

INgratitude



I was busy ending lymphoma in Zachary's honor when cancer decided to tap me on the shoulder (breast). I remain INgratitude...

by Ann St. John

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by Ann St. John

August 16, 2010

Cancer is my friend

Cancer is my friend

Breast cancer. Specifically invasive ductile carcinoma.

We're in this together. And for the record, I didn't want to be your friend. You scare me and you terrorize my loved ones.

And I know to be careful who I choose as an adversary because it will define me in ways untold. So here we are, you and me. It doesn't feel like a dark room, maybe an open field with tall grass. For reasons unexplainable the sun is out and it is warm. I know you will raise me up and give me an arena in which to grow and be kind and help and yes, as with Zachary I am committed to my heart growing no matter the outcome.

So here we go! Amazing how life is lived alone. And so much together. At least in my tribe. So when it gets hard I will find my happy place and those I love will help me and our lives will be richer for the experience.

So thank you my adversary. I find you worthy.



What can you do?

Thank you all for your thoughts, love and concern. Please feel free to leave comments here or e-mail me directly at astjohn@stjohnjobs.com. Did I mention cards? I love those too (210 E. Gilbert, Bloomington, IN 47408).

I know many of you want to call me right now but my time (damn tests) and energy is focused on the journey. I will update you frequently here. In gratitude...

Welcome to Ann's World

I recently found a lump in my breast. The doctor did a biopsy of the lump and determined that I have Stage I Invasive Ductile Carcinoma aka breast cancer. For those of you itching to google my diagnosis, you will find that I have the most common of breast cancers. 80% of women with breast cancer receive the same diagnosis. The great news is that I caught it early and I am in the best shape of my life. The major concern is that they staged the tumor as Grade III on a scale of one to three with three being the most aggressive. Obviously this tumor picked the wrong person! What is ahead? I will be having a lumpectomy, chemotherapy and radiation. This process will take about six months with three being radiation and three being chemotherapy. I have started this blog to help answer questions and keep everyone informed near and far. We have assembled a terrific medical team and I am grateful that some of the same physicians (Dr's Vose, Repetto and Joyce) are a part of it. Check back for further updates... In gratitude...

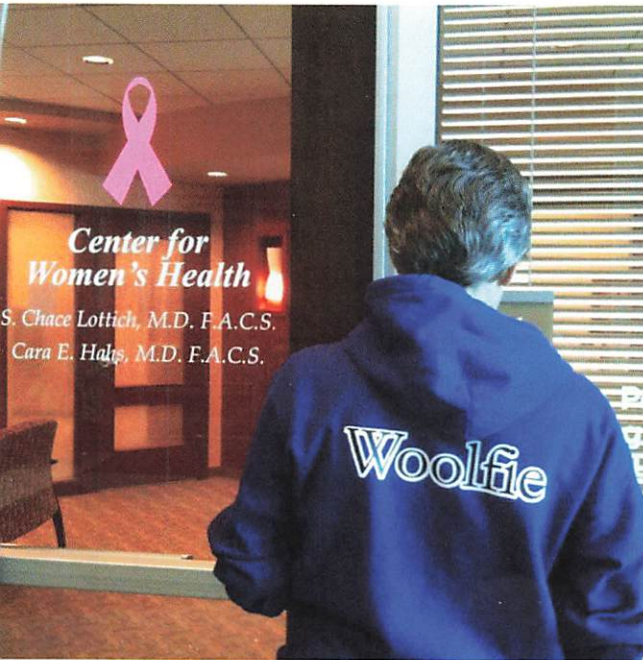
August 18, 2010

Forward Motion

Everything that could go right is going right! I am getting excellent care, physicians normally booked for months suddenly have appointments available, and all further tests have had great results. My lumpectomy is scheduled for the afternoon of Monday, August 23rd. The cancer will be "getting out" and my sentinel lymph node will be checked. I won't know until later on Monday if I need to spend the night in the spa (hospital).

Thank you to everyone for your kind thoughts and prayers. INgratitude...

PS You can subscribe to this blog (look to the right of the page and you will see the words subscribe to this post. Click on the link.) Updates will then arrive in your e-mail.



August 19, 2010

Coincidence

I found this flower growing out the cracks in the concrete. The only conclusion I can come to now is that the world is one random, senseless activity followed by another random, senseless activity.

It's just a coincidence. I'm 49 years old. I exercise 4 times a week. Half of the food I eat is organic. I have no history of breast cancer in my family. And yet I have cancer in my left breast and a right breast that is described as "active" but cancer free.

It's just a coincidence. Six months ago, I decided to get in great shape and dropped 20 pounds in the process. Without the weight loss, the doctor told me they wouldn't have found my cancer for another year. Without the weight loss, I would probably have not found the cancer in my self exam. Did I mention that the Doctor elaborated that without treatment I would be dead in three years?

It's just a coincidence. When the



surgical nurse called the breast cancer oncologist's office that there had been a cancellation five minutes earlier or I probably wouldn't have gotten in for months.

Ok ok ok! So maybe it's not a totally random world!!!! But why do I have cancer???

Dear Ann, stay awake in 'class' and you might just find out!!!

Stay tuned....INgratitude...



August 23, 2010

Annie Get Your Gun

No, this is not an NRA ad but it is a great photo about the day I have planned. I have cancer in my sights and I am removing it from my body. At 10:30am I am having a wire guide inserted in my breast to assist the surgeon. At 2:00pm I have my lumpectomy at the surgery center. We will update more after the surgery. INgratitude...

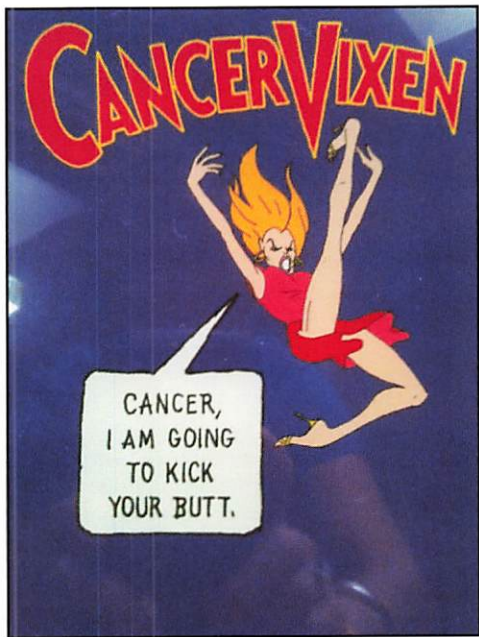
Best Possible Outcome

Ann's surgery finished in a very quick 45 minutes. The tumor was removed with clean margins and her sentinel lymph node was cancer free. The physician seemed please. She is sleeping and should be awake soon after we add espresso to her IV. INgratitude...

August 24, 2010

Ann After Surgery

WOW!!!! Ann St John has cancer. That's not a sentence I ever thought I'd say!! And I keep thinking: This is a very aggressive cancer, I caught it in a self exam and this kind of cancer if untreated would have killed me in three years. If I had not caught it, the physicians believe it would have been another year before they would have caught it. IF that would have happened we would have had a very, very different fight on our hands. So what's the point???? Control the controllables. It shows up everywhere. I can control my diet, exercise, attitude, I can (listen up ladies) do self breast exams. I cannot control my genetics. Control what you can control. That's the point! So every time they stick me with a needle and say 'this is gonna hurt' I say THANK YOU! I practice being grateful. I intended to have a great surgery and get to go home. Does everything then go my way?? Hell No. But my life sure is better for it! How am I doing today? Check out the cancer vixen. I am feeling great today and focused on my recovery. Tomorrow is my first appointment with the oncologist in Indianapolis. And speaking of life being better---I have all of you. Thank you for being your wonderful, loving selves and holding me in your hearts. INgratitude, Ann



August 25, 2010

First Meeting with Oncologist

I spent the morning with Dr. Kathy Miller a breast cancer oncologist at Indiana University in the IU Simon Cancer Center. We have a good plan for treatment which includes hormone therapy medication for 5 years and radiation. The final decision on whether or not to do chemotherapy will hinge on gene typing of my tumor. This test takes about three weeks. In the meantime, I am seriously considering starting a new blog called UNgrateful for you to track my upcoming knee surgery. Most of you are probably as shocked as I am, that in addition to my cancer diagnosis, a piece of cartilage in my knee decided to render my left leg useless for running and other athletic pursuits. The good news is that the oncologist cleared me to get my knee scoped early next Tuesday morning. What else could possibly go wrong? Actually, so much went right today. I am happy.

INgratitude...

Ann

INgratitude

August 27, 2010

Just Kidding

We thought the lymph nodes were negative but wait, there is more. Upon further pathology, the sentinel lymph node tested positive for metastatic cancer. Huh? It is now a new ball game. I have Stage 2 cancer because my cancer is now on the move. I feel like I have gone from "pretend" cancer to real cancer. Where do I go from here? Knee surgery Tuesday and no, cancer is not in my knee. A piece of loose cartilage has inflamed my knee and it will be removed. Cancer treatment will begin as soon as we get the last test results. The course of treatment remains the same; chemotherapy and radiation. The last test will determine how long and how strong the drugs will be for chemotherapy. We are at least 3 weeks away from the last test result. I will update again this weekend.

INgratitude...

Ann

August 29, 2010

Great Expectations

Dearest Ziggy bo,

Hello my grandson. Soon you will be out of 'captivity' and born into a pretty awesome world. I can't wait to hold you!

The irony of you being born the same month I start chemo is not lost on me. Life's great recycling program!! Were all terminal dear. None of us are getting out of here alive. Now having said that, my plan is to be at your wedding decades from now so don't get too excited. Grandma's not goin' anywhere if she can help it.

Your birth and my cancer do have me in a reflective moment. I've been thinking about what I want to teach you that I've learned so far in my life.

The first thing I've learned is that you'll have to learn all of this by yourself and I can't teach you a thing!! But that would make for a very short letter. ;-)

It's been my experience that you don't have to do much 'right' to have a lovely life. The first thing I think you need to do is to choose very carefully your life's partner and then treat them for the rest of your life like they ARE your best friend. In my experience if you don't get that right, the rest is kind of immaterial.

Second, spend less than you make.

Practice being kind to everyone.

If you cheat and don't get caught you're still a cheater.

You believe every single thing You tell yourself.

This is an important one. When I was in my mid 30's I tested this out in a way that changed my life. I always told myself that I wasn't good at math. I failed math in school. I couldn't multiply. The data clearly indicated that I was NOT good in math. One day in the afternoon at work I got tired of feeling stupid in math. I went to the conference room downstairs and wrote out all of my multiplication tables just like I was in third grade and I started saying them out loud. In an hour I knew my multiplication tables. I wasn't stupid! I told myself a story and I just believed it. Then I realized I was the author of this story and therefore I could change it any time I wanted to. You remember that son. The past does not have to determine your future. Given the ability to write our own stories you'd think we'd to a better job but that's another letter!

Manual labor, hard work, getting dirty is not above your dignity.

Use your 'powers' for good. No matter what they are. Use them for good

Be nice to the new kid in school. I know for a fact that they are scared. One kind word can change their world.

NO is a full sentence. If you need to expand it, you can say No Thank You. People will have lots of very odd ideas about how you should live.

Your life is not a democracy. It is a dictatorship. Own it. It's your body, your brains, your talents, your will. YOU are the author of your story.

Whining sucks your energy and does not change a situation. Don't bother.

Eat organic foods. It's much healthier for you.

Live in your sphere of influence. There is so much you can't do and also so much

you can do. Know the difference and use your energy to make the world better.

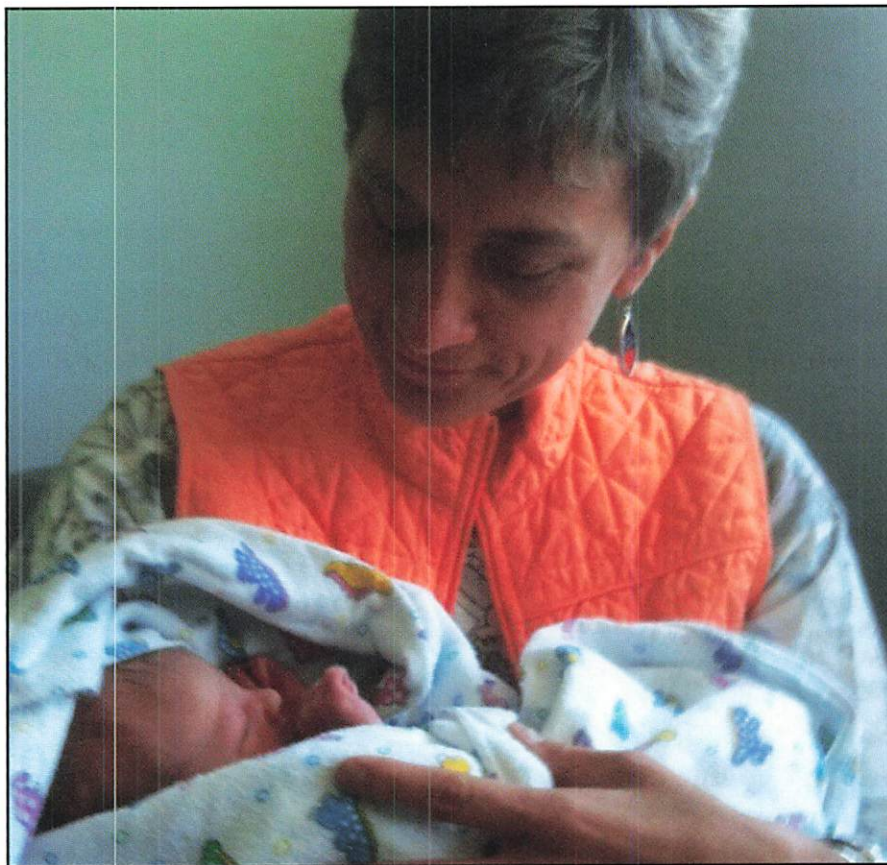
Turn off your TV and everything with a screen often. Reboot in nature.

Love people in your care. If you are a camp counselor, a lab buddy, a CEO, love the people in your care. Be good to them.

YOU have the power to interpret data. I have cancer. That is true. I choose to let your Uncle Zachary who died of cancer recently be my teacher. He said, "I am going to be gracious and grateful and thankful. And not let life's miracles pass by unacknowledged.' It's a beautiful world! I can't wait to meet yo

I love you so much already,

Grandma



September 5, 2010
Welcome Augustine Zachary Greulich

August 31, 2010

Surgery No. 2 Done (Knee)

Just a quick update on Ann. Her knee surgery was successfully completed this morning. The surgery lasted about 35 minutes and it removed loose cartilage and smoothed out the remaining cartilage. She is resting comfortably (the press says that about all the important people) and will be doing so for the next couple of days. She is hoping the anesthetic will wear off by tomorrow so that she can actually complete a full sentence (just kidding!).

Her spirits are great and she is focused and excited to have her knee fixed. She remains INgratitude...

September 4, 2010

Brave Women

I did something this week I hope you never do. I went into the same room with the same oncologist as our son had in 2007. My heart went out to Dr. Joyce. She is a good and kind woman. She loved Zachary as so many of us did. For those of you just tuning into the story, Zachary died on May 4, 2008. It was a Sunday.

The wind is blowing right now. I am sitting on my back deck where Zachary would be a part of family dinners. I can feel his presence in the wind. Not a day goes by where I don't miss him.

Dr. Joyce asks if I am OK being in the same room we shared with Zachary. 'I'm OK' I tell her. Whatever the hell that means.

I am crying now. I miss him. They say that crying is cleansing but I just find it makes my eyes look like bugs.

The cancer has spread to my lymph nodes. It's on the move. The standard protocol in breast cancer requires another surgery when the sentinel node contains cancer. This second surgery involves removing the rest of the lymph nodes in my arm near the surgery site.

Why? The physicians want to know where the cancer stops. I appreciate that the physicians want more info but I am much



more concerned about using my arm for the rest of my life. Unfortunately, many women who have their lymph nodes removed end up with lymphedema in their arm. Lymphedema is a swelling of the arm that can be painful, impede use and make air travel difficult.

Since Dr. Kathy Miller (breast cancer oncologist at IU) in Indianapolis is the 'quarterback' I suggest we get her input. Dr. Joyce agrees and leaves the room immediately to call Dr. Miller. The stars must have been aligned because Dr. Miller comes to the phone right then to discuss the second surgery.

Dr. Joyce is visibly stunned when she comes

back into the room. Dr. Miller suggested no additional surgery. She based her recommendation on a recent study of 893 women. This study involved half of the women with breast cancer electing not to have their lymph nodes removed. The study concluded that there was no difference in cancer recurrence between women who had their lymph nodes removed and those who did not.

She tells me that this is the advantage of having Dr. Miller on the team.

Then Dr. Joyce really rocked me. She pointed out how Brave those women were to go against protocol and participate in that study so that now we have this information. She went on to ask, “Do you know how Brave they were??? They could easily have died.”

In a week, my 16-year-old niece Alex St John is participating in Hoosiers Out Run Cancer. She is walking in memory of Zachary and because she loves her Aunt Ann. I am asking for your help. Not for Zachary or myself but for ‘those women who were so brave.’

Hoosiers Out Run Cancer is sort of a stupid name. (No offense really.) We're not going to Out Run anything! We're going to get smarter with research. Our knowledge base is advancing every single day. Breast cancer specifically is being treated in radically different ways not because we Ran but because we Research. That costs money.

There are ‘Brave people with cancer’ who are quite literally putting their lives on the line to better understand cancer. What better way to honor them than to continue to support their efforts?

Please consider, sending a check today to Hoosiers Outrun Cancer (tax deductible), in care of Ann St John, 210 E Gilbert, Bloomington, IN 47408. While you're at it, ask a couple more people to send a check along with yours.

I'm not fast enough to out run cancer (after my knee surgery I could not out run a snail). I am thankful for all those brave enough to risk their lives for those of us who are or will one day be diagnosed with cancer.

Ingratitude for you, my niece Alex and Zachary,
Ann

September 10, 2010

The Study

Some of you have asked about why I have decided to not have the rest of the lymph nodes in my arm removed. I thought it would be helpful to post the easy to read analysis on the study I based my decision. INgratitude, Ann

Axillary Lymph Node Dissection: Is it Necessary?

July 14, 2010

From the Dr. Susan Love Research Foundation

When a woman has a lumpectomy or mastectomy, her surgeon will also look to see if there are affected lymph nodes under the arm (axilla). For decades this was done with a procedure called an axillary lymph node dissection, which involves removing about 10-15 of the 30-60 lymph nodes under the arm. After they are removed, the nodes are examined under a microscope. If the pathologist identifies cancer cells it means that there is a greater statistical risk of there being microscopic cells elsewhere in the body and therefore a higher risk of a recurrence. If no cancer cells are seen, the risk is lower that there are microscopic cells elsewhere in the body. This estimate of risk is used to decide on whether and how much treatment in addition to surgery is needed.

Now, women are just as likely to have a procedure called a sentinel node biopsy, which identifies the first nodes that drain the area of the tumor and therefore are the node or nodes most likely to have cancer cells. Because a positive sentinel node suggests that there will be other positive nodes in the axilla, the current standard of care is for women who have a positive (cancerous) sentinel node to go on to have a full lymph node dissection. But findings from a study presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Annual Meeting in June could change this.

The Phase III study was conducted at the John Wayne Cancer Institute in Santa Monica, California. It enrolled 991 women who were scheduled to have a

lumpectomy followed by radiation and whose sentinel lymph node biopsy identified a positive sentinel node. The women were randomly assigned to one of two groups. One group went on to have an axillary node dissection with removal of 10 or more additional lymph nodes (the standard of care). The other group had no additional lymph nodes removed. Both groups of women had radiation therapy to their breasts and axilla. The researchers then followed the women to see whether those who had limited surgery had a greater chance of local recurrence.

After six years of follow up, the researchers found that, as a group, the women who had no additional surgery did the same as the women who had gone on to have the additional lymph nodes removed. Specifically, the five-year overall survival rate in patients undergoing axillary lymph node dissection was 91.9 percent compared to 92.5 percent for those who only had a sentinel node biopsy. Disease-free survival was 82.2 percent among the women who had the axillary lymph node dissection compared with 83.8 percent for the women who did not. The rate of local/regional recurrence was 4.3 percent among women who had an axillary lymph node dissection and 3.4 percent among those who had only the sentinel node biopsy. None of these differences was statistically significant.

Currently, many surgeons routinely do an axillary node dissection in women who have a sentinel node that tests positive for cancer cells. While these results are very encouraging not enough women were enrolled in the study to make it definitive. However, it is the largest study of this type done to date, and it's important because it suggests that this additional surgery may not be necessary. And not doing the additional surgery would mean there were fewer women who were at risk of going on to develop lymphedema, numbness in the arm, and other side effects.

Is an axillary lymph node dissection ever necessary? It may still be needed if a woman has nodes that are palpable, a very large cancer, or a lymph node that is obviously positive. Nonetheless, this is one more study showing that more is not always better in treating breast cancer.

September 18, 2010

Unfolding

Next week is a big medical week. Monday I'll see the orthopedic surgeon to make sure that my knee is healing well. Yes, I am a very compliant patient. Really. Perhaps it's the only time that I can use Ann and compliant in the same sentence!

After the orthopod, I drive to Indianapolis to see my lead oncologist, Dr. Kathy Miller. She will lay out the chemotherapy and radiation plan and review the results of the test on my tumor.

Wednesday I head back to Dr. Lottich's office for outpatient surgery to insert my port. A port is put in to save me the pain and hassle of always using the veins in my arms for blood draws and chemotherapy. I have decided to name my port Sue Port...as in Support.....dang I crack myself up!!! This will be my second to last surgery. The last one will be to have Support removed.

I purposely have not been talking with other women and their stories about breast cancer. Of course I care about their stories. It's just that I want MY story to unfold as it does. I did have lunch with someone who was amazingly gracious and helpful to me. She didn't say this in exactly these words but what I got out of it was that when the oncologist tells you what appears to be 'little'



almost insignificant pieces of data LISTEN. DO NOT think they are talking about 'THOSE' women--they are not--they are talking about ME.

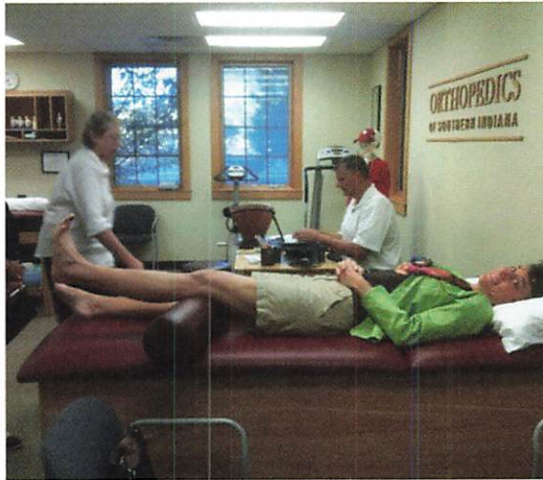
I recently told our son Samson that I thought cancer has made me nicer. He asked 'why?' So much used to matter to me. Is the person in front of me driving fast enough? Is my flight on time? Do I have any wrinkles in my clothes? You know, BIG deal things! :)

I have an added twist that Zachary died. I know this is for real. I get that. But I also am SO crazy happy when I come home and someone thought of me and there is a letter in my mailbox. When I think of Wednesday I think not just about the port and the fact that it will be my third surgery and I'm starting to look like a quilt.....I'm wondering what Doug and Sarah will bring me for dinner!

I'm shallow!!!! What can I say? But it works for me! I love the t-shirts people send, especially the funny ones! I'm feeling so loved! I know I'm 'supposed to' feel bad and I'm sure that will come but for now I'm pretty happy and feeling ALL of your LOVE.

Totally INgratitude,
Ann





September 20, 2010

Oncology Plan for Chemotherapy

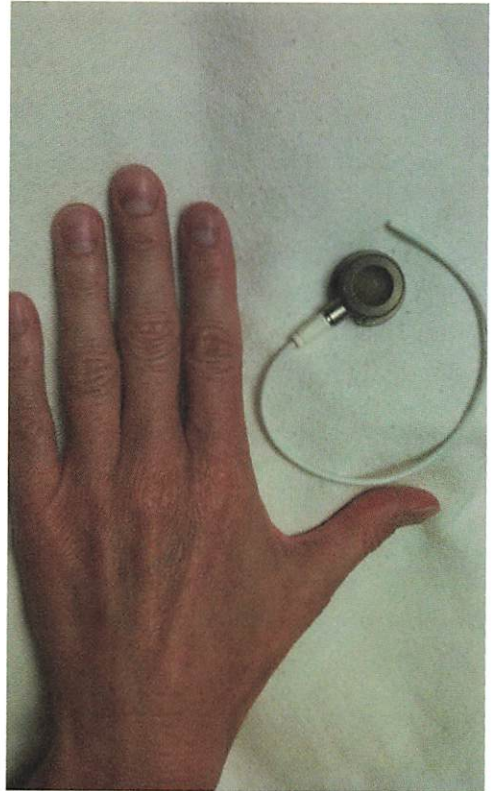
I just finished my meeting with Dr. Kathy Miller in Indianapolis. The bottom line is nothing has changed. Based on the oncogene type I am a candidate for chemotherapy. I hope to begin next Monday with my first treatment. I will have four cycles of chemotherapy every 3 weeks and will complete the treatment in 12 weeks total. Chemotherapy will be followed by radiation and hormone therapy. At this time all of my questions have been answered and I am determined to start as soon as possible. INgratitude, Ann

September 22, 2010

Sueport

I am having surgery in the next hour to have my new best friend implanted. She will be located near and dear to my heart...literally.

INgratitude,
Ann



INgratitude

September 24, 2010

Focus

The alarm goes off. It is 7:00am. I have now slept as long as possible. I get up. The first thing I notice is that the two hour nap yesterday and the NINE hours of sleep have left me still tired.

I get out of bed. I go into the bathroom where there is a large mirror. I start to examine my bandages from the surgery that I had a day ago. I am bruised. I hurt. I am swollen. My leg from a couple of weeks ago is still swollen despite my icing, elevating and thinking good thoughts. The left side of my chest looks no better than the bruised right as I focus on the 2.5 inch scar on the side of my breast.

I hate the way I look. I look scornfully in the mirror at my body and I think 'your chemo starts on Monday. You haven't even begun and look at you!!' I want to go back to bed but I don't. Instead I sit on the edge of the bathtub and well.....feel sorry for myself.

Michael looks at me. 'Honey??' 'Yes.' 'Where are you focused right now?' 'On my aches and pains.' 'How's that workin' for ya' pumpkin?' 'Not very well.' 'May I make a recommendation?' Now I have to insert that I'm debating whether or not this man is BRAVE or stupid even to look at me let alone speak and then on top of it to give advise but..... He goes on to say:

This is a relational practice you might want to do. Never ask yourself how you feel. Don't focus there. What you may want to affirm is 'I feel only Your presence. I feel only Your energy.' As you look around Ann, see that everything is transparent to the One truth, to the One energy, to the One light.'

A moment passes. I am debating whether or not to roll my eyes or try it. With nothing to lose I decide to try it. My day is totally transformed. I go from 'I cannot possibly get dressed' to 'I can't wait to get to work.' Yes, just like that. Who knows, it might even become a habit! I am reminded of Zachary's words. '.....I am not going to let life's miracles pass by unacknowledged.' Miracles really are everywhere.

The scars. The bruises. The cuts. The swelling. It doesn't go away Ann. It's just that the miracles don't disappear either. Focus on the miracles Ann. Focus on the One truth. FOCUS.
INgratitude,
Ann

September 28, 2010

All the emotions in one day...

Welcome to my first day of chemotherapy. Hello to my new friends Taxotere and Cytosan. They are my cocktail of choice for chemo. Picture yourself in a dank beige room with large dentist like chairs surrounded by folding chairs. Unfortunately, health precautions do not seem to encompass the Infusion Center. Each patient reuses the same blanket and the same pillow. I wish I was kidding but in light of the bed bug epidemic in Bloomington all I could think was WOW. Wait there is more, to get to the ugly room you have to pass the walk in clinic full of sick people with fevers. I miss Omaha. Take every emotion you have ever had and crunch it into a four hour period of time. That was my afternoon yesterday as I received my first chemotherapy treatment. It started at 2:30pm and ended at 6:30pm. I thought I was ready for chemo but my port has been freshly placed and it is sore and bruised. They still puncture your skin. It hurts. I had three different bags of fluid dripped into my body. The chemicals burned at first and that is when the emotions started. I had conflicting emotions; do not let these poisons into my pristine body contrasted by the thought that without these drugs I would be dead in three years. Last night I felt exhausted emotionally and physically. I was also really, really pissed off. I had no idea how many other drugs and shots were a part of chemo. I woke up this morning madder than when I went to bed. How did I feel when I woke up? My skin was itchy but otherwise I felt well. Nausea seems to be of greatest concern but at this point the anti-nausea medication is working well. The good news is that I am doing an unsolicited systems analysis on the medical practice where I am receiving treatment. I almost pity them.

INgratitude,

Ann

October 8, 2010

Everybody Has Their Story to Tell

I gotta be honest. I never thought of myself as vain. I wear close to no make up. Don't dye my hair. What you see is pretty much what you get.....

WRONG!!! Tell me I'm not going to have my hair and all of the sudden emotions rise up that I had no idea even existed.

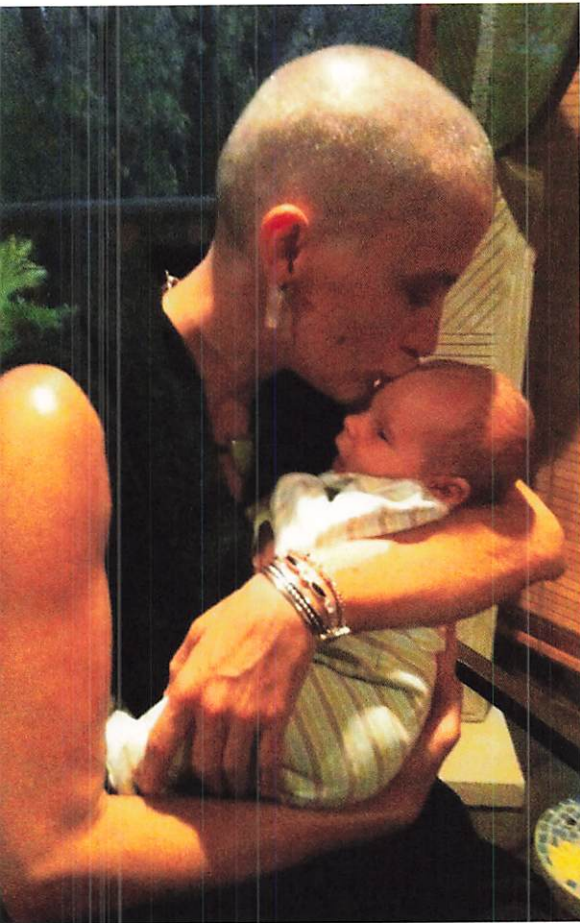
The pictures posted are the best ones taken. They don't show me crying while I was getting my locks cut off. And just to be really clear here, when I say crying I don't mean tearing up, I mean tears streaming down my face! I did NOT want to have my hair cut off!! Did NOT!!

I wish that I could describe how **VULNERABLE** I feel with no hair; there is **NO** where to hide. Interestingly I also feel smaller; almost invisible and not as in weight. It's very, very odd.

So, how did the first morning go??? Well, I got into the shower and the first thing that I did was get my shampoo and start shampooing my head! No, not kidding. But before that I woke up in the middle of the night and went into the bathroom and passed the mirror where some **BALD** stranger scared me to death!! Not funny. That's all I gotta say!

Some of the lessons I am learning or relearning are:

Life is gonna hand us all a certain hand to play. **HOW** I choose to play that hand is my choice. I don't get to decide the cards, just the attitude



Everybody has their story to tell. Everyone. When I am open to that and not wrapped up in mine I get to hear the most amazing stories. I learned today how my grandmother died. Not because I asked but because I was attentive to my mother when I stopped by today to say hello.

There really is a silver lining to every cloud. Jane, my baby sister, can find anything. I asked her how come she was so good at finding things. She said when people are looking for things they often say again and again, "I cant' find my keys or my....." She said I don't say that. I say, "I'm finding my keys or my" She said it's just a tiny difference but it's the difference between finding an not finding. So I LOOK for the silver lining. It's there.

Turn off the TV and talk to those people of importance to you.

Be nice. It is NOT overrated. I mean to everyone. The grocery line bagger, the homeless people who walk through our parking lot everyday, the college students who are in my care, my children, my partner, my parents..... BE nice. It's not about them; it's about ME and the kind of person I am practicing being.

Thank you for reading this. I have scars all over me now. I'm bald. My eyes are trashed from the dryness of the chemo. And truly I am grateful. What a wonderful world it must be that I can need you and you are there for me! If you want to send me a card I'd love to hear from you. 210 E Gilbert, Bloomington, IN 47408

I am so..

INgratitude,

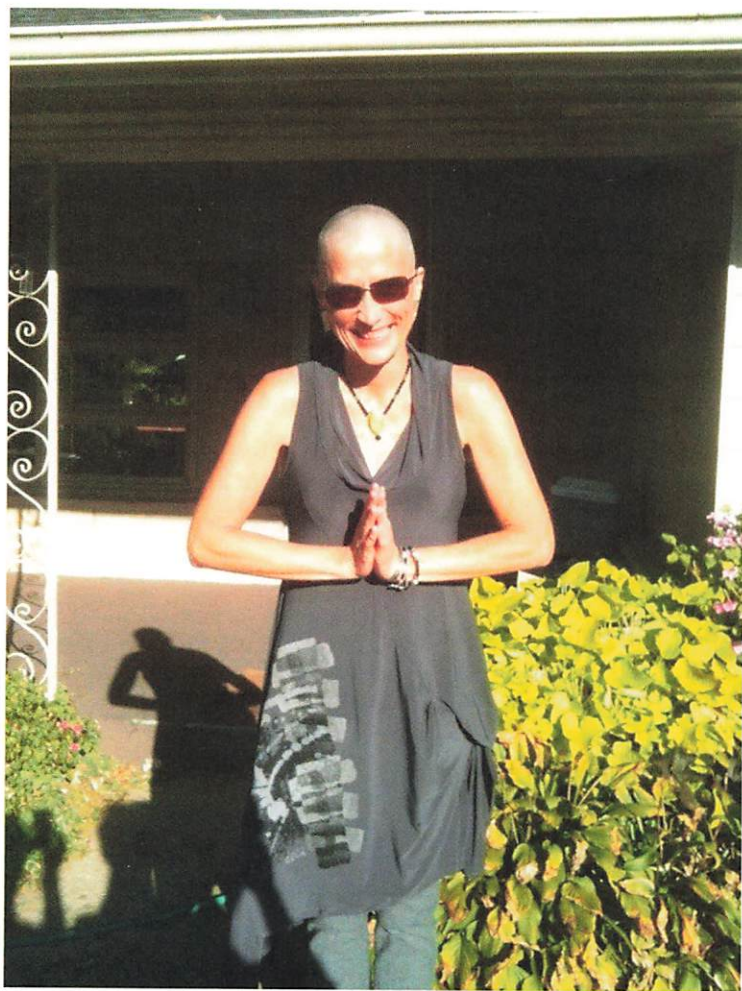
Ann

INgratitude



October 9, 2010

Take a Little Off the Top



October 17, 2010

Experience is a Double Edged Sword

Monday is my second chemo treatment. The first chemo I had no expectations. I went into it with a small amount of fear. You know, 'ignorance is bliss!' Well now I know what will happen and this knowledge is a double edged sword. Wait Ann.... now you THINK you know; there is a difference. On my side of the bathroom counter is lotion for my skin because it is so dry, saline gel because the inside of my nose started to develop sores, drops for my eyes and super dooper lip balm. BUT on the time saving side, I no longer have to wash my hair!

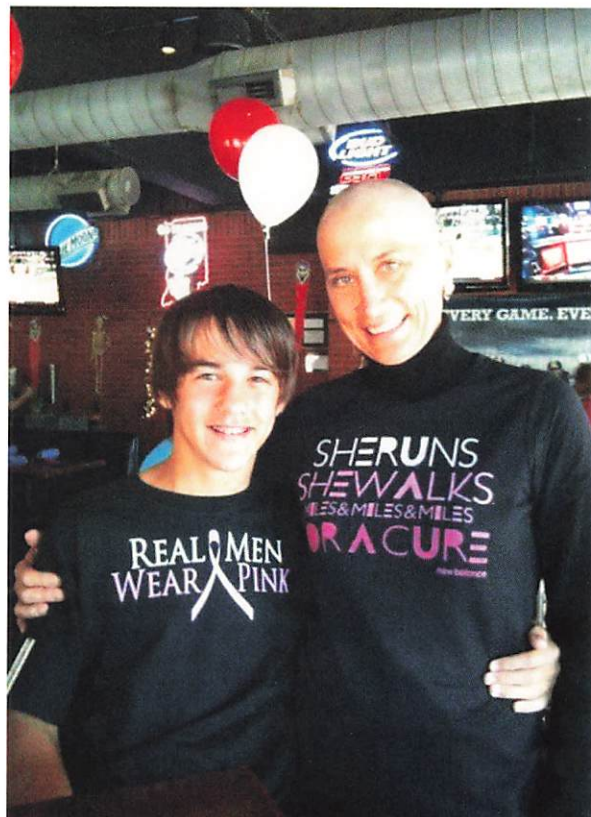
I'm scared now for Monday to come. I don't want to sit in the chair with the drip, drip, drip for hours on end. I know it will burn. I know the next day the round of shots and monitoring will start to make sure they don't push my body TOO far. I remember how dizzy I was in the mornings following the first round when I walked down the hall to my room and I had to hold on to the walls for balance. I know that I won't be able to drink coffee or wine because my taste buds will change and nothing will taste good except fudgesicles. I am remembering that there were days that I went to sleep at 7:00pm right as Michael so lovingly had dinner ready and I simply could not stay awake. I remember and it haunts me.



NO ANN. NO. NO. You listen to me, I say to myself. YOU LISTEN CAREFULLY!! You know nothing. Be open to what the moment will bring. Be open to what the moment will bring and settle into it. There were moments of fear; don't make the memories count for weeks on end. Be in the exact moment as it unfolds. You don't know.

And if you remember, remember all of it and stop being so dramatically self selective! Remember the construction worker who was staring at you with your bald head and then broke into the most beautiful smile as you passed; remember that your friend for life drove 1100 miles to be with you for the weekend, remember that you have your very own cooking genie who sends food your way, remember that every single day people at work cut up fresh vegetables and put them in Tupperware so you eat well, every single solitary day since you have asked you have received a card in the mail--even on a national holiday because our business has a PO box with one tucked in there!! (210 E. Gilbert, Bloomington, IN 47408) Wink, wink. :) It's no wonder I walk around smiling most of the time. I lead a charmed life!! Remember THAT Ann! The out pouring of love continues to be so uplifting!

Yeah, remember the love.
INgratitude,
Ann





October 22, 2010

With All my Heart...

When I don't know where to focus and my mind is reeling I go to a quote from Mother Teresa,

"With all my heart I want it to be just like this..... With all of my heart I want it to be just like this..... With all of my heart I want it to be just like this."

I figure I'm taking from a pretty 'deep well' quoting her mantras.

I've learned a few things since my first round

of chemo:

1. Cancer does not burn calories; neither does chemotherapy. Still butter pecan cookies rock!!
2. The question I get asked most often is "does the port get caught on your clothes?" The picture here is your answer. It is the bulge under the skin below the small incision.
3. I started as a germ-a-phobe before I got cancer. Now that my immune system is compromised I have learned one truth--the free samples at the grocery store ARE GROSS. Do not eat them even if you are on

the verge of fainting from hunger. Resist the temptation. GROSS. YUCK. Why?? Because little children lick their hands and put them all over the samples, people sneeze and then take something.....

4. It pays to live in a freaky liberal college town. Bald head?? No big deal. I hardly get a side ways glance.

5. I miss Zachary every single day. He talks directly to me. These days he is saying "shut your mouth Ann. Do not say what you are thinking." Sage advice.

6. If you remember only one line to communicate with those who are healing remember this, "It is so nice to see you." You can always use that line no matter what. This is in place of sentences like "you look tired" or "do you feel well?" Let's say just for the sake of chatting that the person IS tired or really DOESN'T feel well. Have you really helped??? No.

7. Question Rock Solid Medical Protocols. Time will find them all wrong.

8. While were questioning—who are "THEY??" "They" say not to.... "They" say to.... "They" will think..... "They" do not exist. Don't let "they" dictate your behavior.

9. And finally, if someone shoves you off a cliff and you fall down the cliff it does NOT make you brave. You had no choice.

Thank you for reading my blog. YOU expand my heart and for that I am,

INgratitude,

Ann



October 25, 2010

Dream and Work Backwards

Yesterday, I taught a class for Habitat for Humanity. The topic is supposed to be about money but we cover everything from parenting to eating to growing up. I usually really enjoy interacting with the soon to be home owners but this time the magic was just not there. I would love to have blamed it on the fact that I had cancer but not even I could spin that story!

I was racking my sweet little brain and it dawned on me; Ann, you have only asked them to work, you forgot the dream part of the equation. (Insert light bulb going off.) So I started class by asking people to take a pen and paper and write or draw what they wanted in 1, 3 and 5 years. I asked them

to write down the thoughts they don't share because they are 'silly' when they are driving in the car and no one is around. I asked them to write or draw what they would do if they knew they would succeed.

They wanted; fences for their dogs, new beds for their children, and tulips in the spring in their new yard. They wanted to go to Disney World, they wanted their cars to be reliable; they wanted money to take their partner on a 'real' date.....

Then I asked them to do some research on the specifics of the cost of those items. Work backwards I told them. Start with what you want and break it down until you know what you need to do today and tomorrow and the next day to live YOUR dream and make it a reality. Break it down into teeny weenie parts so you know where to

focus and you know what that looks like.

If I have any skills at all, that's the one I have. I first see things in my mind and then I work backwards. I am a G rated gal who is SIMPLE. I have no plans for world domination. I taught myself to multiply in my 30's. The friends I have now I have had for the most part, for decades. AND I always am asking myself, 'what do you want your life to look like decades from now?'

When Michael and I started our business about 20 years ago we wanted a small group of highly compensated people with very little turnover who liked one another and who would support being great stewards with the resources we generated, Guess what we have?? Bingo!

When I married Michael I told him we would not be going to marriage counseling if either of us cheated, we'd just divorce. Instead we decided to build a Fairy Tale Romance life. Guess what we have?? Right again!

People I love are very, very important to me and I spend my time and energy cultivating those relationships. Guess who gets showered with love all the time?? Oh, you're good at this game! Right again. :) I could keep going but I think I've made my point.

Dream and work backwards.

Yesterday I was walking in our neighborhood and a little girl was standing in the road. She was about 5 years old. I said to her, 'where are your shoes?' She looked at me and said, 'where your hair at?' I laughed and said that was a good question. I was about to answer her when an adult called her inside. Too bad, I was about to tell her, I am taking medicine that makes my hair fall out. It's worth it though because when you come back to visit your family again and you're in high school, I'll be here to chat with you once more.

Dream and work backwards. It's a simple equation that works for everything in my life..... business, friends, marriage and most certainly cancer.

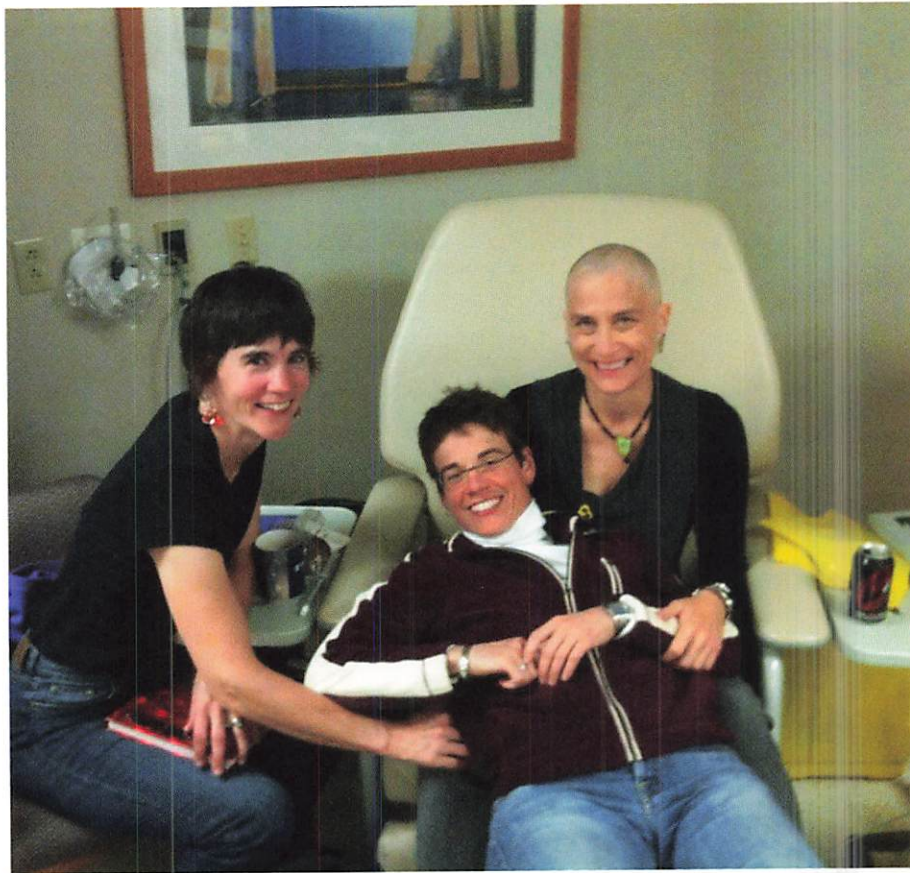
I am Ingratitude to you,

Love,

Ann

October 18, 2010

**Ann and the Chemo
Sisters**



October 29, 2010

Fashion Forward

We work with our oldest son Samson so to see him today was no surprise. Behind him was our granddaughter Kaia all smiles and happy; that was unexpected! 'Kaia, to what do we owe the pleasure of your visit this morning?' 'I don't know.' Samson chimed in, 'she just wanted her grandma to take her to school this morning.' 'Oh, I'd be happy to take her' I say.

Before we leave it dawns on me that I have a very fashion conscious third grade granddaughter. Terror comes over me. What could I have possibly been thinking....she wants the bald me to take her into her classroom!!!!? I am stunned; I am about to burst into tears. What if I embarrass her?? What if she is ashamed of me??

Kaia, I ask, will I embarrass you that I look like this? Kaia responds with a confused WHAT? I have to repeat my question again, 'Will I embarrass you?' Kaia looks at me and says 'No, you're my grandma' as she proceeds down the stairs.

My heart is still thudding. The drive takes forever (fill in 8 minutes). We get out of the car and I think, now what is Kaia going to do?

I open the back door. I ask her if she would like me to carry her backpack. 'Yes please' she responds. Then she took my arm and put it around her shoulder. We walked in the building and down the hall. 'Good Morning' we said to everyone we passed.

We got to Kaia's room. She took her backpack from me, waved and was off not giving it a second thought!

There really and truly are three things that last forever; Faith, Hope and Love. And truly the greatest of them all is Love.

And for those curious people, yes I did burst into tears when I got into the car. There is nothin' as wonderful as the love of a fashion forward third grader! Thank you Kaia.

I love you.
Grandma

INgratitude

October 31, 2010

Happy Birthday Zachary Paul May

Zachary Paul May Born 10/31/81, Died 5/4/08

Dearest Zachary,

My day started with an e-mail from our dear friends. It had a beautiful picture of you and it said, 'Remembering the beginnings of a special life...with love and affection, Norm and Cricket.' Then it went on to say Our inner and outer design is in perfect balance with the universe.

Now I'm gonna be honest with you pumpkin, the beautiful photo and the special life part were easy to stomach. But the perfect balance part?? I don't know Zachary. Man, I struggle mightily with that one. There had to have been a mistake. I mean really??? That's the best plan?? Be born so charming and with such twinkling eyes and be so adored and then get TWO cancers and die a slow painful death???? That's the best #\$\$%^&*() plan the Creator of the Universe can come up with?? Really???? I could have helped with that plan and I'm just a mere mortal. That's the best plan..... I'm not sure.....

It's Fall. The leaves are turning brilliant color. Why do they change color?? Why don't they just drop brown crispy leaves to the ground? I wonder that every year and I can only come up with a very scientific reason that it's to make our hearts soar. And the gardens get put to bed at this time of year so that the plants and bulbs can rest and come back renewed in the Spring. Think about that.

The tides pull at different times of the year. That took a damn big idea to think of that !! And the human body stays the same temperature no matter what happens around us (for the most part). And think for a second about the heart just as a pump. All of our little brains pooled together can't come up with what the human body does billions of times a day flawlessly (for the most part). WOW.

I remember waking up the day after you died and being really surprised that the sun came up. I can't even go into the whole sun and moon and stars and how all THAT works. It's amazing.

And that's the point.

It's an amazing world we live in.

Which brings me back to our friends; who I associate with is so vital. Those around me help to shape what I NAME the Creator of the Universe's plan.

It is Awful or Awe Filled???

My friends this morning helped remind me that life is Awe Filled. That for a moment in time our paths crossed, that I can recollect with tears streaming down my cheeks that beautiful face of yours, that you are my teacher every minute of every day. Yes Zachary, I remember your words, "I am going to be Gracious and Grateful and Thankful and not let life's miracles pass by unacknowledged."

Happy Birthday Zachary. I love you with all of my heart.

INgratitude,

Ann

November 12, 2010

Road Map to a Great Life: Intentions and Plans

In a National Geographic special, there was an antelope running across the desert being followed by a lion trying to kill him for lunch. The narrator went on to talk about all the physical realities going on with the antelope---elevated heart rate....quickened breathing....adrenaline pumping...etc.. For whatever set of reasons the lion stopped chasing the antelope. The next scene showed the antelope calmly grazing once again.

The narrator went on to talk about stress in humans and that one of the ways people differ from the antelope is that we reflect again and again and again on a previously stressful situation. Once the antelope was out of danger, the thought that 'I almost died', did not enter its mind again. Most people take a near death experience and reflect on it again and again throughout their life repeating the stress and carrying it with them. Interestingly, the repeated reflection is usually with stressful situations not wonderful experiences.

When I was diagnosed with cancer I felt like the antelope who was trying to be killed by the lion. Quickly it dawned on my pumpkin, that I better come up with a better plan than 'get eaten for lunch' or that is exactly what is going to happen.



Here is my big plan;

- * set my clothes out the day before
- * set my alarm
- * get up when it goes off
- * get dressed
- * go to work being of good cheer.

It may not sound like an earth shattering plan but it has made ALL the difference in my cancer experience. I PLAN to have a great day and to feel well by setting out my clothes the night before. I INTEND to be of good cheer and to be at work. Does this mean that I always feel great and am of good cheer? NO. My intention gives me a purpose.

I intend to live to be an old woman, so this past Saturday when I was just mad at everything and wanted to punch something (preferably soft, I have delicate hands you know), I had a little chat with myself

"Ann, you can have some rough hours and some discomfort or die in two years; which is it gonna be?"

I intend to live. Guess who's attitude changed on a dime?? But this isn't about cancer, this is about life and how I expend my life energy. This little scenario gets played out again and again and again in relationship to everything. What is my intention with my body, with my loved ones, with my job, with how I interact with the physical world around me?? And then what plan do I have to do to implement my intention, to make it real.

Yeah, that lion better find another antelope or he's gonna go hungry! I intend to joyfully live!!!

I have to go now. I have my clothes to pick out for tomorrow.

I am INgratitude to YOU,

Love,

An

November 9, 2010

Kid's Say the Darndest Things

Just a light story I thought might make you smile:

My godson Sam has the ability to make connections in this world that no one else is likely to think about. His mom has been knitting me hats lately.

Logically, he asked "Mom, why are you knitting Aunt Ann SO MANY hats?"

After she explained to him that I'd be losing my hair, and that she has been knitting me hats to keep my head not only warm, but in high fashion (remember: look good, feel good) he made the connection "Oh, so that's what happened to Daddy! He lost his hair to cancer!"

November 23, 2010

Silver and Gold

In this photo is Meb Keflezighi who won the 2009 NYC Marathon, 2009 US Marathon Champion and 2004 Olympic Silver Medalist in the marathon. Next to him is Joan Benoit Samuelson, the first Olympic gold medalist in the women's marathon in 1984, who also just ran the Chicago Marathon in 2:47:50 and finished 43rd overall. Prior to my knee surgery I couldn't have kept up with them. WAIT; I still can't, but it was a fun day (the NCAA Cross Country National Championship in Terre Haute, Indiana)! It was humbling to be around people who are truly the very best in the world at what they do. And just for the record, they got to be the best by some genetics and a life time of hard work.

INgratitude,



November 26, 2010

Receiving is the New Form of Giving

You're going to have to stay with me a moment because you might think I've lost my mind. Yes, I know it's Thanksgiving and most people think about what to GIVE at this time of year. Well, I'm not most people. Of the numerous lessons learned from cancer, one of them has been how happy it makes people to give. I mean really happy!!!

Guess what? In the giving and receiving equation there needs to be a recipient of the kindness. I cannot tell you how many people have

told me in the last several months how they really enjoy giving but not receiving. My gift to you (you don't-feel-comfortable-receiving-people) this holiday season is a message: GET OVER IT!! Really. Try it just once and see how it works.

It goes something like this for those of you in real need of help: Your children come in and say, "can I set the table?" You respond with, "yes, that would be lovely" keeping that voice inside you that says "I can do it faster myself." You are in a particularly busy time of life and someone says, "I would be happy to do XXX for you." You respond, "thank you that would really help me out." Smile warmly and then let them help.

You have something on your mind and rather than do what is customary, you share your problem/thought/idea with your partner asking for help.

For those of you not used to this you may want to start small. You are ill and someone says “I make the best chicken noodle soup, may I make you some?” Guess what you say????? Yep, “THANK YOU SO MUCH.”

The holidays are a wonderful time to try my Receiving-is-the-new-form-of-Giving program!! I bet you will be shocked at how happy you make people when you say thank you so much and loosen those boundaries between you and the giver.

I have my last chemo this coming Monday November 29th which means by the end of the year I should be feeling pretty good again. YEAH!!! Then radiation starts in the New Year. I need to go now so I can eat the food that my friend brought me for lunch and read my cards from today. (210 E Gilbert, Bloomington, IN 47408)

INgratitude,

Ann

INgratitude

November 29, 2010

Continuing Education

Ann and Sue are in the infusion center right now. Sue is sipping a Coke Zero and Ann is drinking from the well of chemotherapy. Thank you for asking, Sue feels great.

As the last drips of chemo enter my body for the last time I am wanting so much to help someone else who may be going through a health challenge. My brain is a little foggy but here is my best attempt:

Things we have learned:

- 1) If you are diagnosed with breast cancer get gene onco type testing of your tumor even if you have to pay the \$4000 out of pocket. It is a game changer.
- 2) If you are diagnosed with cancer find the best specialist for that cancer. Go to him or her. After you see the specialist, then you can use your local oncologist to implement the plan.
- 3) Thinking about having your axillary lymph nodes removed? Consider the alternative view: Axillary Lymph Node Dissection
- 4) Use caution when allowing others to tell you what you will experience. You may not have their experience. People do not tell you the positive and often only the very negative. Keep your attitude positive and expect the best possible outcome.
- 5) Have one coach (your specific type cancer specialist/MD) and listen to them. Everything else becomes noise.
- 6) Everyone in America has a cure for cancer. It is truly amazing that this is a disease. People want to help you and are being kind. Just respond with, "Thank you so much for that information."
- 7) Getting a port? Don't go to a general surgeon, go to a breast surgeon. Get the best and do not expect anything less.
- 8) Get a mammogram. They are not over rated.

The chemo will be leaving my body by the end of the month they tell me. It will be months after that before my hands stop tingling and some of my nails will probably fall out. I start radiation in the middle of January when we return from vacation.

I was getting mentally ready for this day when I received an e-mail from my friend who is in El Salvador working with Habitat. They are going to their work site today for the first time. There they will meet a man whose four children and his wife died in the mud slides. She said that every single person in the country knows someone who died in the last year. The man lost four children and his wife!!!!

And I have chemo today and I may lose my fingernails...puts everything into perspective. I am in total gratitude to you for being with me on this journey.

Love and INgratitude,
Ann

December 15, 2010
New Beginnings

I'm learning quite a few lessons in classrooms that I didn't really WANT . Today's lesson: it's DAMN hard to start again when you feel that you are so far down.

This past Saturday I woke up and after about 5 months of having cancer, surgery, and chemotherapy. I decided ENOUGH. I told Michael that "I had cured myself of cancer and that I was going back to being an athlete!" Then the fun started!

Currently, when I walk up one single flight of stairs I can get winded and my heart flutters. My knee is still swollen from the surgery months ago to repair my cartilage. I look down at my nails and they are turning black and will eventually fall off. My head looks like a billiard ball all hairless and smooth. I've actually managed to gain weight while on chemo! (Hey, I can't resist my friend's homemade food and treats!!)

Last week, my white blood cell count cratered as my immune system fell apart. And then as a precaution they put me on an antibiotic. In theory, it was a great idea until I developed a lovely case of hives. Yes, it was a sight!! Picture bald lady, big hives on head and face. It turned out to be a gift because the situation got SO bad that all I could do was laugh. I looked in the mirror and said, "IS THAT ALL YOU GOT CAUSE I AIN'T GOIN' DOWN."

A time of new beginnings. After being cleared for exercise by my doctors to run I stepped back on the treadmill and started to run. I couldn't do it well. The athlete in my mind had vanished. Gone. Nowhere to be found! In her place was someone I didn't recognize. She was slow and winded and weary and feeling hopeless.

I was talking to my friend who is an accomplished athlete and trainer of us-mere-mortals about my woes. She looked at me and forcefully said, "Ann, you are NOT the athlete you were before cancer. You are the athlete you do not recognize and unless you embrace with both arms where you actually are, you will hurt yourself and quit."

Today I went from a beat up cancer woman to an athlete. Welcome to my new beginning.

Nothing really changed but everything changed. This morning I ran a mile 1/3 SLOWER than ever before. That's not the point. The point is that I did it....poorly at first but the athlete showed up.

INgratitude for New Beginnings,
Ann

INgratitude

December 22, 2010

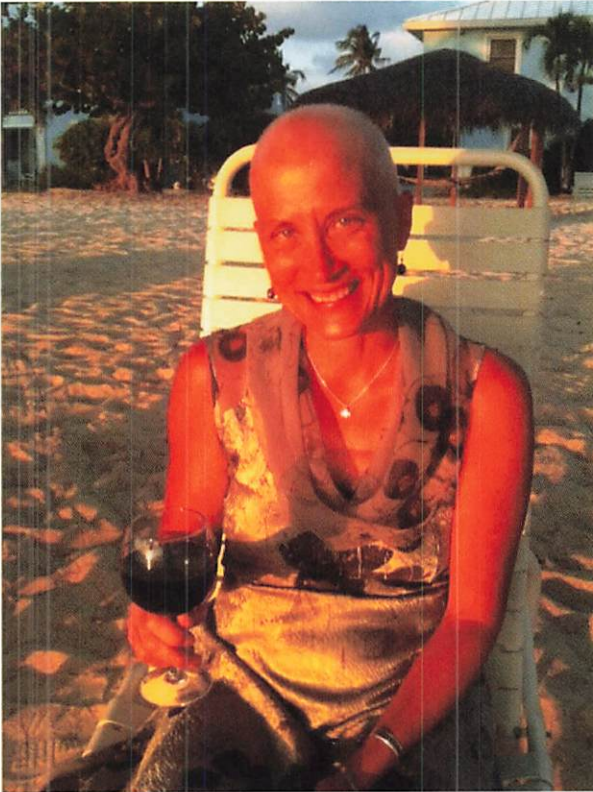
Deportation

Good morning, We (Ann, Jane, Sue) are spending this morning at Community Hospital in Greenwood. This hospital is brand new and amazing with large rooms, cappuccino maker in the lobby and great staff. Today I get to experience deportation as my port will be removed signifying the end of my chemotherapy. How am I doing? I am relieved to be finished with chemotherapy. It was as challenging as I anticipated for reasons no one mentioned. My taste buds change so food tastes bad. My finger nails turn black. Accumulated fatigue is profound. My knee's healing is delayed. I am cold all the time. It changes my physical looks. A lot of diseases have anonymity. Cancer treatment and my subsequent bald head announces to the world that I have cancer. The system wears me down. It is unbelievably inhumane. You get to the point where you think you cannot take one more thing and then it shoves another thing. Our medical system is broken. It is massive big business. Getting information from anyone takes Herculean effort. Today I get one step closer to finishing but I am still in the middle of a significant cat fight. I am focused on starting radiation towards the end of January after I take a much needed vacation with Michael. I chose to do the Canadian radiation protocol which cuts my treatment time down from 30 days to only 15 by giving me a higher dose of radiation each time. This is much more suitable to my personality. The marathon continues...

INgratitude,

Ann





January 7, 2011

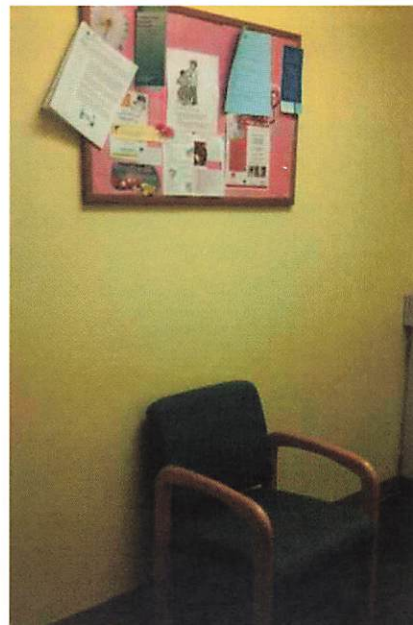
**Celebrating a New
Year**

On Grand Cayman.
Happy New Year to you
and yours.

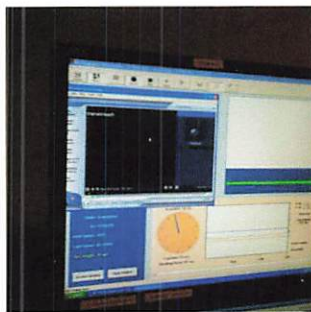
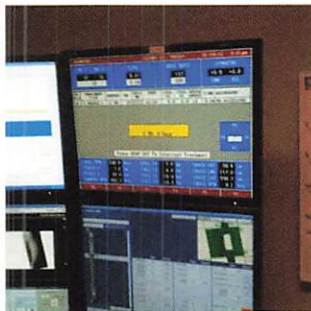
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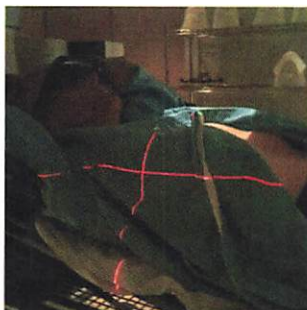
Ann

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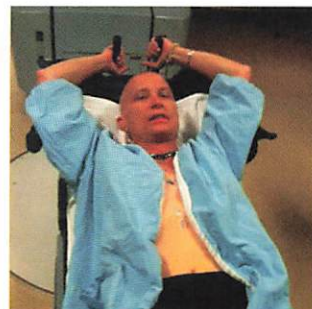


INgratitude





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February 6, 2011

Lessons from Cancer

1. Don't think. Move. Get up. Literally. Get up out of bed. Move.
2. I am an experiment of one. Statistics can be mildly amusing and maybe even helpful...maybe....but they only matter as applied to me.
3. Not having hair has been perhaps the most 'out of body' experience to date. It marks me and says to people 'she's sick so I better be fragile with her and be kind.' But here is the funny thing, MOST of the people I encounter need me to be kind and fragile with them they just don't have a big sign telling me!!
4. No news is NO news. It's not helpful to fret; it just burns energy I will need soon. In due time all will be revealed and even if I want it to 'go faster' its not gonna.
5. Go to specialists! I can't say this one enough.
6. Start with no. I like this one, I really do. It suits me! When a doctor tells me I need anything I say NO. Then if they come back as they do half the time with a real reason then I do it and the other half of the time when they say 'OK you don't really need an *** or your treatment will be the same even without ***' then I don't have *** . I highly encourage the use of the word No. (To me when I hear no, I think of it as the start of negotiations.)

7. Rest heals the body. The world will continue to spin around even if I am in bed. I couldn't believe it either!

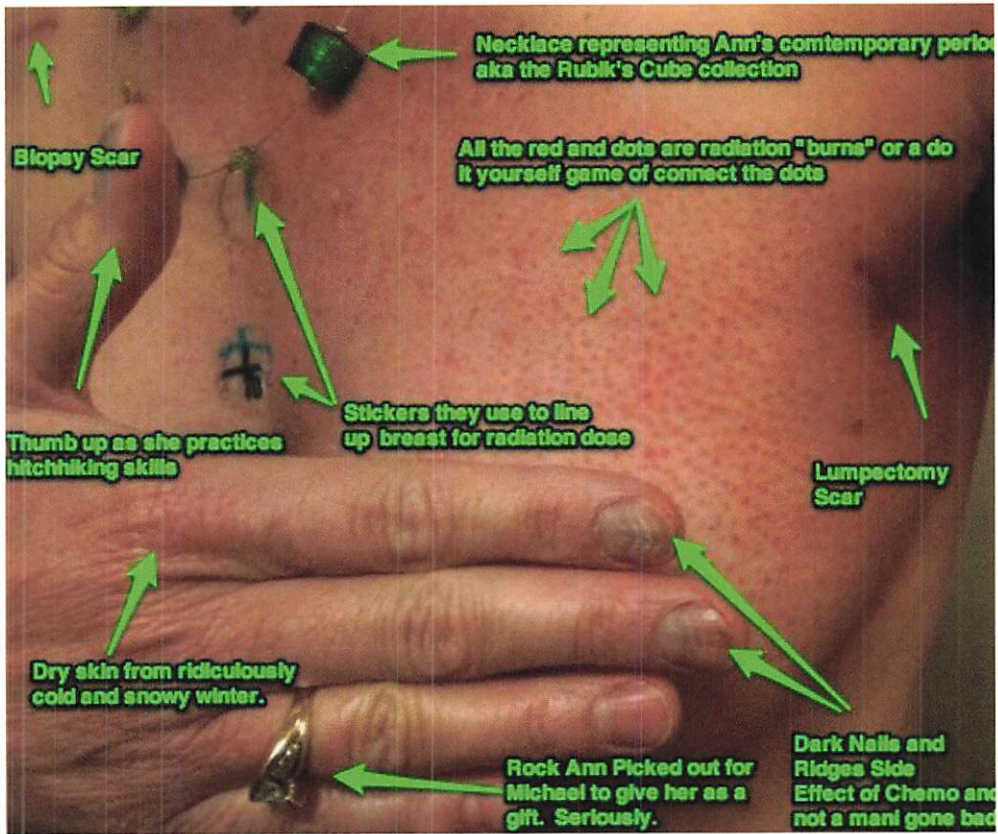
8. I don't say anymore 'let me know if I can help' because people don't ask. I have a friend at work that has brought me granola, fruit and yogurt every morning for breakfast during radiation. She brings it in a Tupperware container and puts it on my desk. It is one of the kindest acts I have ever had the privilege to receive. Nothin' says Love like food! People have been SOOOO good to me in that department. Oh my. I'm gonna miss that. And the cards.....I'm gonna REALLY miss that!

9. Expect to do well. Plan to do well. Have a plan to do well! My very shallow plan is 'look good feel good.' Even writing this almost makes me cry. It is so hard when I look in the mirror sometimes, so hard. My eyebrows are starting to fall out again. It's just hard to execute my simple plan some days. I'm glad it's a simple plan.

10. Love is not overrated.

INgratitude,

Ann



Radiation Porn

February 9, 2011

Certain Breast Cancer Patients May Nix Node Surgery

A great article on NPR why Ann decided not to have additional lymph nodes removed:

Certain Breast Cancer Patients May Nix Node Surgery, by Richard Knox

For years standard practice in breast cancer treatment has gone like this: If a biopsy of one or two "sentinel" lymph nodes near a breast tumor shows cancer has spread, surgeons should cut out other nearby lymph nodes to prevent it from spreading further.

The old conventional wisdom made sense. But a new study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* says standard practice is wrong — for tens of thousands of women with a new diagnosis of breast cancer.

"It is counterintuitive, isn't it?" says Dr. Armando Giuliano, chief of breast cancer surgery at John Wayne Cancer Institute in Santa Monica, Calif.

Giuliano led the new study, sponsored by the American College of Surgeons. But he acknowledges the new results are "hard to accept."

"It makes sense to cut it out," Giuliano says, referring to positive lymph nodes. "But it looks like it doesn't really matter."

He has a lot of credibility on this issue. Back in the mid-1990s, Giuliano was instrumental in establishing the current practice of sampling one or two sentinel lymph nodes and then using those results to determine whether

other lymph nodes in the area should be excised.

But among 900 women in the new study who had either the conventional approach or no additional lymph node surgery, there was no difference in survival over five years — or in return of their cancer.

Avoiding Complications

When the study started in the late 1990s, its architects expected five-year survival rates of 80 percent. So Giuliano and his co-authors were surprised that over 90 percent of women were alive five years after they had a positive lymph node biopsy

"That's great news for women," Giuliano says. "And the fact that the women who did not have their lymph nodes removed had just as high a survival is great news because we can avoid that more radical [lymph node] operation, which has its own attendant complications."

Those complications, for up to 30 percent of women, include chronic, painful swelling, called lymphedema. It can limit many women's use of their arms.

Some think the study results reflect the impact of earlier diagnosis of breast cancer combined with widespread use of chemotherapy and radiation following removal of the primary tumor. Those treatments may make it less important to remove lymph nodes containing metastatic cells.

But study authors caution that there are a lot of unknowns about breast cancer cells found in lymph nodes — they may be biologically different from

those that cause real trouble when they migrate to bones, liver and other organs.

The new findings don't apply to all breast cancer patients — just those with early-stage cancer who have lumpectomies followed by whole-breast radiation and chemotherapy. That may be 20 percent of all new breast cancer diagnoses

Changes In Practice

Giuliano says the study results have changed his practice, and they've started to change other doctors' minds. The results were initially presented last spring at a meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, but many specialists have been waiting for formal publication.

"I'm sure there will be controversy. I'm sure there will be resistance," Giuliano says. "But I think physicians will consider this option in the management of their patients and be less likely to remove lymph nodes."

Maybe not overnight. "Change tends to be slow in medicine," Giuliano says. But some think it won't be as slow as breast surgeons were to accept a similar idea back in the 1970s and '80s, when mastectomy was gradually replaced by lumpectomy.

Dr. Mehra Golshan says the study is having immediate impact. He is head of breast surgery at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

"I definitely think it's a big deal," Golshan says. "Anytime you have a study that is going to — and has actually already started to — change practice

patterns in breast cancer surgery and treatment, it's a big deal."

He says the new study is not perfect. It enrolled far fewer patients than it originally set out to. He and others would like to have more than five years of follow-up on the study subjects. There are other quibbles that may be resolved when European studies on the issue ripen — a few years from now.

Less Versus More Surgery

For now, Golshan welcomes the findings — especially because, he says, there has been a resurgence of mastectomies despite a string of high-quality studies supporting the effectiveness of breast-conserving lumpectomies.

"I hope this study will bring us back to the notion that less surgery is probably as good as more surgery," Golshan says.

Breast cancer patients are already asking whether they really need a dozen or more lymph nodes removed if a sentinel node is positive. He saw two such patients in his clinic Monday.

"I went through the pluses and minuses," Golshan says. "One woman did not want further surgery, and the other did."

Breast cancer treatment is often a very personal decision, he says, involving a woman's age, her particular kind of cancer, how much disease there appears to be in her lymph nodes, and her attitude about risk and uncertainty. And no one study is going to change that.

February 10, 2011

My Last Blog Post; No Such Thing as Normal

Over the last 6 ½ months I have had four surgeries, 16 weeks of chemotherapy and one round of 17 high dose radiation treatments. This Tuesday was my last radiation treatment.

For the next five years I will take medicine to keep my body in balance. The exact drug will be decided next week. The question most have asked is 'are you cured?' I don't know. There is no test to find that out. I will have mammograms every six months for a long time to come. My oncologist says you're cured of breast cancer when you die of something else. I plan on dying of old age.

This is my last blog post.

I would like to thank you for coming on this journey with me. I have heard numerous times that I came through this making it look easy at times. For the record, it was not easy AND there is a point there. I have had your support and love in abundance overflowing. Perhaps there is a correlation between love and healing....

I need to especially thank our son Zachary Paul May who had a two year battle with lymphoma and died on May 4, 2008. It was from Zachary that we learned the lesson about the need for specialists. We also learned from him that no matter how loved someone is, we are all going to die, all of us.

I also learned from Zachary that there is no such thing as 'normal.' I will

INgratitude

never 'get back to normal.' Really, how stupid is that??! Having paid so dearly for the lessons learned why would I choose to forget and 'get back to normal'?

INgratitude,

Ann



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