sue Muise notes that most of the 11-member board of Friends for Friends was on a Cape Ann Relay for Life team that raised around \$100,000 for the American Cancer Society over 10 years.

The group of friends began creating comfort baskets for people receiving chemotherapy. Today, Friends for Friends curates bags that contain a plethora of healing products, including lotions, mouthwash, lemon drops, gift cards, a warm blanket and socks, a mug and tea, and a journal and pen. The bags are delivered to Addison Gilbert Hospital's chemo infusion center each month.

Friends for Friends held their first fundraiser in January, raising \$5,000 selling Super Bowl squares. The group is planning a future 50-50 fundraiser along with applying for local and national grants.

"We want to help people in the community know they are not alone," Muise said.

They include a personal note in each bag that tells the recipient about Friends for Friends.

"We want people to know that there are people in the community who care,"



Courtesy photo

Tough Warrior Princesses is giving out 300 curated Warrior Baskets to cancer patients this year.

Muise said.

A retired nurse, she notes that the grassroots nonprofit is hoping to spread the word.

"Nothing would make me happier than to help more people on the North Shore," she said.

Donations to Friends for Friends can be made via Venmo, @FriendsforFriends, or by mailing a check in care of Sue Lovasco, 24 South St., Rockport, MA 01966.

Grateful Friends

It all started with a phone call. Gwen Mahan Ryan called her friend Lee Miraglia to share the news that she had been diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. Miraglia informed her that she had been just diagnosed with lung cancer.

"We were paralyzed for a moment and laughed a little, but we promised each other we would compare notes after our surgeries," Ryan said.

When the friends got together, they shared an appreciation for the support of family and friends. They thought about people who did not have a circle of support and realized that there was an untouched opportunity to help people.

With the help of SCORE Business Mentoring, the duo developed a business plan for a group that they planned to call Two Grateful

Friends before they were advised to open the group by dropping the "Two."

Ryan reports that they are still doing that what they started doing a decade ago, making baskets and giving financial support to adult cancer patients in Essex and Middlesex counties. They started out curating baskets for individual needs and realized that people also had financial needs like grocery bills, water bills, keeping the lights on, insurance bills and mortgage payments.

If she could give baskets with a note to everyone in need, it would make her heart sing.

Grateful Friends President Becky Beckman said that right before the COVID-19 lockdowns, they were planning a gala at Danversport Yacht Club that had 400 people signed up to see Livingston Taylor before they had to cancel.

Today, the Beverly-based nonprofit has a robust board of directors and a cadre of volunteers. Beckman is hoping to bolster monthly memberships and recruit ambassadors to get the word out in the community.

Grateful Friends will be celebrating 10 years of being grateful at a fall luncheon on Tuesday, Oct. 22, at noon at Ferncroft Country Club in Middleton. Tickets are \$40. Visit gratefulfriends.org to purchase or learn more.

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Knitting for a cause while waiting for a cure



By Caroline Enos

» cenos@northhofboston.com

A nationwide network of volunteer knitters working to support breast cancer patients has spread into Danvers. Their work: creating an alternative to traditional breast prostheses called “knitted knockers.”

These knitted or crocheted “knockers” are meant to feel more like real breasts than other types of prostheses. They are soft, washable and easy to wear with a bra.

More than 875,000 knockers have been provided to breast cancer patients for free through the nonprofit Knitted Knockers since 2015. Founder, breast cancer survivor and Washington resident Barbara Demorest said that the knockers are meant to help lift patients’ confidence and bring back a small sense of normalcy after undergoing a mastectomy.

“This brings passion and purpose,” Demorest said. “We have people in nursing homes thriving because they have a purpose in making these and helping someone else. And then we hear from the recipients who can’t

believe that a complete stranger has done this work.

“I feel the love,” she said. “It’s just astounding to me.”

Roughly half of the women who have mastectomies choose not to undergo breast reconstruction surgery afterward, Demorest said. For some, it’s because they will face complications. Others just don’t want breasts that feel oddly hard and heavy, which can be the case after reconstruction.

Knitted Knockers come in different cup sizes and colors, including a range of skin tones, and are stuffed with polyester fiber fill.

Demorest first heard about them from her doctor. He said that she likely wouldn’t want a regular prosthesis, so she asked her good friend to knit her one.

“It was soft. It was light. It was beautiful,” Demorest said.

These knockers are made by more than 6,000 volunteers across the country.

In Danvers, Diane Moore has become a state supplier.

Moore has crafted hundreds of pairs of knockers since she began making

them about five years ago. She does not have a personal connection to breast cancer, but she wanted to use her craft to help others after hearing about Knitted Knockers at a women’s group she attends.

“I am a knitter who knits all the time. You can only make so many scarves and shawls, and kids don’t want sweaters anymore,” Moore said. “I wanted to keep busy.”

Moore sends the knockers she makes to doctors and patients around Massachusetts. Because Knitted Knockers relies on its volunteer knitters to supply their own areas with their creations, there is a good chance that Moore’s work has directly helped some of her neighbors.

She has also donated knockers to doctors in other states and while visiting Puerto Rico.

“It’s important to get the word out to women that there’s something to help them to feel better about themselves, look better and be comfortable,” Moore said.

To learn more about Knitted Knockers and how to donate or receive a pair, visit knittedknockers.org.

Courtesy of Knitted Knockers
The nonprofit Knitted Knockers donates thousands of pairs of a knitted alternative to regular breast prosthetics each year to patients who have undergone mastectomies.

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"Wonder Woman," modeled by Cynthia Keefe, created by Jevine Lane.

LANI SHUMWAY
PHOTOGRAPHY/
Courtesy photos



Displaying confidence

The Bra-zaa Fashion Show and Sale was held on Friday, Sept. 6, at Dew Collective on State Street in Newburyport.

Models ranging in age from 30 to 80 strutted down the catwalk in 29 one-of-a-kind art bras created by 23 designers.

"The show, in its second year, has proven to be a wonderfully supportive and bonding event for the designers, models and the audience," organizer and breast cancer survivor Cynthia Keefe said. "Many of the looks were inspired by or created in honor of loved ones who have had cancer."

The event raised more than \$2,300 for Tough Warrior Princesses, an Amesbury-based organization that provides support to women affected by cancer.



"Antiquatitties," modeled by Angela Walsh, created by Tina Robillard.

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"Cacophony of Fall," created by Lisa Greene at Beach Plum Flower Shop, modeled by Ashley Souza.



"Insect Armor," created and modeled by Beki Ferrari.



"Gold Inside You," modeled by Christine Elise, created by Cynthia Keefe.



"Super Woman," modeled by Kim Richards, created by Caryn Wilson.



"Queen of Hearts," modeled and created by Jenna Desrochers.



EDUCATION IS THE BEST FORM OF PREVENTION



s a l e m s t a t e . e d u

Restorative reads

Local booksellers recommend variety of healing titles

By Stacey Marcus

» Correspondent

In the words of Stephen King, “Books are a uniquely portable magic.”

Whether you are looking for a gift for someone who is going through a hard time or navigating stormy waters yourself, a book is a timeless treasure that can help heal.

Lucas Cotterman, the co-owner of Dogtown Books in Gloucester, thinks that books are truly essential to human life.

“In terms of healing, books are often invaluable,” he said. “They can be a needed mental escape from the very real medical drama that surrounds those diagnosed with a disease, and they can also be a bridge or connection to stories of others who have coped with similar circumstances.”

His first pick is “Gratitude” by Oliver Sacks. It’s short and a great read, Cotterman said.

“Sacks was an absolutely brilliant neurologist and author who was diagnosed with cancer later in life,” Cotterman said. “This is his reckoning with his mortality and, as the title suggests, his gratitude to those in his life who had made an impact on him.”

For those struggling with literally anything in their lives, Cotterman often recommends “When Things Fall Apart” by Pema Chodron. Chodron is an American-born Tibetan Buddhist who is just a big ball of compassion and joy. “When Things Fall Apart” is very Buddhist in its approach — moving toward fear and anxiety to understand it — and a great handbook for

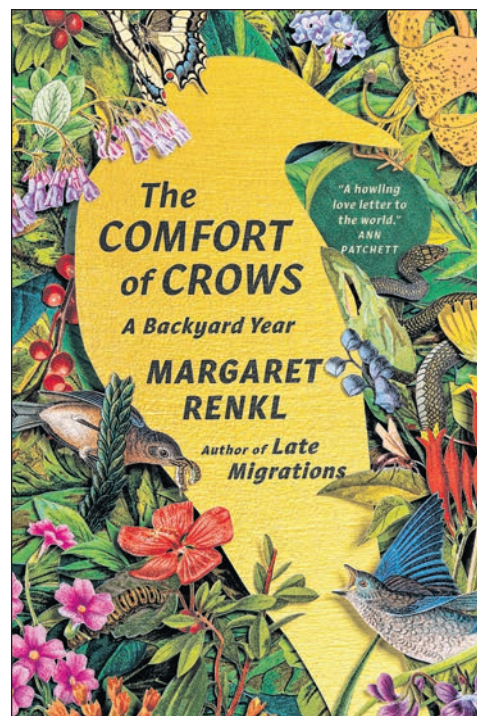
tough times.

Staying with the Buddhist theme, Cotterman gives a thumbs up to Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese monk who writes in very plain language.

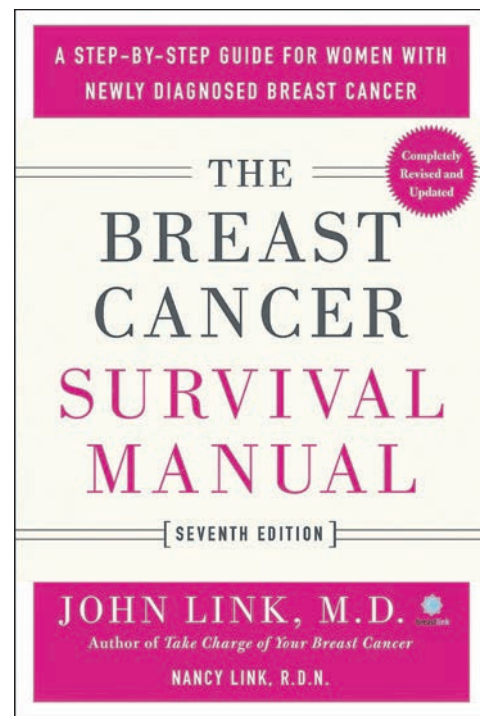
“His ‘how to’ series is great, with books on how to relax, how to eat and how to smile,” Cotterman said. “They are deceptively deep in spite of their simple packaging. Short, inspiring and easy to slip in your pocket.”

Lastly, Cotterman thinks it is beneficial to “read to get away from it all.”

“If it’s Stephen King or Tolstoy. Doesn’t matter. Read what makes you happy,” he said. “The most important advice imparted to me was that you are not alone. If you find that connection through reading someone else’s story or meet someone new who likes to



Tribune News Service photo



MacMillan Publishers photo

read what you read, do it.”

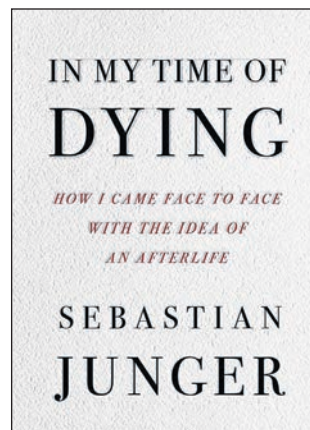
Sue Little, owner of Jabberwocky Bookshop in Newburyport, agrees. Getting lost in a good story — like a mystery or a thriller — a story you don’t want to put down and can’t wait to get back to can help people going through treatment.

“A good book takes you out of your every day, and while immersed in it, totally quiets the monkey mind, the worry and sadness and stress that can go along with a cancer diagnosis,” Little said.

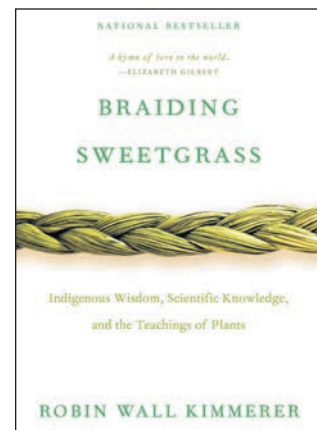
She notes that sometimes when going through difficult times, it can be hard to concentrate.

“Reading a poem or short essay with your morning coffee and stopping to reflect can be a very healing practice,” she said.

She recommends any of Mary Oliver’s poetry books or, for a marvelous anthology, “The Poetry of Impermanence, Mindfulness, and Joy,” edited by John Brehm. She also suggests maybe trying Ross Gay’s “The Book of Delights,” which she describes as a truly uplifting book of short two- or three-page lyrical essays reminding us to make space in our lives for simple pleasures.



Simon & Schuster photo



Milkweed Editions photo

Little also recommends two books full of the wisdom that comes from connecting with the natural world around us, another time-honored path to healing both body and soul.

“Braiding Sweetgrass” by Robin Wall Kimmerer is a beautiful, scientific, sacred, historical journey into the world of plants and our relationship with nature,” she said. “The Comfort of Crows” by Margaret Renkl combines stunning essays through one full year in her backyard and thoughtful ruminations on life as we live it today.”

Two new memoirs that Little said should bring hope, inspiration and introspection are “A Life Impossible: Living With ALS:

Finding Peace and Wisdom Within a Fragile Existence” by Steve Gleason and “In My Time of Dying: How I Came Face to Face With the Idea of an Afterlife” by Sebastian Junger. Two books that Little suggests on cancer itself are “The Breast Cancer Survival Manual, Seventh Edition” by John Link and “The Beat Cancer Kitchen” by Chris Wark.

Olivia Renzi from The Purple Couch Bookshop in North Andover adds “Wintering: The Power of Rest and Retreat in Difficult Times” by Katherine May to the list, noting that a lot of people going through hard times gravitate to the book. She also said that Gretchen Rubin’s book “The Happiness Project” is inspiring.

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A daughter's fight for her mom and herself

Sheryl A. Razney

My daughter, Vanessa Baca, is without a doubt the strongest person I know.

She is always striving to do her best, whether it's excelling in the classroom, her career or in the many sports she plays. Vanessa loves all sports, particularly basketball. She always liked competition and gave it her all.

During her college years, she started boxing. She became passionate about it and began to fight competitively. In 2019 at age 31, Vanessa fought in the fundraiser Haymakers for Hope, which raises money for cancer. She won the fight. She actually fought for me as I was diagnosed at age 55 with breast cancer, Stage 0 ductal carcinoma in situ.

In October 2022, Vanessa felt a lump in her breast. She thought maybe it had to do with her cycle, so she proceeded to wait a few weeks. Given my own history, I wanted her examined immediately. Fortunately, her physical was the following week. A mammogram was ordered. The radiologist saw a mass, and Vanessa was biopsied right then.

On Nov. 8, 2022, the diagnosis was Stage 2 triple-negative breast cancer. It was not in her lymph nodes.

Knowing I had breast cancer, I certainly was aware my daughter could possibly be diagnosed with it. Never did I think she would be diagnosed at age 34! Vanessa was a new mom, and her little girl was only 18 months old. Vanessa's BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene tests (as well as mine) were completely negative. There is no breast cancer on my mother's side, but there is on my father's side.

Vanessa was in disbelief. "I am so healthy," she said. She was told by her

oncologist that she would need five months of grueling chemotherapy, then surgery. Now the chain of events began. In November, a port was placed in her chest for chemo. Shortly after, she went through the process of freezing her eggs. She had to inject herself with hormones to ripen the eggs. Once the eggs were ready, she had them retrieved.

During this time, I know inside she was sad and frustrated, but she only showed strength, poise and bravery. Vanessa's attitude, courage and perseverance were amazing.

Her first chemo began on Dec. 9, 2022. Working throughout her entire chemotherapy treatment was unbelievable. I know she said it helped her and it probably did, but it was a lot, considering what she was going through and the exhaustion she felt. Vanessa was truly in the "fight" of her life.

"I will beat this," she said. "I have to."

One of the hardest things for Vanessa was the loss of her hair during the chemo. Boy, could she wear a hat. She rocked many winter hats and baseball caps for months. They became part of her wardrobe, along with several chemo tops. The other difficult part of having chemo is the exhaustion she felt. She couldn't exercise due to the weakness and shortness of breath it caused. Never did she feel this physically weak. She would walk as much as she could, but sometimes she was just too tired.

Her wonderful husband, Eric, is extremely loving and supportive. His strength gave Vanessa strength, and her strength gave me strength! I knew every time Vanessa looked at her little girl, Clara, she would continue to gain strength and persevere.

Her final chemo treatment

was April 13, 2023, and in May, she had her first surgery, a bilateral mastectomy with placement of expanders. After surgery, Vanessa was told she could not work for six weeks. She told the doctor she would be fine to go back after two weeks, but the doctor reiterated six weeks. In August, Vanessa underwent reconstructive surgery, which entailed removing the expanders and placing bilateral breast implants. She did take oral chemo for three months following surgery, until the end of November 2023.

This cancer treatment took away one year of her life. But I am thrilled to say Vanessa is doing great. The appointments are less but still there — bloodwork drawn every six months and yearly visits to the surgeon and oncologist.

As a mom, it has been so difficult to watch my daughter go through something like this. While working at Massachusetts General Hospital, I was able to attend her many doctor's appointments and be with her for all her chemo treatments.

A friend of mine said to me, "Your daughter is so lucky to have you." My response was, "No, no. I am so lucky to have HER." She is a wonderful daughter and my best friend.

Time is precious. Life is precious.

As Vanessa says: "You know your body and if you think something is up, don't hesitate. Tell your doctor and be persistent. Do your self-exam and get your mammogram. Early detection is absolutely key."

Sheryl A. Razney lives in Peabody, where she raised her daughter. Vanessa Baca attended Bishop Fenwick High School and Bentley University and now lives in Ipswich with her husband and 3-year-old daughter.



ABOVE: Vanessa and Eric Baca are all smiles with their daughter, Clara.

LEFT: Sheryl Razney and her daughter, Vanessa Baca, are both breast cancer survivors.

Courtesy photos

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The benefits of breast cancer support groups

Millions of women across the globe are diagnosed with breast cancer each year. According to the World Cancer Research Fund International, breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women each year, with nearly 3 million new cases confirmed every 12 months.

Those figures are undoubtedly daunting, but they also tell a different story of perseverance and survival that can comfort women who have recently received a breast cancer diagnosis.

According to the World Cancer Research Fund, in 2020, there were 7.8 million women worldwide who had lived for at least five years after their breast cancer diagnosis. Indeed, survival rates for breast cancer have improved dramatically in recent decades.

Women often overcome the disease on account of their own personal resilience, but also by drawing on the experiences of others for inspiration and strength, namely through support groups.

Women recently diagnosed with breast cancer may be surprised to learn just how beneficial support groups can be.

► Support groups can help women overcome the mental challenges of a diagnosis. A 2019 study published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology* examined the effectiveness of support groups for women with breast cancer and their caregivers. The study found that participation in a support group can help to reduce feelings of depression, anxiety and more while also making women more capable of adapting to their situation.

► Support group participation during treatment can have a lasting effect. A longitudinal study published in the journal *Psycho-Oncology* in 2014 found that social support of breast cancer patients was positively predictive of better physical and mental health-related quality of life at three-year follow-up appointments for breast cancer patients. That means the benefits of joining



a breast cancer support group are not only evident during treatment, but endure long after treatment, as well.

► Support groups can be informative on multiple levels. Breastcancer.org notes that

participation in a support group can teach women diagnosed with the disease how to become better advocates for themselves. That's a notable benefit, as women confronting the mental health side effects of cancer treatment,

including depression and anxiety, may feel as though they lack agency. In addition, by listening to others in a support group, women can identify new resources for understanding their disease and treatment plan.

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We're Banking on a Cure.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

But for survivors, it is every single day. We celebrate those who have shown and continue to show courage and perseverance in facing cancer head on.

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