

MINA KING-CALBAZANA, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
Blazing New Pathways to a Brighter Reality

In December 1991, six months after the joyful completion of a graduate degree at Northern Arizona University, I was diagnosed with metastasized breast cancer. Not only was I far away from my beloved leaders in Boston, but also a step away from starting a Fulbright Fellowship in Mexico.

At the time, I did not realize what a wonderful opportunity awaited me to further develop my life. In fact, I was unable to see this dilemma in any other way except for the tragedy it appeared to be. Despite knowing that time and time again, through sickness and sorrow, including the death of one of our sons, my prayers and unshakable faith had enabled me to live through just about anything — and still come up smiling — this time I panicked.

My life was on the line, and I was so traumatized I could not chant for weeks after the diagnosis. A senior leader in Phoenix literally had to take me by the hand and lead me back to my Gohonzon.

I became hopeful when doctors at the U.S. Information Agency in Washington, D.C., advised me that the Fulbright award could be postponed while I underwent cancer therapy. They would then make a decision based on the outcome.

After living through the agonies of a lumpectomy, chemotherapy and radiation, I was to continue with the drug tamoxifen indefinitely. Although the cancer had already metastasized to 13 out of 22 lymph nodes, the doctors still concluded that my treatment had been successful.

Consequently, in May 1993 I left my home in Arizona to serve one school year as a teacher-trainer at the University of Yucatan in Merida, Mexico. I soon realized a rate of professional growth that probably could not have occurred had I remained at home to teach. In addition, while in Mexico, my husband and I took a side trip to Cuba, only 90 miles away — a country he and I had always wanted to visit but had no idea how to go about doing so until then.

Upon returning to Arizona in February 1994, we had promised my daughter, Nina, to return to Cambridge, Mass., to baby-sit our two young granddaughters. Since my regularly scheduled medical checkups every three months indicated no recurrent evidence of cancer, I felt confident to go there, and in a relatively short time found a part-time ESL/EFL teaching job at one of Boston's community colleges. Surely after three years absence of any signs of the dreaded disease, I thought, it must have passed out of my system — due to my strong unceasing prayers, I was sure.

But my destiny was otherwise.

In May 1995, shortly before the end of the school semester, a biopsy revealed that new boils that had begun to appear on my left breast were indeed cancer. Again.

Despite the high-tech tests I had been taking every three months — the extensive blood work, X-rays, MRIs, CAT scans, and bone scans — none had indicated the disease was still present, until the eruption of boils. Frantically, I enrolled myself in the Macrobiotic Institute in Bequeath, Mass., for one week, certain that a change in diet could bring about remission. And once again I began the round of chemotherapy and radiation, thinking, "I'll surely beat it this time." After all, I had the Gohonzon, I was back in Boston (my spiritual home), and now I had the best medical care available in the United States.

After undergoing several cycles, it became clear that neither the chemotherapy nor the radiation were working very well. My doctor changed the therapy to more potent chemicals, which nearly killed me. I was hospitalized a total of five times while undergoing

the therapy. Each time I doubted that I would leave the hospital alive. I became a frequent visitor to the local library, and searched the Internet determinedly for more information on alternative and complementary cancer treatments.

Although I had found information that appeared to offer better answers, the problem now was that I could no longer afford additional treatments. I had quit my part-time job to devote myself full-time to finding a cure. Worse still, spending so much money to change my diet did not appear to be working, either.

Nevertheless, I told the medical personnel that I wanted no more of their treatments. I resigned myself to an early death, while continuing to eat organically. If nothing else, I thought, at least I will die eating correctly.

Gradually I became aware of other changes taking place in my life, despite the turmoil that raged within. It appeared that my heart was opening up new pathways to a reality I had never experienced: Not only were my family relationships becoming deeper, but I was also making friendships in places where none had existed previously.

People were attaching themselves to my life in the most meaningful ways. My suffering appeared to be changing my life, leaving me feeling warmly connected to people. New and old friends were calling me long-distance, writing and sending cards, or sending me flowers for no apparent reason — except to wish me well.

However, I was resigning myself to the fact that my days were numbered. I was becoming confused. Should I just give up and die now, I pondered, or should I continue to fight for my life? Even though Nichiren Daishonin writes in the Gosho “On Prolonging Life,” “One day of life is more valuable than all the treasures of the universe...,” the struggle to live was becoming too difficult for me. It became very clear before long that I needed guidance once more.

Yet another leader in faith answered my main questions very simply and eloquently. In so many words, he said, if I were resigning myself to an early death, then I was not practicing the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin; I must redetermine to fulfill my mission with faith and courage until the last moment of my life. What a wake-up call that was for me. Immediately, I began to fight for my life again. If there were a solution, I prayed, please let it be made known to me in concrete terms — actual proof was what I sought.

About this same time, I had been trying also to reach a son whom I had not heard from for many months. Five days after beginning to chant in this way, he called.

“Vince, where have you been?” I asked.

“Mom, I had no good news to tell you so I didn’t call,” he said. “But I’ve got good news for you now. I’ve hit the lottery for \$50,000 dollars. And I’m going to buy you and Dad a car to replace your old one.”

“Great,” I answered without thinking, enjoying his excitement.

Later, I decided to call him back to ask if he would pay instead for one of the cancer treatments I had been researching, thinking, “What on earth would I do with a new car if I’m dying of cancer?” He agreed to help out and asked that I find out what expenses were involved, including those needed for my husband to accompany me.

The expenses amounted to a whopping \$17,000 dollars for both of us to travel and stay for three weeks at a reputable cancer treatment center in Mexico. A complementary cancer therapy called the Gerson Therapy was being practiced at a Meridien hospital in Playas de Tijuana. Founded more than 60 years ago by a Dr. Max Gerson (now deceased), it has been successful in initiating a cure for advanced cancers and other degenerative diseases.

Disheartened by the costs, however, I called Vince once more. He replied without hesitation, “I’ll pay for two-thirds of it if you can get the rest.”

Immediately, I called another son in Minnesota to see if he could help. Teddy promised

to call me back shortly, so I was surprised when the phone rang to hear Vince say: “Pack your bags, Mom. You and Dad are going to that hospital in Mexico.”

It seems Teddy had called Nina and then Vince. The three quickly agreed to share the costs. Vince oversaw everything, even taking the day off from work to take us to the airport. In less than 10 days after praying for actual proof, my husband and I were on a flight to San Diego. From there, a shuttle bus carried us to the Meridien hospital.

From the time we arrived at the hospital until we left, I received unimaginable care — organic meals, B-12 injections, other vitamins, enzymes, massages, acupuncture, freshly made juices around the clock, daily enemas, clay packs and other treatments intended to detoxify the body and build up the immune system.

In three weeks I had lost approximately 30 pounds, mostly fluids, from my malfunctioning cells; my liver function improved 100 percent; there were now half the number of free radicals in my blood; and the swelling in both arms from lymphodema had disappeared completely in one arm and decreased immensely in the other. The doctors at the hospital agreed that my system had reacted well to the treatment, although they felt it better not to apply the full therapy. None of the medical care I had received in Boston had achieved these results.

According to the Gerson Therapy, I will have to continue this program for the next one-and-a-half to two years to rid my body completely of cancer. Only time and my determined prayers to win will be the deciding factors in my struggle for life. Yet I feel as though I have won the battle no matter what the physical outcome.

My life has changed so dramatically, leaving me feeling that this disease has manifested itself as a protective force in my life. There is no cause ever to doubt the gift of my life, as well as that of those around me.

My deepest gratitude to all of my family and the SGI members and other friends who have helped me to realize my treasures.

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