

## A Prayer To Be Close

By DEBI WEST

Los Angeles

*Debi West, diagnosed with breast cancer, launches into a battle that transforms her relationships, bringing her closer to the people in her life. 'There were a few moments of fear and sadness,' she says. 'But mostly I was amazed at how much love was around me and how powerful I felt.'*

I have always been the kind of person who appears to be so happy and to have everything. My friends and people I meet immediately sense that I am a very confident and self-reliant woman.

In my opinion, I am a walking anomaly — although I do feel powerful and capable on the inside, I have been one of the loneliest people I have ever met. I go from man to man, hoping that someone will recognize what a good woman I am, fall in love with me, and we'll live happily ever after. To no avail, thus far.

My mother and father were divorced when I was 8. As I look back on my life and observe my tendencies, especially in relationships, I know that this was devastating for me. All my life I felt that somehow my father left because I did something wrong or was not good enough. Although we do talk from time to time, he lives far from me, and our relationship has felt simply obligatory.

My mother and I have never gotten along. I have consistently pushed her away and tried my utmost to protect myself from her, and from what I have always viewed as her controlling nature. I always felt like nothing I did was right and that keeping my life secret from my mother would keep her from proclaiming this. We, too, have shared an obligatory relationship, although she lives closer than my father and calls me all the time.

During my entire Buddhist practice, I have had little hope that these circumstances could change, although from time to time, I would include the *possibility* in my prayers. It hurt to face the fact that I had no true parent-daughter relationship. I have filled my life up with countless relationships with men, all of them failing, in hopes of filling the void in my heart for my mother's and father's love.

I believe that as a practitioner of this Buddhism, it is my mission to have the kind of faith that no prayer goes unanswered. I have often felt panicked that I would not reconcile with my parents, and that they would both die before my prayer to be close would be answered.

Recently, however, the fear of my parents' death became more intense. I chanted more toward reconciling our relationships — although I had no idea what I would have to go through to accomplish this. I felt as if something really big were manifesting in my life, and that I would have the opportunity to see the absolute power of the Gohonzon.

In August, I started dating a man named David, who soon discovered a lump in my left breast. It seemed like an ordinary cyst to me, but David had had a tumor removed from his breast several years back. He urged me to see a doctor.

During the week that I was waiting for my test results, my new boyfriend (or so I thought) started to do what all men have done with me: pull away. I was devastated and panicked. I could not deal with another person leaving me. I was more upset about this than having a lump in my breast. After all, the doctor seemed so positive that this was just a fibrous adenoma or benign lump.

It so happened that my mother was sick, and I made the effort to be there for her. I was a wreck, so being with her made me nervous. Although I don't like to talk about men with her, after a few minutes, my mother began to grill me about David. At first I played

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everything down, but after a short while, I burst into tears and began a diatribe of misery, which turned into two hours of confiding in my mother and aunt, something I'd never done before. For the first time ever I felt that it was OK to be close to my mother. She had always done her best to bridge the gap; it was I who was so distant and incapable.

I went home — still feeling abandoned by the guy — but with a new sense of hope for my relationship with my mother. It felt so great to trust her.

The next day, I called my doctor. I never in a million years expected to hear him say that “we have reason to believe, based on your test results, that you have breast cancer.” I felt a surge of heat race down my entire body. Then I went numb.

My friend Steven happened to be there. He grabbed the phone and quickly made arrangements for us to meet the doctor.

The doctor informed me that I would need to make some choices. My lump was very small, and I was extremely fit and healthy, so I wouldn't necessarily need to have a full mastectomy. They would need to check my lymph nodes in case the cancer had spread, and I needed to decide about that procedure as well.

The next day, something came over me — something that I didn't realize I had the courage to do. I decided that there was no way I was going to lose. I made the choice to share with as many people as possible what I was going through, so that they could chant for me, pray for me, meditate for me, whatever. I wanted as much positive energy going out into the universe as possible.

A fairly new friend, Barry, a psychologist, got pages and pages of information off the Internet for me. He read through everything, so that he could summarize it all and not bog me down with such a huge task. He helped me contact some of the best doctors in the country who specialize in breast cancer, so that I could get as many opinions as possible. My close friend in faith, Jennifer, started calling everyone and arranging chanting sessions.

My phone never stopped ringing. Everyone came out of the woodwork to support me. The best part was that I really wanted my mother to go through this with me. My desire to shut her out vanished.

My life-condition began to soar. I was completely ready to take action against this obstacle, share this Buddhism with others and change my destiny. There were a few moments of fear and sadness, but mostly I was amazed at how much love was around me and how powerful I felt. Even David was supporting me with all his heart.

On the day of my surgery, I was accompanied to the hospital by an army of support. David held my hand every step of the way, and my mother and family stood by my side along with four or five other friends. We all joked in the waiting room and had a good time.

When it was time to go into pre-op, David reminded me that this was the time for true courage. He shared his surgery experience with me again and helped me to understand the stand-alone spirit. It was so powerful, because he is not even an SGI member.

I spoke to every nurse and became friends with my anesthesiologist. I chanted every moment until my doctor showed up. The last thing I remember saying was, “Doctor, don't be surprised if you open me up and find a miracle.” He smiled, and said that he wanted nothing more — but he just didn't believe it would happen. The test results of a fine needle aspiration are 99.7 percent accurate.

Well, as you may have already guessed, the doctor woke me up two hours later, beaming and proclaiming that I did in fact have a benign tumor. The doctor and everyone else were so amazed. How could this be?

Well, we all know that “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 119)

In my 13 years of practice, I have seen benefits in every area of my life. It has been my

determination to prove the power of the Gohonzon, so that I could make a difference in this chaotic world that we live in. So many people I know are unhappy and have no idea how to overcome the obstacles that daily human living is certain to bring. I feel even more confident now that I can introduce my friends and family to this practice. I am so proud to be an SGI member.

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