

## AFTERWORD

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Growing up the daughter of two pharmacists, I was well versed in the “here, take this” approach to medicine. An ailment, a diagnosis, then a drug. Funny, it never really resonated with me. That’s why, later in my life, I found myself searching beyond my conventional nursing training for something more. This search ended with a postgrad immersion into the science and credentials of holistic nursing, which eventually led to my degree as a Naturopathic Doctor.

It just made sense: being able to look at an individual comprehensively, caring for the whole human, understanding the unique contributing factors behind a clinical presentation, identifying and treating the root cause, respecting the innate healing abilities of the body. This was how I could and would practice medicine. No more reducing anyone to his or her signs, symptoms, diagnoses, or lab tests. No more protocols. Instead, I saw “wake-up calls” in each and every person I cared for throughout over twenty years of practice.

This made the practice of medicine meaningful for me. I respected the rigor of science, the time-tested history of natural medicine, and the essence of caring for and truly seeing someone who came to me for help and assistance.

Then the tables turned. While I was lying in my infrared sauna—walking my talk—with a bentonite clay mask on my face and chest, rubbing the sweat around, I bumped into something. Something peculiar.

Something not right. A *lump*. A lump the size of a nickel around five o'clock on my left breast.

The first MD dismissed it as “nothing; perhaps trauma from an ill-fitting bra.” I got a second opinion. My breast surgeon called me the day after I had a biopsy and said, “You have inner and outer ductal breast cancer.”

After a subsequent MRI, I chose to have a double mastectomy. The surgery went well, and I healed wonderfully. My surgeon referred me to a western, allopathic (conventional) oncologist. She was the head of the department and had a stellar reputation. Even with my background and beliefs, after the shocking diagnosis of breast cancer at age 55, it was the one appointment that I felt too scared *not* to make. I first saw her nurse, then her PA, and then finally her.

She came into the exam room with my pathology report in hand. She reviewed the prognostics and offered her treatment. Yes, a drug. That was it. No questions about me, my diet, or my lifestyle. No blood-work or further tests. Just a drug. Oh, and the mention that if I had too many uncomfortable side effects from this particular drug, we could try some others. Then a quick note that she would like to see me in six months.

I am not exactly sure why I was surprised, but I left that appointment shocked and more scared than before. My body had just demonstrated that it was vulnerable to influences that stimulate abnormal cell division. I knew from my studies, having recently given a presentation on cancer stem cell research, that most people diagnosed with cancer don't perish from the original tumor. They die from metastasis occurring before conventional treatment has begun, from cancer recurrence after conventional treatment, or from immunosuppression and other toxicities resulting from both chemotherapy and radiation.

Enter integrative oncology and anthroposophic medicine.

I was lucky enough, because of who I am and who I knew, to have an amazing contact willing to care for me post-mastectomy. Unlike the Western oncologist that I was too scared not to see, my anthroposophic doctor asked me questions. *Many, many questions*. Questions about

my history, my environmental exposures, the kind of water I drank, my diet, my lifestyle, my exercise habits, my parents, my marriage, my work. She asked me questions about my body, my soul, and my spirit. Then she drew from all these biographical details and my prognostics, ordering precise individualized testing to uncover root causes in my terrain. After all, if I simply pointed my finger at the cancer, as so many do, I still had three fingers pointing back at me. Yes, my surgeon removed the tumor. Now we, as a team, needed to tend to my terrain.

This wasn't a scary process. In fact, despite the recent cancer diagnosis and major surgery, this new process was a warming one. I still felt the loss of innocence and the fear of future metastasis or complications. But this new path helped me feel contained, comforted, and relieved that I was being monitored, measured, and treated. That treatment included evidenced-based natural interventions and therapies like mistletoe. I also incorporated specific dietary and lifestyle recommendations, and we monitored my labs monthly. Changes in my lab results informed tweaks to my initial treatment choices. This was a true partnership with someone who practices root-cause, whole-person, evidence-based, anthroposophic medicine. With each passing month, I started to feel more and more confident in my body, my health, and my future.

Yes, I went from being a practitioner to being a patient. At first, I was seduced by the "here, take this" approach out of fear and anxiety about the "C" word. I forgive myself. I was gently reminded how powerful nature is, how amazing our bodies are, and how holistic principles, with their roots spanning thousands of years, are still relevant and deeply needed today. One year after my initial diagnosis, I am here and strong and dedicated to this path.

I am so grateful to see this collaborative book out in the world, connecting with both practitioners and patients. We all need the message in these pages—both the education regarding mistletoe therapy and the greater call to see and care for the whole person.