

STORIES OF HOPE



The Shoes that Saved My Life

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In the Fall of 2006, I bought a pair of green sandals with a cute kitten heel. I enjoyed the color and style and made sure they were comfortable, but it never occurred to me to examine the sole. Several days later I put them on and headed down my basement stairs. One step onto the threshold and out went my feet as though I'd stepped onto ice—one foot went back and the other scraped the wall in front of me. Fortunately, the basement stairs are very narrow, and I was able to catch myself by grabbing both walls of the passageway.

Thus began an astonishing journey.

After my narrow escape, I felt fine, except for some discomfort in my left wrist, elbow and right ankle. I figured I should check myself out, primarily for the twinge in my left forearm. So, I began with a referral to see a hand surgeon who wanted to give me cortisone injections, but she wasn't sure what site to use. Next, another hand specialist who wasn't sure the problem had to do with my hand-- maybe it was tennis elbow? My referral was to a neurologist to confirm a diagnosis, but he only tested for my wrist and not my elbow. He concluded there was no nerve damage in my wrist and ordered an MRI to see if I had a pinched nerve in my back. The MRI came back. It showed no pinched nerve-- but it picked up two tiny spots in my right lung. My internist sent me for further tests and an eventual biopsy. The diagnosis: lung cancer!

Fortunately, my Internist sent me to a top-notch surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital who scheduled my surgery for three weeks later. Because of my early diagnosis, he was able to remove just the two small tumors in two lobes and a small section of tissue around the sites. They were small, early stage, and contained—they hadn't spread. My oncologist felt I didn't need any further treatment as did her colleague. My internist reflected on all the events that led to this fortunate outcome and said to me, "Somebody up there really likes you!"

I went home from the hospital to recuperate.

Most people would say there's nothing fortunate about getting lung cancer. In fact, it was horrifying, shocking and upsetting to wrestle with the diagnosis and try to figure out what it meant for my life and life expectancy. As I came to terms with it, I also found that the experience gave me a different level of awareness of how lucky I have been. My husband, Richard and daughter, Micaela went to all of my doctor's visits with me. My son, David and his wife, Amy arranged for food to be delivered. My daughters Claire and Robin came from San Jose and Chicago to nurse me in the hospital and when I came home. My dearest friends rallied to help me in every way possible, from researching the latest treatments and outcomes of lung cancer to bringing me dinner and keeping me company. Their

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extreme kindness made me vow to be a better friend to someone in need. So many people expressed concern, good wishes and a desire to be involved and updated about my recovery. I was so moved by how connected all of our lives are, even extending to good people we've never met.

All of us know someone who has had lung cancer. Most of us have stereotyped lung cancer: I know I have. It seemed like a disease reserved for elderly men who smoked for a lifetime. This isn't true. It can happen to any one of us. This disease touches all of our lives. It might be a member of your family, a friend or a neighbor. Perhaps you are a survivor. Or, perhaps it's someone you feel you know. Did you experience the same shock and unfairness I did when learning that Dana Reeves, a young non-smoker, died after years of heroically caring for her husband Christopher Reeves following his riding accident? Perhaps after inviting Peter Jennings into your home every evening to bring you the news, you too were surprised by his illness and death. Remember how charming and funny Suzanne Pleshette was on The Bob Newhart Show? For me, no one had a voice like Beverly Sills. All of these well-known celebrities suffered and died from lung cancer. That's why early detection is so important.

In the days after I came home from the hospital, I worked to get my strength back. I did laps around my bedroom for exercise. I used my recovery time to reflect on my life, on what was important and how to spend my time. I found inspiration through a book recommended to me by a tour guide, Tolga, whom I'd met while on vacation in Turkey. I emailed him about my lung cancer. He wrote back, quite unsentimentally, and said to read *The Alchemist*, a fable by Brazilian author Paulo Coelho. It's a book about learning to read the omens strewn along life's path, and, above all, following our dreams.

This wise guide said it was for me to make something of my experience. After I finished reading the book, I realized that the key point was about transforming commonplace events into something of value, making something of each and every experience. This message spurred me to think about how I could find a way to make something worthwhile and life affirming out of having had lung cancer, an experience that on the surface was of no value whatsoever.

The answer was Upstage Lung Cancer
We won't stop until we Upstage Lung Cancer!

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