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My Road Map  
by Caroline Wright

Lately I have been getting a lot of requests for tips, ideas for how I "cured" myself. For the record, I haven't cured myself. If there is even a glimmer of a chance of that, credit would belong to my doctors, likely mostly to my very capable surgeons first and then a team of very diligent specialists that followed.

That said, self-care has been a huge part of my coping and healing and I know it has helped my experience of my cancer, whether or not it was transferred to my cells.

More importantly than the *what* I did -- those are extensively documented here, anyway-- is the *why*. The *what*, the manifestation of my choices and the details of how I spend my days, are a direct response of my instinct and the dialogue I have with my body and mind. I think that this is critical -- there are a lot of stories out there, including this one, that are largely irrelevant and distracting to someone living through their own cancer story. I think that in focusing on someone else's tools and success steals the most beautiful part of this cancer journey that we are given as patients-- the opportunity to listen to our bodies and minds very silently, very humbly, and find where our own healing resides.

Here are a few general principles that I deduced over time, themes that were reinforced as important motivators to my choices. I am writing them as bits of advice to someone else battling cancer in the hopes that someone in the early, meandering and fearful stages of diagnosis could feel supported in knowing some things that help me:

*First, I feel strongly that doctors should be left to do what they do best: to fight the cancer. Trust them and let them hit it hard with all they have. You, in turn, take care of what you know best: you. If you're like me an already thought you had a balanced life before your diagnosis, consider really stopping everything in your life, like a crisis shutdown. There will be things you miss from your routine and things you won't -- listen to that voice.*

*Find every way to be gentle to your body. It is already working so hard to do what the doctors ask it to do. For me, that involves a lot of yoga, meditation and writing. It also means sleeping well, taking only the medicines that are absolutely necessary according to my doctor. Sticking to a good diet and moving my body with regular, stress-free exercise.*

*Seek help and conversations with people who are already living awake lives. The sources that feel valuable to you will be different than mine. Starting with practitioners who can diagnose parts of you that the doctors can't see, like a homeopath and/or an ayurvedic practitioner, is helpful. Let them help you find the changes you need.*

*Focus on where and how your body is strong, not weak, and nurture that source. This pertains to both emotional and physical strength. Mine is my kids and family, my motherhood and my creativity.*

*In terms of supporting my physical strength, I kept returning to my focus on being gentle to my body. I wasn't fit before my diagnosis-- in fact, I gained a lot of weight during the period of my tumor growth. I've since lost almost thirty pounds. I feel much healthier. I believe strongly in walking, even when I didn't want to-- actually, especially when I didn't want to. Even if only around the block.*

*Diet is hugely important to wellness, I believed before my diagnosis as a food professional but has been reinforced personally since. I have maintained a sugar-free, gluten-free, corn and potato-free, anti-inflammatory and alkaline diet full of produce and meats that have been handled with loving hands. No fried foods, no alcohol or coffee. This goes back to the "gentle" idea, too-- to let your body work hard on healing itself rather than have it spend valuable energy fighting foods that anger or clutter its clarity on a very basic level. (A naturopath or nutritionist is helpful in finding the most gentle foods for your body if you don't know where to start.)*

*Remove yourself from toxic sources. Fighting cancer is no time to be a people-pleaser. For those that love you, those you hope to live for, it is important to put yourself first. Those that don't understand that aren't worth your energy.*

*Support the things in your life that make you feel like you, not a patient. Don't stop doing things that make you happy because you got sick. Letting cancer take over your life is the first step in giving up, which weakens your ability to fight.*

*Do not look or wait for the side effects that doctors tell you about to show up. It will make you crazy and doubtful. Just live your life as normally as you can until further notice. (That's what I did. As a result, I never noticed any symptoms.)*

*Get your head out of your phone or computer and be present. It is so challenging these days, but I do think it is an important factor in being able to appreciate the life worth fighting for, to see the beauty of the helpers around you, and listen to your own instincts rather than be distracted by what the world wants you to be or how to think.*

*There are the prompts I consider with every action I take. I hope it brings comfort to a fellow cancer journeyman.*