
*Thoughts on
Living with Cancer*

**Diagnosis Cancer:
Why Me?**



by Caren S. Fried, Ph.D.

My Personal Experience

In 1994, I was told those fateful words: “You have cancer.” At that time, I was 35 years old, a biologist, wife, and mother of a two year old. I was diagnosed with lung cancer, even though I had never smoked. My cancer treatments included two major lung surgeries (which resulted in the removal of my right lung), various standard and experimental aggressive chemotherapy treatments, and numerous alternative therapies. Despite all this, my cancer persisted. But so did I!

A turning point occurred for me when I decided to focus on my health instead of my illness. I believe that cancer is an illness of the body, mind, heart, and soul. Therefore, for me being healthy meant dealing with the emotional, psychological, and spiritual issues related to cancer as well as undergoing the physical treatments. In addition to the various conventional and alternative therapies which I pursued, writing became an important part of my own healing journey with cancer. To be able to express my emotions, thoughts, and beliefs in writing was critically important for my own overall health.

These pamphlets grew from the numerous notes that I wrote every day in my healing journal. The information that is available for newly diagnosed cancer patients can sometimes be overwhelming. It was my intention, therefore, to write short pamphlets concerning various topics that deal with the practical issues of living each day with cancer. I hope that these pamphlets will encourage discussion of topics that are often difficult yet necessary to deal with and to help cancer patients and their families make the numerous decisions that need to be made during this time.

Healing is a very personal issue and each person must find his/her own path to healing from cancer. To this day, I continue to focus on my health each day, to live a full active life as a mother and wife, and to pursue a new career as a writer despite cancer. It is my hope that these pamphlets will be useful for others seeking out a healing journey while living with cancer and beyond.

Caren S. Fried

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In a strange way, cancer gave me the opportunity to focus on taking care of myself and learning more about myself.

—C.F.

The Question


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Once you have been told by your doctor that you have cancer, it is inevitable that the question will come to your mind, “Why Me?” Researchers tell us that today one in three people will be diagnosed with cancer. Still, the question remains, “Why ME?”

Most people at some point after their cancer diagnosis will ask themselves if there was something they did to cause their cancer. There may also be thoughts of blaming others in your life or wondering if you are being punished by God. While just about everyone has these thoughts, they are rarely discussed out in the open. It is very important to deal with these issues and discuss them, perhaps with a qualified psychotherapist, in order to move forward in your recovery.

From a scientific point of view, cancer cells are being formed every day in everyone. The human body has an innate healing system that promptly gets rid of cancer cells before they cause any harm. A diagnosis of cancer indicates that your body's healing system is not as effective as it could be. It is generally believed that cancer develops due to a complex combination of genetics, environmental factors and individual lifestyles (including diet, exercise and stress management, etc.) that weaken the body's healing system over time. No one knows, however, the extent to which any of these factors may have contributed to the development of your cancer. In most cases, there is no definitive answer to the question “Why Me?”

Crisis and Opportunity

Rather than dwelling on the question “Why Me?”, it will be more valuable to ask yourself what you can do now to help yourself recover. Illness can be viewed as a crisis that provides you with an opportunity for changes in your life. While you would have never wanted this disease, now that it has occurred, how can you use it as an opportunity to make changes in your life? Being faced with a life-threatening illness allows you the opportunity to make changes in your life that you probably needed to make anyway but that you never would have made otherwise.

While some of the factors that contributed to the development of your cancer may be beyond your control at the present moment, other factors may be within your control. Perhaps by making even small changes in your everyday life, you can increase the effectiveness



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of your body's healing system towards destroying more cancer cells. Making lifestyle changes can be very difficult and it is usually necessary to obtain the help of a health professional (psychotherapist, nutritionist, etc.). In addition, the help and support of family and friends is critically important. Support groups may also be helpful as a place where you can share your thoughts and feelings with other people who are also facing the challenges brought forth by a diagnosis of cancer.

Summary

There is a fine line between blaming yourself for your illness and making changes that can contribute to your recovery. It is important to express your feelings concerning this topic in order to move beyond the question "Why Me?" Seek professional help if you continue to dwell on this question for too long. By using your illness as an opportunity to make changes in your life, you will be empowering yourself as an active participant in your recovery from cancer as well as contributing to the quality of your life despite the cancer.



Thoughts on Living with Cancer Pamphlets

Cancer as a Whole-Body Illness



How to Be an Active Participant in Your Own Recovery:
Guidelines for the Newly Diagnosed Cancer Patient.



Coping with Hair Loss Due to Chemotherapy



Positive Thinking - Helpful or Harmful for Cancer Patients?



Suggestions for Friends and Relatives of the Cancer Patient



An Introduction to Alternative/Complementary Therapies for Cancer



Being a Parent with Cancer



Diagnosis Cancer: Why Me?



Healing and Dying



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