

*Satori*





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# Satori

## Stories of Cancer Victors



*Swapna Sethu*



*Archana Vishaye*



*Salma S Shetty*



*Lakshmi R.*



*Kartikeya Mishra*



*Nivedita Sinha*



*Rupali Vaity*



*Abhinav Mittal*



*Sailakshmi*



*Padma Kinger*



*Raina Joshi*



*Seema Khanwalkar*



*D K Srivastava*



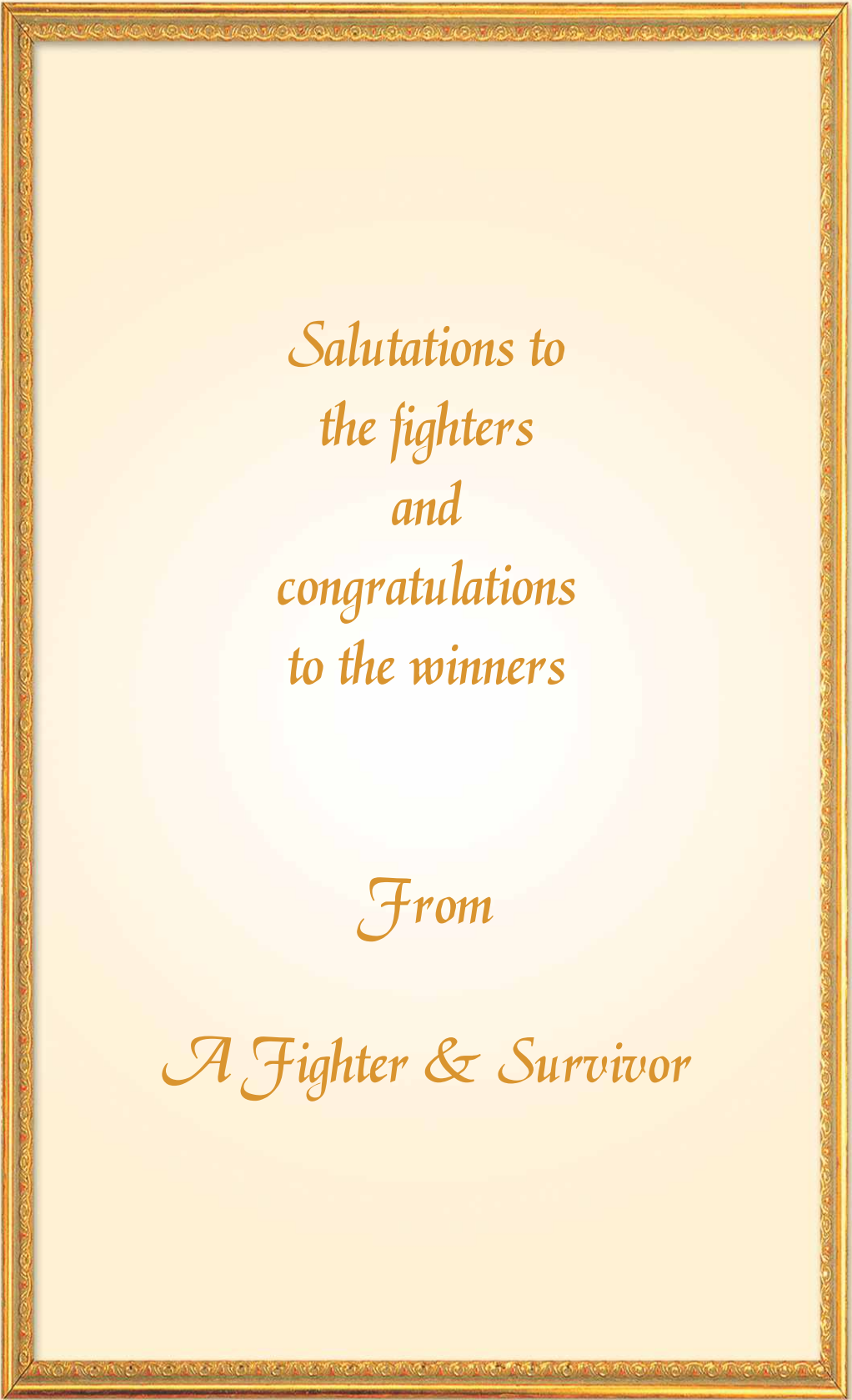
*Harvinder Singh*



*Shubhda Varadkar*



*Naresh Kalra*



*Salutations to  
the fighters  
and  
congratulations  
to the winners*

*From*

*A Fighter & Survivor*

# Prelude



We all grow up sharing our stories with our families and friends.

As children, we shared them with our Moms, as adolescents we shared them with our friends. These small tete-a-tetes, surrounded by love and warmth, always left us with a feeling that we are cared for.

However, once adulthood arrived most of us became guarded. Conscious of being constantly evaluated and judged by family, friends, colleagues and others, we stopped sharing experiences in life. Resultantly, we lost on the joy which came by sharing blissful experiences and also the healing which happens by sharing struggles.

In 2009, when diagnosed with a triple negative stage 3 breast cancer, I was in a fix. Will I be better off talking about it or hiding it? Will guarding my space reduce my pain or intensify it?

I did, what came naturally to me i.e. I started sharing this experience with whoever I came across, be they friends, family, colleagues, neighbors and at times even complete strangers.

Sharing helped. The more I talked about it, the more detached I felt from the misery and pain I had to endure. Importantly, the more objectively I looked at my pain, the more it opened me to others' experiences and journeys.

This consciousness, that I could help in sharing their pain, spurred me to start 'Sanjeevani... Life Beyond Cancer'.

In this journey, I have come across wonderful people who have gone through a cancer experience and have converted it into an opportunity to lead transformed, meaningful and more evolved lives.

This book is a compilation of stories shared by some of these 'Cancer Victors'. They have come forward and shared their stories with a hope, that these would inspire others fighting cancer. I salute them and thank them for sharing their experiences.

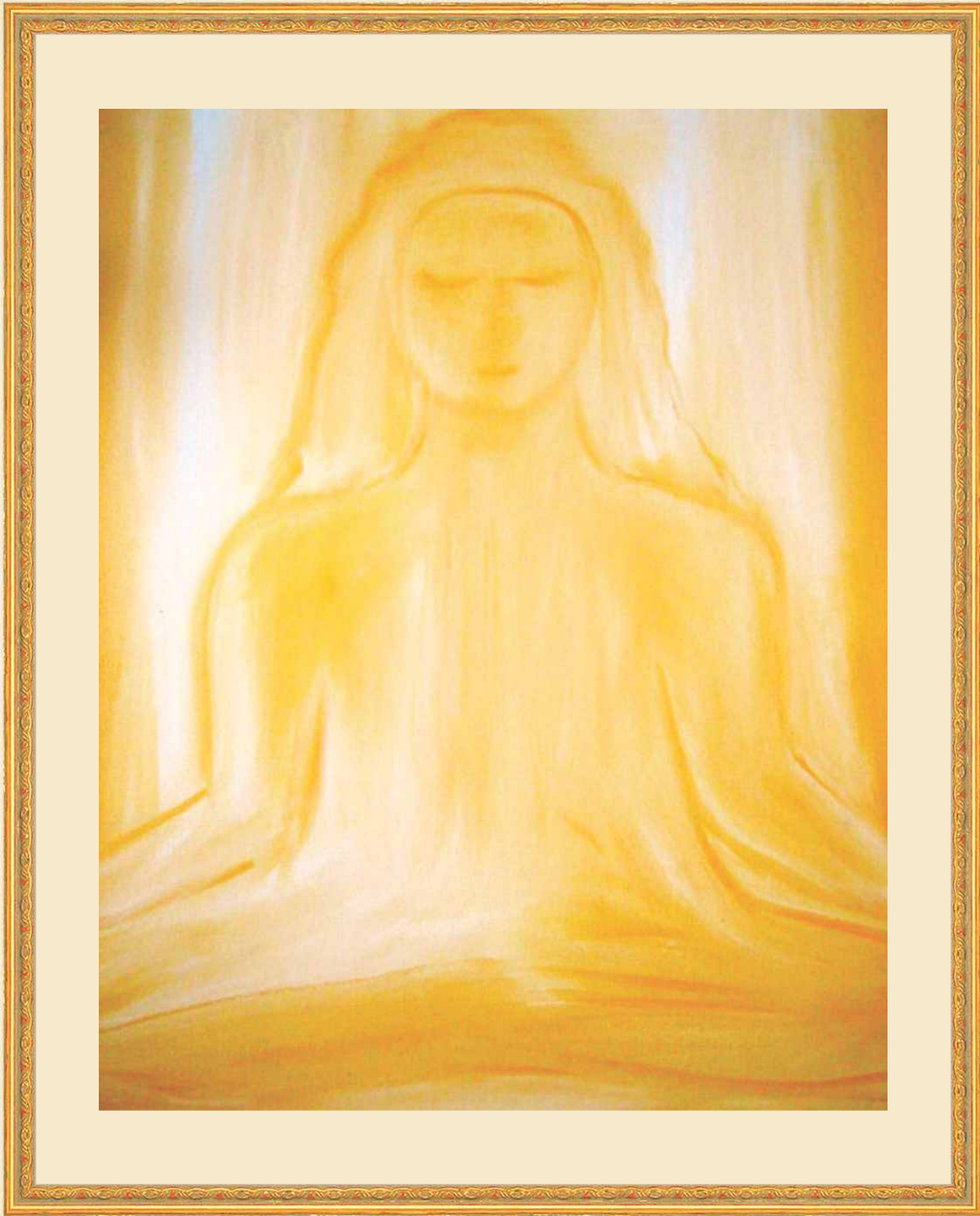
I would like to make a special mention of and take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my mentor Shri Narayan Varma, who has always been an inspiration. His story will need a separate volume.

These stories enriched me and I hope that they enrich you too.....

**Ruby Ahluwalia** I.R.A.S.

Founder & Managing Trustee

Sanjeevani... Life Beyond Cancer



*The expansion of consciousness makes the Being one with  
HIM and a state of SAMADHI is experienced .....*

# Foreword



Over 1 million Indians are diagnosed with cancer each year and most people would know someone who has had cancer or is undergoing treatment for cancer. Yet the word 'Cancer' strikes fear in our heart. Cancer is generally associated with long and difficult treatment; financial hardships for the family and above all the uncertainty of cancer coming back or being fatal. While this is true to some extent for advanced cancers, it is not the case when cancer is caught early and treated well. Awareness about risk factors for different cancers and their avoidance; awareness about early warning signs of cancer and taking prompt action if any of these signs appear and healthy living can prevent many cancers or at least take the sting out of cancer. In western countries, vast majority of cancers are detected in early stage I & II and are cured with modern treatment. 'Cure' means they have no trace of cancer in their body and the chances of cancer coming back in future is negligible. Millions of such cancer survivors or victors go about their normal life till a ripe old age, sometimes troubled with long-term side effects of cancer treatment. In our country, due to lack of public awareness, inadequate diagnostic or treatment facilities outside big cities and limited affordability, majority of cancer cases are diagnosed in late stages or deprived of timely or adequate treatment.

Doctors, nurses and hospitals treat the cancer to the best of their ability but for the person to move on with life, the scars in the mind have to be healed.

Support of the family, friends and well-wishers can ease the journey through cancer and also helps in overcoming fears. Having dealt with thousands of cancer patients and their families over the last 25 years, I have realized that the fight against cancer is almost always led by the person afflicted with the disease. Their courage and will to fight against all odds is the motivating force for their families, well-wishers and also doctors.

The stories of people going through the journey of cancer are so varied but have a common theme as evident in many of the stories shared in this book. From the initial stage of shock and disbelief, upheavals during the treatment and then regaining full control of life after treatment, most people go through a vast range of emotions and practical situations and often need support. It is heartening to note that voluntary organizations like Sanjeevani have taken a holistic view of the menace of cancer and have joined hands with doctors and professionals in raising awareness about cancer and in providing all possible support to families in their fight against cancer.

The burden of cancer in the country is so huge and its impact on a family is such that in a very short period we have to increase public awareness, sensitize policymakers to make nationwide cancer prevention and early detection programmes a reality. This has to be backed by wider availability of affordable cancer care. I have personally witnessed how Sanjeevani has evolved and its reach has increased in such a short time. Knowing the vision and passion of its founder Ruby, I am not surprised. I wish that Sanjeevani continues to grow organically and touches many more lives.

**Prof. Rajiv Sarin**

Incharge, Cancer Genetics Unit  
Tata Memorial Centre.



*Complete absorption and tranquility leads to opening  
the conduit to let the cosmic consciousness flow in .....*



Swapna Sethu

01



Face the sun and the shadows will fall behind you...

Swapna Sethu is a fighter, she can't decide if she is really that strong or the situations in her life left her without another option. She lived in a physically abusive marriage for many years before finally appealing for a separation. In the process, she lost the

close friends and family that I was not emotionally responding to my condition by taking it as the end of the world, in hindsight, it was for the best. I let my experience educate me. My intellectual engagement with my body allowed me the strength to



custody of her son to her husband. While coming to terms with her loss and separation, a period emotionally trying, she enrolled for her training as a lawyer, an attempt to start a different life, this time depending on herself more than anyone else.

Swapna's story of conquering cancer began in February, 2004. She was 33 years old when admitted to Adyar Cancer Institute, Chennai. She received good schooling and comfortable childhood years in Kuwait and pursued higher education in Pune. Her medical history was limited to a few hospitalizations for accident injuries and a difficult caesarian during the birth of her son.

After her separation, she moved to Bangalore on the insistence of her close friend, Rajini. She was her closest aid, her silver lining, her friend in need. Rajini cared for Swapna and made her feel herself again. It was she who insisted that Swapna gets the white patch on the underside of her tongue medically examined. The scars were of a previously inflicted injury during a violent faceoff with her husband.

On much insistence, Swapna decided to consult a dentist, who was quick to suggest a surgical examination. The biopsy reports diagnosed Squamous Cell Carcinoma Gradell. On her immediate response to the reports, Swapna said, "At that time I did not fully realize how dire my diagnosis was and it upset my

concentrate on learning about the disease and what would be happening to me and how I had to face it. I decided to research the disease rather than collapse mentally".

Swapna considers herself lucky to have been treated by the best team of medical professionals. Remembering late Dr. Sastri from Adyar Institute, she remembers her gentle approach to her patients. The treatment itself brings back painful memories of the sessions of Iridium Brach therapy through implantation after removing all her teeth on the right lower jaw. She was put on nasal feed for many days, which she described as highly painful. Due to the terrible pain and difficulty in even drinking fluids let alone eating food for more than six months, she explored and supplemented her treatment with alternative therapies which proved helpful. She underwent modified Radical Neck dissection performed by the veteran, Dr. C. S. Mani and his team, who gave high priority to her fear of an ugly scar and stitched her neck beautifully. Once discharged, she was given a break of one month after which external neck radiation continued for one and a half months.

Swapna was also warned of secondary Lymphoma of the neck and was advised to go for neck surgery at the earliest. Many years of physiotherapy, follow up visits for endoscopies and minor surgeries of gums

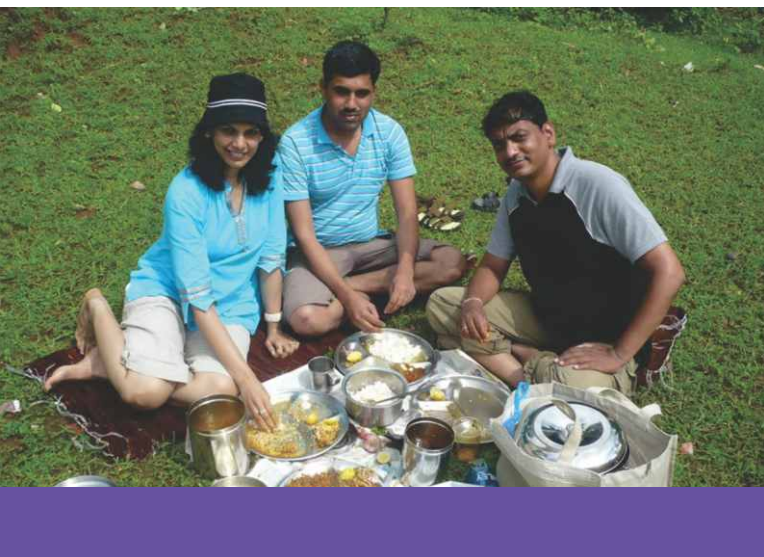
continued.

Against the backdrop of all this, once back in Coimbatore, Swapna explored several career options, including construction, travel and HR. She tried to continue her career in Law but it did not work out given her low immunity and muscular atrophy of shoulder rendered by loss of lymph nodes, muscles and nerves due to surgical interventions. She had both good and bad days and the multiple scars left on her body due to radiation elongated the process of healing.

For Swapna the bigger challenge, than enduring her medical condition, was gathering the courage to ignore the paranoid concerns of loved ones over recurrence of the condition. She said, ***“Once you learn the art of keeping your head when everyone else is losing theirs, then it is a smooth sailing from there”.***

Swapna doesn't like the term 'survivor'. She prefers 'conqueror'. To her, the experience was like a sandstorm - something blew in and out and somehow one made it through. She was clear of who

internationally before finally settling in Pune. She has invested in keeping her mind young and alert by continuing to have further education and acquiring knowledge in various fields.



she was and wanted to be. She believes she emerged as a better version of herself. She took Cancer at the face value, taking it as an opportunity to learn what she thought she needed to learn and to appreciate little things, see the world from a different perspective. She wanted to conquer the sense of hopelessness that everyone associated with Cancer. She did.

Her treatment and physical suffering never broke her spirit. ***She did not stop herself from living life to the fullest. She participated in rallies, ventured into commercial modeling, danced on stage at functions, started a boutique of her own, travelled to new places, played in the snow, swam in pools and did almost or maybe even more than what a healthy person does.*** She has lived in various cities



*Sapna has completed eleven years of cancer-free life, which she described as fulfilling and rewarding. Swapna's spirit draws from the unconditional love she received throughout her testing times from her family and friends across the globe.*



*Search within*

Acrylic on Canvas by Ruby Ahluwalia

**Archana Vishaye**



**Cancer will be the last reason for my death...**

For Archana Vishaye, a Juhu local of Mumbai, life has been full of surprises, more often than not unpleasant. When she found out about a malignant lump in her left breast, she turned to her family, her husband Arvind and in-laws in hope that they will do what she would have done in their place take care of her. However, her husband brought her to her mother's house and left indefinitely, saying he didn't have the money to treat her.

her life partner. She asserted her wish to work and continued to do so for most part of her life. However, falling into the classic trap of male chauvinism, she quietly submitted her earnings to her husband, who "allowed" her to continue working. In 1987, Archana gave birth to Janvi, a beautiful girl. Her life changed, she got a reason to hold on. She promised herself that her daughter will never be expected to put up with betrayal, misogyny and misery.



Archana wasn't disheartened. She does not remember a better side of her husband, simply because there has never been one. Within the first week of their marriage, Archana caught her husband in an act of infidelity. Having grown up in an abusive family environment as a child, her father being a heavy alcohol consumer, she could not gather the courage of confronting Arvind. There is a conscious fear of being abused that stays with women who have seen their mothers being abused by their fathers.

As a child, Archana witnessed a hostile and violent family environment. She lost her older sister to domestic violence. This alarmed her mother over the safety of her three children – Archana and her two brothers and they moved into the maternal grandmother's house when Archana was nine years old. Once Archana was twenty-one years old and her marriage was arranged, her mother moved back into the father's house.

Out of the many reasons that keep women tied to a violent family environment, economic dependence is significant. Archana had taken lessons from her mother's life. Early on in the marriage, she knew it wasn't the kind of bond she expected to form with

Archana lived in a chawl in Juhu for the better part of her life. One of the biggest dreams she had was to own a house in which she could enjoy the monsoon without worrying about a leaking roof. She takes great pride in the fact that she has provided such a roof to her mother and daughter, where they currently live.

When she found out about presence of cancer in her left breast, Archana wanted do everything to ensure that the mother of her daughter is safe and around to care for her and not desert her. That emotion gave Archana the strength to endure the treatment. She had no money with her, though earning since many years, as she given it all to her apathetic husband, who turned his back on her when she needed him the most.

Her response to cancer first time round was fearful, almost filled with subconsciously anticipated grief. Archana noted that many times, when she would find herself in conversation with other cancer patients, she could somehow see it happening to her too. She felt that she had "attracted" cancer by planting a seed of fear against it.

Her treatment cost was born by her younger

brother. She credits her maternal family for being her safe haven. There was an important lesson in there for Archana and she was quick to take it. Once through with the radiation therapy and beginning to heal, she resumed work. However, she made sure she saved every penny she could. She was on a new mission, several actually. She wanted to own a house of her own, from where nobody could throw her out and she wanted a house in her daughter's name – to secure her future.

Though there was a new approach to living, she had a constant fear of relapse. She feared and in a weird way seemed to know that cancer will recur. The fear was very real for Archana and consumed her for the next five years. It was like an unusually calm and still lake, the depth of whose water cannot be predicted but only experienced. Strangely, or maybe



not, in five years from her first surgery, Archana discovered a malignant lump in her right breast. Her fear turned into self-ridicule as she was convinced that, had she not thought about a relapse so much, it wouldn't have happened.

She did not consult a doctor for one year after discovering the second lump. This was crucial time lost. In hindsight, she asserts that she would love to go back in time and to relive those years having sought medical help as soon as the relapse was detected. She sought it late. Her breast had to be removed.

However, Archana's spirit is not about the challenges she endured, it is about the person she became because of those. The relapse shook her to the core. She convinced herself that it was her unfortunate belief that enabled cancer to take the better of her. She vowed to become so strong that no fear could ever touch her emotions.

The treatment, this time round was painful and challenging in all aspects. Archana had no significant savings. Both her brothers had passed away in highly

unfortunate circumstances. She was bed-ridden and had the responsibility of her daughter and her mother. Janvi's workplace was unsupportive of her seeking approvals for absence to accompany her mother to the radiation therapy sessions. During a time when one needs maximum support of close relatives, Archana spent most sessions escorted by someone from her daughter's friend circle. She also experienced hateful behavior from the designated medical social workers within Tata Memorial Hospital (TMH).

**Once recovered, she buckled up and hit back with double energy. She addressed her tendency to "attract" negative experiences. She now asserts that cancer will be the last reason for her death.** She is confident that she will live a full, contented life.

Archana is on the path of self-realization and is unleashing the power of her strong personality gradually. Today, she has managed to buy a small house in her name in New Mumbai, where she currently lives with her mother and daughter. **Their current house has a balcony where they sit and enjoy the first rainfall of the season with a cuppa, old hindi songs playing in the background.** Archana realizes her dream every time it rains and she does not have to worry about leakages in rooftop.



*She currently works for Sanjeevani...Life Beyond Cancer in capacity of a counselor. She aims to move up the ladder within the field of counseling, as she feels that is her calling.*



*The incessant commentary of mind, talking to itself about the experience of pain, leads to contemplation which works as a means of silencing itself where-in the transcendental self is experienced ...*



**Salma Siddiqui Shetty**



**It's all about sharing the battle and surviving...**

Mumbai resident Salma Siddiqui Shetty decided to shave off all her hair herself when the chemotherapy made it start falling. "My husband Sandy asked me not to wear scarves or wigs. He said I looked beautiful being bald." She smiled and added, "I can never forget that."

the same as mine. We read and reread the reports while still in the car and decided to get in touch with experts," she says.

While Sandy decided to Google everything he could about breast cancer, Salma decided to take a



To start at the very beginning – cancer dawned upon Salma Shetty in 2011 and quite suddenly. She had been trying to conceive a baby for long time. Salma was undergoing fertility treatments to hasten the process. That was when she noticed a lump in her left breast. "The mammography showed a suspicious growth but my doctor asked me to ignore it," she remembers. The second mammography, which showed an increase in the growth, was their wake-up call.

Says Salma, "To be honest, the most dangerous thing in cancer is the denial that patients and their families go through. So while we did the biopsy, we had not even dreamt that it would be cancerous. You can imagine my shock when I went to pick up the report and was told that I have carcinoma of left breast. Sandy and I had just come back from a week in the Himalayas and were planning to have a nice quiet dinner. And suddenly I was being told that I had cancer." She called Sandy as soon as she had her reports. He was in a meeting at work and she decided to visit him there. "When I told him, his reaction was

long nap. His research reassured them a little. "We read that breast cancer was the least lethal form of cancer. It was only a matter of how long the battle would take." Still, the couple decided to keep the news to themselves for the a few days while the doctors ran all the required tests. They wanted their own space and to just be with each other. Everything happened so quickly after the test reports that there seemed to be no time to breathe. They informed their families just a day before Salma's surgery. "Everybody was naturally quite shocked," she says.

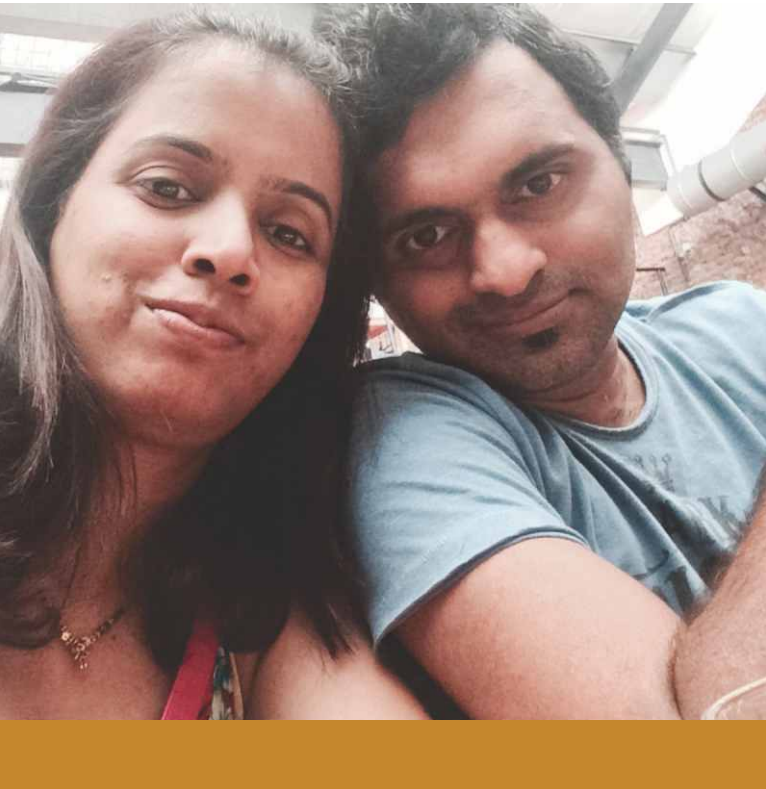
The surgery was peaceful and fast. Salma doesn't remember most of it thanks to the heavy painkillers she was being given. What she does remember is her husband refusing to leave the hospital for even half a day to go home. She says, "He stayed where I stayed, ate what I ate."

The difficult part came after the surgery. The effects of chemotherapy were something that Salma wasn't prepared for. "Sandy's job makes him travel extensively and this scared me. We made a roster of family members who would stay with me through all

my sessions," she says.

Adds Salma, ***"He was always there when it mattered the most. To hold me whenever I got frustrated, to tell me to stop being silly whenever I felt I didn't look good anymore or to force feed me wherever I got fed up of throwing up and decided to avoid eating at all."***

For them, cancer was a blessing in disguise. They say it made them both emotionally mature; so while they still fight over the small things like who gets to watch which program on television, they know it's the bigger things that matter.



Cancer can do that to a couple - make you realize how unpredictable life is. You then learn to appreciate time and learn how valuable people and relationships are. Salma and Sandy exemplify this. They've chosen to make the most of every moment.

Today, life is very different for Salma and Sandy. "We decided to adopt a little girl. Seher came into our life and is all of 2 and a half years," smiles Salma. The happy mother now works around Seher's day. "Of course there is a lot more responsibility but it's so much fun! It's been a rollercoaster," she says with glittering eyes.

***"Adoption isn't something I was entirely comfortable with. Sandy and I thought we should try conceiving before considering adoption. But, when cancer happened, I knew life was too short and the decision to bring Seher home became so much easier,"*** she says.

It takes effort and courage to survive cancer. The

whole affair can be physically and emotionally exhausting – not just for the patient; but also his/her partner. "It's so important to have an anchor," says Salma, "You're being bombarded with questions and with information. It's all so confusing. So it becomes really important to have someone to vent to and to lean on." In the end, it's all about sharing the battle and surviving.

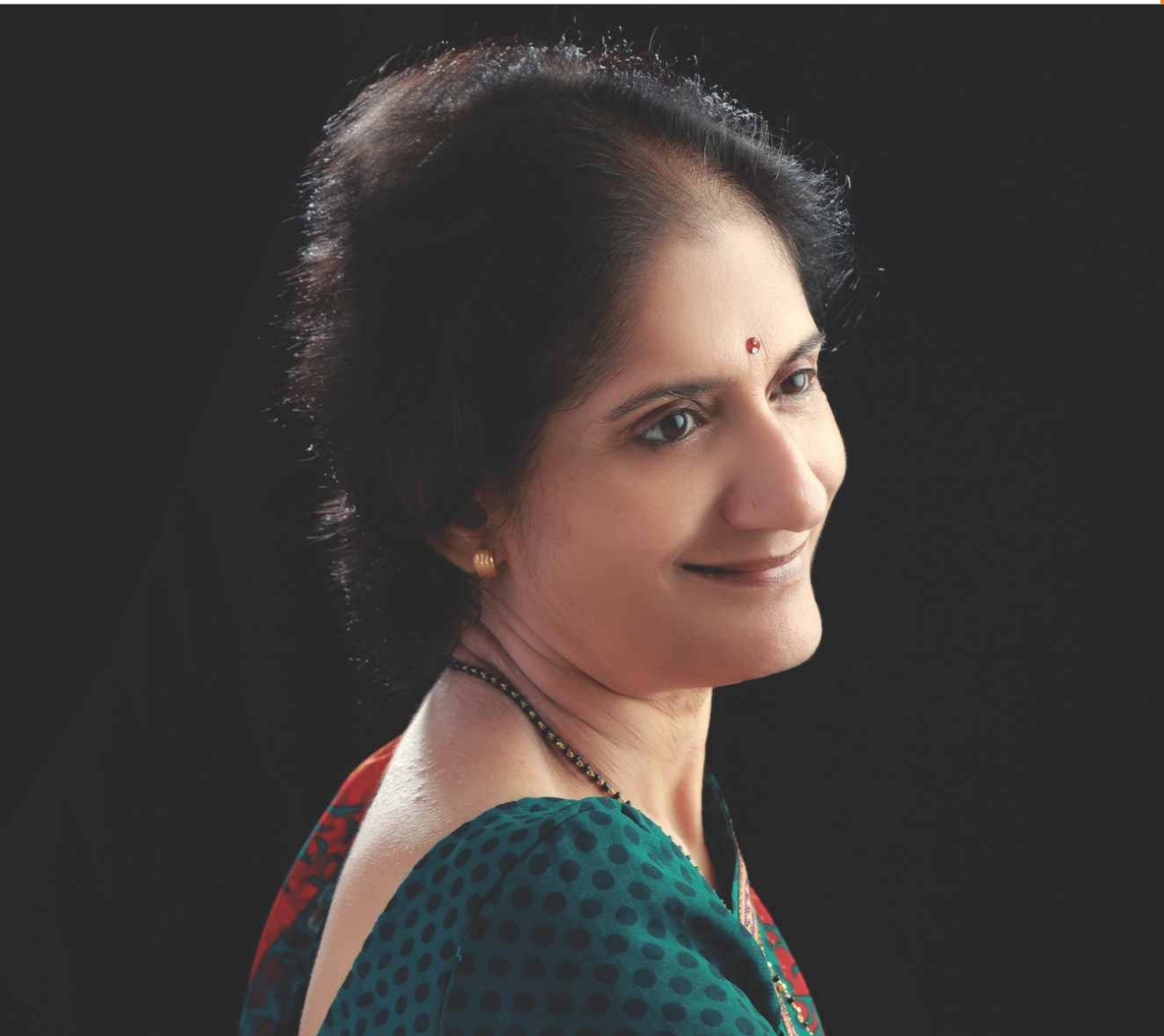


*Salma has also started taking baby steps back into the corporate world. "I love working and want to keep doing it. I also want Seher to grow up to be an independent woman and so I must practice what I preach," she says. In some ways, she is thankful to cancer for being a catalyst into adopting Seher.*



*The agony of going through physical and mental pain  
produces a yearning to find the cause beneath ...*

Lakshmi R.



If you believe it, you can achieve it...

Lakshmi R. was born in a conservative family. Though, it wasn't necessary for girls in her community to study beyond high school, as a young

Lakshmi remained in the hospital throughout her treatment and Manohar took over the responsibilities of the house, kids and ensured his presence in the



pupil, she enjoyed academics and was an above average student. She pursued matriculation and by the age of sixteen, started working as a stenographer. Although she had left studies early, she nurtured a burning desire to continue her education. In the meanwhile, she got employment with Indian Railways. Along with her job, she pursued higher studies and earned a post-graduation in Law.

Lakshmi married Manohar in 1989. Manohar was supportive of Lakshmi's aspirations and proved to be her pillar of strength through her long medical journey. In 2010, Lakshmi started falling sick frequently. Initial consultations suspected malaria. However, her family doctor having observed a sudden rise of WBC coupled with drop in platelets doubted Leukemia. She was referred to a Hemato-oncologist. Lakshmi's reports confirmed Leukemia. Her family collectively skipped a beat and started praying fanatically that the reports were incorrect. Everyone's lives in the family, Manohar and the kids came to a halt in shock, disbelief. Her son, Prateek was appearing for his 10<sup>th</sup> grade board exams, while daughter, Sushmita was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. They were young of impressionable age and Manohar told them, every day that nothing will happen to their mother.

hospital with Lakshmi every day. Alone in the hospital room, the couple would often reminisce over the past – their courtship days, marriage and the years passed by raising kids. They also had financial concerns as the medical expenses were unforeseen. Though doctors treating her were among the best, the cost of treatment was making a big hole in the small pockets of this middle-class family. Finances were pooled in from relatives and long term investments had to be encashed as Lakshmi underwent a second round of chemotherapy. It took four chemotherapy and many radio therapy sessions before her body was declared free of cancer cells. She was back home.

Probably the only fear Lakshmi had was for her parents to find out about her condition. She was convinced they would not be able to deal with the news. It was decided to keep it under wraps till the chemotherapy was over.

When Lakshmi had given birth to her daughter, she left Indian Railways to dedicate all her time and energy towards raising her kids well. She, like most mothers, wanted to give her children everything she herself grew up wanting. Her kids became her prime priority. However, she was too dynamic to put up with the monotony of domestic work. She decided to

volunteer with a community based organisation working against domestic violence. Her legal background was put to good use as she represented the cases of extremely poor and battered women.

***Sailing through challenging situations with humor had always been Lakshmi's forte.*** Recalling her chemotherapy days, she remarked "I had started losing hair. My skin had turned very dark and with my kohl smeared eyes, I used to resemble a Tollywood villain. That used to be the joke in the family those days". She never resorted to wearing wigs, as it was her chance to don the *Persis Khambatta* look.



Lakshmi never shied away from her body as it went through intense chemotherapy. She found it strange looking at herself in the mirror and could stare at herself for hours. She never consciously restricted her social life and whenever she stepped out she simply covered her head with a *dupatta*. She often remarked that it was her secret desire to shave her hair, which she is living through cancer.

Lakshmi found herself through her journey of defeating blood cancer. ***She emerged as a stronger person. She found many reasons to live every day to the fullest, instead of postponing happiness onto another day in the future.*** She went up-close-and-personal with the fact that the anticipated tomorrow may not come. The realization of the cycle of life and death made her much more spiritual in her approach towards life, other people and most importantly herself. She said, "Unlike my life before cancer, now we all sit and eat together. Why should I eat after everyone else, like I used to before! I have learnt to treat myself like an individual first and a mother and wife later."

Lakshmi had always been a fighter. Her spirit

never let her fall into the abyss of hopelessness. She believed that nothing would happen to her, even though reports suggested otherwise. Gradually she improved and got back on with her life. She connected with the pain and journey of fellow cancer patients and her heart went out for them.

She says, ***"If you believe it, you can achieve it!"***



***Having experienced gaps in our healthcare system, she started working with 'Sanjeevani Life Beyond Cancer' as Mumbai co-ordinator.***



*Accepting the true self helps to open up  
the conduit to allow the flow ..*



**Kartikeya Mishra**



**Count your blessings...**

A dashing young man, Kartikeya can easily fit into the Mills and Boon criteria of a hero of a tall and handsome man. Energetic and dynamic, his days are busy and occupied with his work, fitness routine at the Gym, theatre rehearsals, apart from spending time with his lovely wife and a young son. His childhood was beautiful but life started becoming

Kartikeya was, however, fortunate to receive good medical care. Dr. P. Jagannath, the doctor who operated upon him at Mumbai was a renowned colorectal surgeon of the country. Kartikeya also gratefully acknowledges the advice of other doctors who helped him to overcome his self-pity and face the ailment with a sense of determination to emerge



tumultuous towards his adolescence. Kartikeya's father was diagnosed with cancer and had put up long fight with it before he succumbed to it. Kartikeya was in Class XII. Despite this, Kartikeya topped Rajasthan in Class XII CBSE and qualified the prestigious IIT Joint Entrance Examination.

Cancer still had not had enough of the family. In 1991, his mother was diagnosed with cancer within days of his passing out of IIT Kanpur. Being the only son, Kartikeya put his career aspirations aside and attended to her treatment. All of his time went in taking care of his mother and providing her the required physical and moral support.

Owing to this phase in his life, Kartikeya missed out on the crucial time when he could have worked on campus placements and got selected for a great job. His mother also succumbed to a relapse of the ailment twelve years later.

Kartikeya himself was diagnosed with cancer in 2007. The disease was in advanced third stage. A tumor involving the colon with multiple enlarged lymph nodes in the adjoining region, suggestive of metastasis. Consequently, 46 cm. of the intestine had to be surgically removed in addition to the fatty layer surrounding the stomach and several parabolic nodes. The chemotherapy that followed was very painful. Unfortunately, the disease relapsed in 2009. He had to undergo another surgery and a more rigorous chemotherapy protocol.

as a survivor rather than a victim.

Kartikeya always kept his spirits high during the treatment. He played cricket with his six-year old son. He also attended and conducted trainings in the field of education and management across the country, at times even between two chemotherapy sessions spaced over a period of seven days, while coping with the side effects of his treatment. The travel and the successful conduct of these sessions not only gave him confidence, it also gave him 'a sense of satisfaction of being able to impact people's lives and the society at large'. He made new friends among his colleagues and participants. He tried to relish and enjoy each moment.

***He firmly believes that his positive attitude during the treatment was the sole factor that ultimately helped him to overcome his ailment.***

His wife was a pillar of strength in his moment of crisis. His friends helped out in all possible ways, whether by inviting him out for dinner or through the offer of monetary support.

Instead of cursing the ailment, Kartikeya feels indebted to it, and said ***"Cancer has taught me to lead a more fruitful and complete life. I have learned to smile, to count my blessings and to enjoy each moment of life. Life seems to have begun in its true sense for me only after cancer"***.

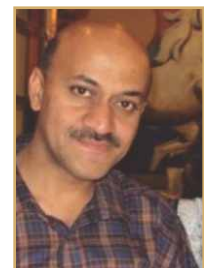
Kartikeya has authored *"There is Life after Cancer"*

in order to inspire and motivate other cancer patients and their attendants in their struggle against the dreaded disease.



Kartikeya said "I am too busy to think about this ailment any longer". He is pursuing a Ph.D. in Disaster Management from IGNOU. He recently joined a gym and lost 15 kgs. in order to keep himself fit. He is learning vocal music and has just acted in a couple of plays; "in order to popularize theatre among the common people".

Theatre is Kartikeya's latest passion. He devotes a lot of his time after work in rehearsing for the different characters that he plays. In his recent play staged in Jaipur, he played the role of an opinionated old man. No wonder he won many accolades for the same.



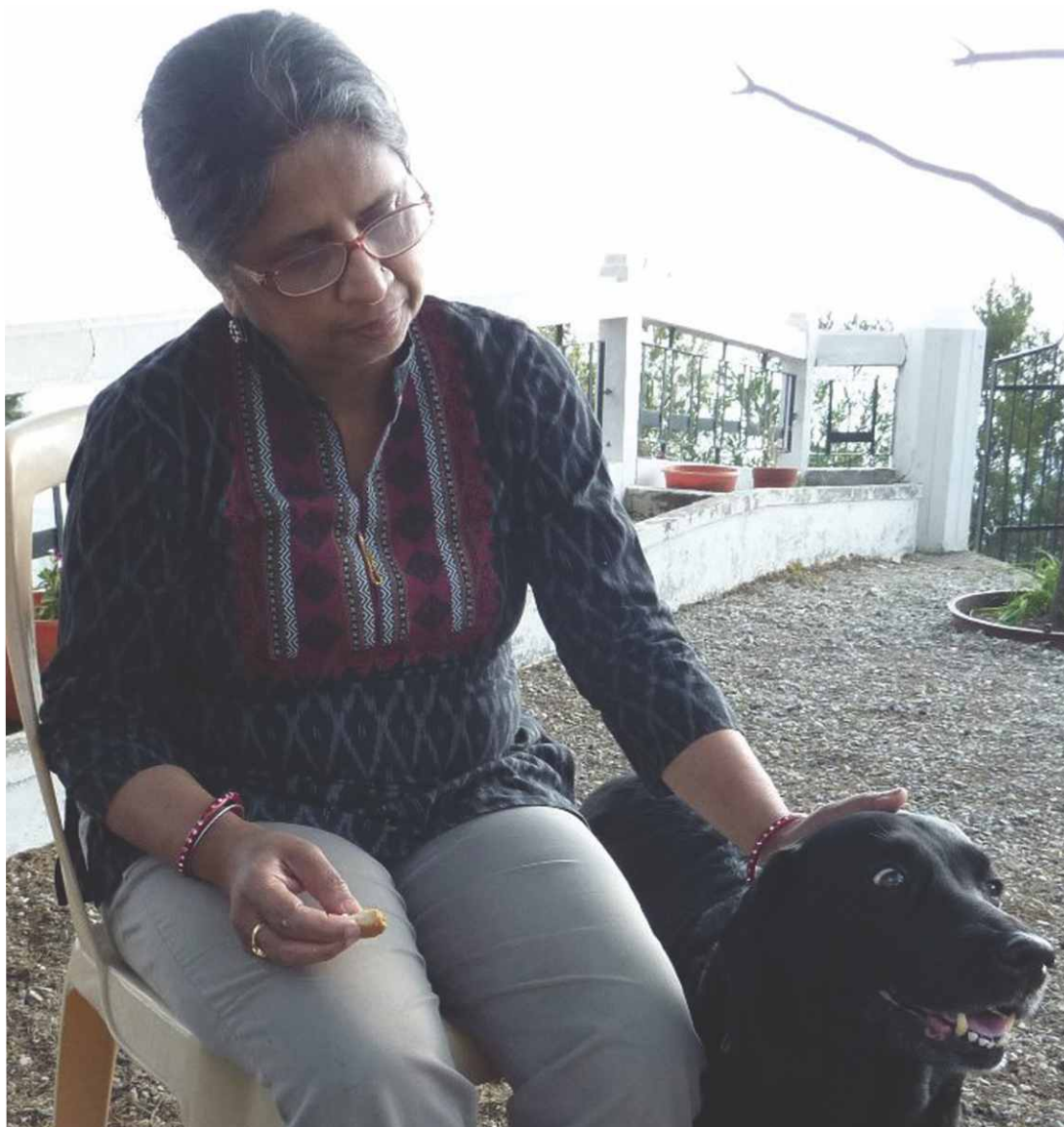
*Today, more than five years later since the last recurrence, Kartikeya, in addition to performing his official role as a civil servant, is a name to reckon with in the fields of management training. Kartikeya is an avid theatre artist too.*



*Looking Back ....*

Acrylic on Canvas by Ruby Ahluwalia

**Nivedita Sinha**



**Weed out wastages and focus on life's priorities...**

Nivedita was diagnosed with breast cancer in July 2000. She recalled often reading the phrase "walking over one's grave" but comprehended it in all its depth only on reading the FNAC report which unequivocally stated that she had cancer. She was 42 years old and in the prime of her life and career. She was a healthy and fit woman and it was extremely hard for her to imagine that she could have even a small disease, let alone cancer.

Nivedita saw the effect of the diagnosis on her daughter, her only child, then just a month short of her 17th birthday. The denial, insecurity, fear and the effort to appear brave and normal. That was what

***immortal, something must occur to serve as a reminder, so that they learn to value and enjoy every moment and not waste the precious time.***

Nivedita underwent treatment at Tata Memorial Hospital at Mumbai, which began with a surgery followed by chemotherapy and radiation. There were good days and bad days and she sailed through both with tremendous support and encouragement from family and friends, many new ones she met at the hospital during her treatment. During the treatment process she understood the difference between giving up and surrendering oneself to destiny. Giving up, she figured was losing hope, while **surrendering**



broke her heart. She decided right then that she would not allow anything to happen to herself.

Nivedita said, ***"Clichés like 'if God gives misfortune he also gives the strength to cope' are not said in vain. I found them to be true"***.

She found her strength coming from several, often unexpected quarters. It was a rainy day when Nivedita was sitting by herself, lost in her dark thoughts, when her brother came to see her. She couldn't resist opening up to him. She asked, "How did I get this disease? Nobody for several generations has had it in our family". Her brother replied that there was only one thing hereditary in the family and that was death. The grandfathers and grandmothers died, the uncles died and the father died. So will the rest of them. His answer brought a smile to Nivedita's face and she got the message. She understood that life is uncertain whether or not for cancer.

***When people live life as though they are***

***was acknowledging one's position in a bigger picture and letting things happen through self.***

She found hope in several places, through prayer and keeping faith.

Once recovered, she was overwhelmed with the desire to extend support to others, doing something for those who were suffering without adequate means to comfort them.

Her doctor helped her see through the length v/s quality of life lived. She realized how she lives was something she could control. She drew inspiration from everyone she met during her visits to TMH, the doctors, the many fellow travelers and selfless volunteers she met in TMH whose life stories gave her courage and motivated her to do something towards supporting and rehabilitating women undergoing treatment for breast cancer.

At TMH, while the doctors and hospital staff were extremely competent and empathetic, the sheer

numbers left them with very little time to deal with non-medical issues that patients and their families have, needed to be addressed and resolved.

Nivedita believed that one must lead a good life after cancer and wanted to spread the message. She also wants to spread awareness about breast cancer and cause behavior change leading to early diagnosis and better prognosis.



Her experiences made Nivedita review her entire life and as she summarizes, ***"Weed out wastages and focus on life's priorities. She adds "Strangely it also helped me get over my insecurities and overcome many inhibitions. I am well today and grateful for that. It's one day at a time. I will end with another cliché - whatever happens, happens for the best."***

Cancer taught Nivedita a great deal in retrospect. When she first heard that she had breast cancer, it took some time for the reality to sink in. On one level it seemed like a bad dream, on the other, it sounded like a death sentence. Fortunately for her, there were many people around to help in coping with all the uncertainty and despair that the verdict of cancer brought. Her brother helped her see that actually life itself is uncertain. One never knows what the next moment might bring. Everyone just lives under an illusion that everything is under control. So once this fact is acknowledged and appreciated, one stops resisting the circumstances and starts working with them.



*Inspired by and the "Reach to Recovery" program in South Africa, Nivedita along with Mamta Goenka (a fellow bilateral breast cancer survivor and an inspiration), introduced a patient information kit for breast cancer patients. This kit is given to cancer patients during interactive sessions before final discharge, where all issues by they emotional, psychological and physiological are addressed.*



*The progress on the path, is achieved by  
'backward flowing movement' so that  
the thoughts are gathered and the  
Divine is experienced.....*



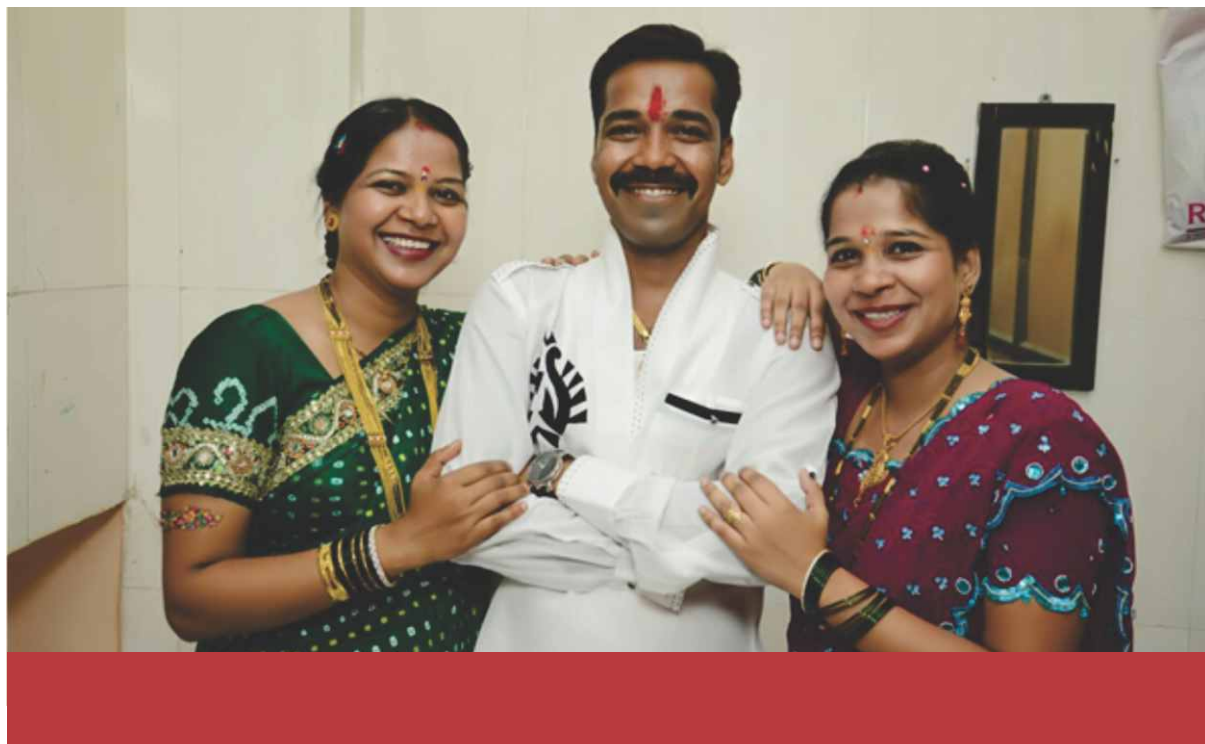
**Rupali Vaity**



**Toughness is in the soul and spirit, not in muscles...**

Rupali Vaity speaks fast and nonchalantly, narrating the day she found a patch of her hair in her hands while doing her morning grooming routine. It had been a fortnight since radiation therapy had

priority treatment. She also felt looked after in the hospital, which made her treatment seem smoother than others. She sought medical help as soon as she became aware of the lump in her left breast.



begun. With the first bunch of hair fall, she casually ordered her younger brother Swapnil to bring a razor and shave off all her hair. She remarked, "I didn't want hair falling everywhere in the house and my siblings getting sentimental over it. It's just hair, it'll grow back. What's the big deal?". Her brother, Swapnil, older sister, Reshma and also her neighbours whose house she was living in whilst being treated for breast cancer, were shocked at her proposal. They tried to take her words lightly, which further drove her off the edge. So she picked the razor and shaved off her own hair.

Rupali, a fisherman's daughter, grew up in Mahim area in Mumbai. Her parents, being the progressive ones in the community, wanted her to succeed in academics. So did Rupali, she loved school. When in her higher secondary, she discovered her mother was suffering through uterine cancer. She chose to be at home and care for her family thereby missing her board exams. Mounting medical bills and responsibilities, motivated Rupali to help her father in every way she could. That was the end of formal education for her.

In 2013, at the young age of 31 on a relatively cold winter day in December, Rupali collected her biopsy reports to discover a six-inch lump in her left breast. It made a special medical case owing to the presence of triple negative cells and was taken up as a study case in Tata Memorial Hospital (TMH). Rupali feels thankful for being part of a study case as that gave her

***Rupali felt numb on finding out. Not shocked, not surprised, just numb. She had a family history of cancer. Six of her aunts had cancer. She expected to get it at some point, at least subconsciously, perhaps the reason behind her fearless approach to it. She said in one breath, "I knew I was not going to die of cancer. I knew nothing was going to happen to me and that I just needed to go through the treatment and I would come out just fine".***

Rupali had got married in 2008 and settled two lanes away from Reshma's house. She was the first person she shared her reports with. Initially supportive, her in-laws and husband decided to consult a family doctor for further treatment. However, Rupali wanted otherwise for herself. She wished to seek the expertise of doctors at Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai. She asserted her opinion and what she thought was in her best interest. This did not go down too well with her in-laws and husband. She was given the choice of either going with their advice or leaving the house. Rupali moved to Reshma's house and stayed there for good part of her treatment. Her husband ignored her completely during the crucial month of her surgery. She thought he was just angry over their misunderstanding and was prepared to forgive him as soon as he came to her. He saw her for the first time after her first chemo session and eventually started visiting regularly. Rupali never questioned him for remaining absent when she needed him the most.

She was just happy that he came back. She later confessed that deep down her heart, she was disappointed in him but she was never going to bring the topic up with him because she didn't know what caused it and wouldn't want to risk his absence again.

During the course of treatment, if there was anything that mildly pulled her down, it was the socializing bit. Rupali stopped socializing during her treatment. She had always liked the process of dressing up, grooming herself and being impeccably presentable. This process was very close to her self-identity. She never let anyone see her disappointment though. She would team up with her four-year old nephew Vedang and play around in the house. Even as her physical movements got restricted during the treatment, her spirit did not. She loved interacting with Vedang, answering his four-year-old-curiosity with matching enthusiasm. He was her bridge to retaining sanity during those times.



Aware of the family history of cancer Reshma and Swapnil were constantly worried for their sister. Rupali's inspiration was to never let their smile fade away. This was the reason she didn't let her own smile disappear at any time. She maintained the chatty, chirpy side of her personality to ensure that her siblings do not feel sad for her. Behind her smile though were hidden concerns and desires. She often felt the absence of a maternal figure – someone she could hug and cry. She wanted to remove the cloak of strength, at times, to bury her head in a comforting lap and have a gentle, reassuring stroke on her head. She remarks "Mujhse koi bada nahi tha to mein khud hi badi ban gayi (I had to take up the role of a matured elder, since there wasn't one present)."

Rupali thinks that she is a 'workaholic'. Right after her radiation therapy, even before fully recovering, she started going for job interviews. She was bored

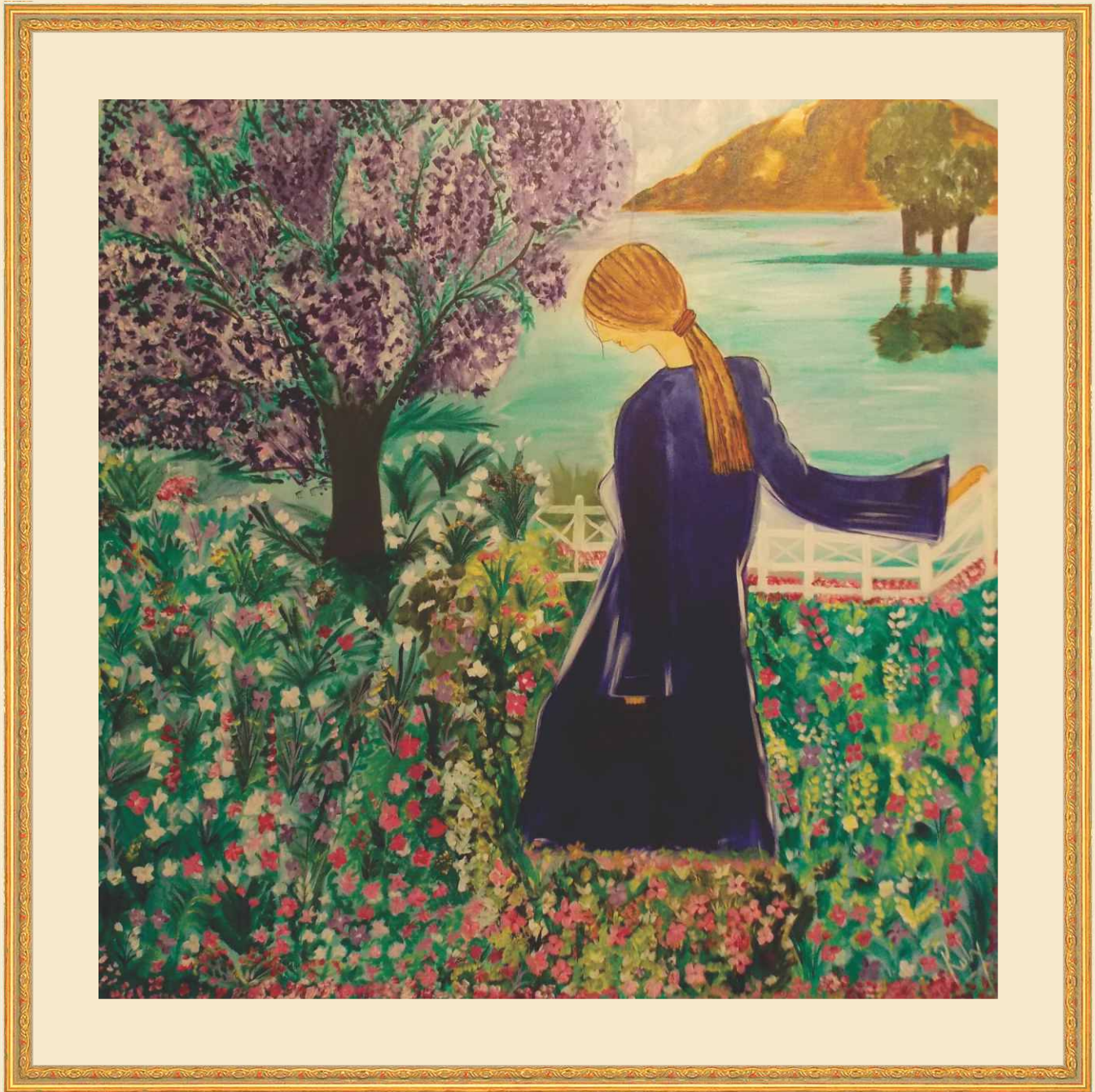
of being at home; she needed to get back to the routine life. She met with recruiters who were shocked in disbelief. She had several job offers. All however, insisting that she wait till fully recovered. She had prior experience in Customer-Relationship Management where she trained people working in BPOs. She had to take this job because it paid well, Rupali confesses. Her heart lies in counseling and rehabilitation services, which unfortunately doesn't pay very well, at least initially.

She wants to add value to the organization that she works with and community at large and also earn money and lead a comfortable lifestyle.

Her future plans include having one biological child and adopting another one. She wants to adopt a baby girl and raise her like her own. Ever since she was a kid herself, she has known this desire of hers. Rupali is one of those people who redefine the limits of endurance. With an effortless selflessness, she embraced every situation that came her way and made the best of it. Engaging with cancer, she has now equipped herself with skills and knowledge to guide others going through a similar trajectory.



*Currently, Rupali has chosen to work with Sanjeevani – Life beyond Cancer in capacity of a counselor. She consults patients and their families, explaining about the medical condition and emphasizing the importance of building emotional strength.*



*Joy...*

Acrylic on Canvas by Ruby Ahluwalia

**Abhinav Mittal**

29



**Feed your faith and your fears will starve to death...**

Abhinav Mittal was in Mumbai, in 2009, when he started keeping unwell, feeling weak, giddy and having increased blood pressure. In September 2009, he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma-Nodular Sclerosis type after a biopsy. It was in II-B stage and was considered to be a curable cancer.

of not letting cancer overpower his sanity. A promise he kept very well.

Abhinav was a body builder, hence a gym regular. As the treatment progressed, he had to discontinue his exercise regime. He said, "I idealized Lance Armstrong



Abhinav sought the expertise of Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai and was prescribed eight sessions of chemotherapy and eleven sessions of radiations thereafter.

His biggest fear was his parents' reaction to this news. His parents were elderly and emotionally vulnerable to anything negative happening to their son. It seemed impossible to share the news with them as he feared that they might not understand the medical nuances and hence have added stress beyond their tolerance level. His parents lived in Jaipur and after much contemplation he decided to keep the information discreet, at least, till the treatment was over. Belonging to a close knit family, speaking to each other on a daily basis was a routine in the family. This implied that Abhinav had to lie to them every day about his health.

Chemotherapy began later in 2009. This meant he could not travel to Jaipur to see his parents; neither could they visit him during his treatment. Hiding his condition from his parents was tougher than enduring the entire treatment, for Abhinav. However, he was determined to fight everything his destiny had in store for him. He had promised himself

and continued with weight training after the first chemotherapy session but could not continue later. As treatment progressed, my hair fell, I became weak, I could not breathe properly both due to the disease and the side effects of drugs, my tongue, lips and eyes turned blue and complexion darkened. I lost appetite and had a persisting bad taste in mouth. Even after all the side effects, I kept my hopes high and told myself that this shall pass. I remember how different it felt when I lost my moustache and beard. I felt I was an adolescent once again. Those days I listened to a song from the movie 3 idiots very often. **"Give me some sunshine, give me some rain... give me another chance, I want to grow up once again."**

Abhinav often spent the treatment days in retrospection. He wondered about his childhood, his parents and their struggles to bring him up, provide him with good education. He was also touched by the support he received from his friends, family and his colleagues. He was assigned a special six-month leave for treatment, along with full support from the organization.

The ride to and from the hospital was over 70 kms, which was painful for Abhinav on days of chemotherapy sessions. He was doing everything to

keep his immunity and platelets high. Since he could not eat solid food, he had substituted the nutrition with protein shakes. His disciplined routine ensured that his platelet count never fell below the minimum prescribed range for a normal person. He was always found fit for next chemo session.

During the treatment, whenever he visited the hospital, people refused to believe that he was a cancer patient. He continuously thanked God for his condition especially after witnessing the condition of many patients in the hospital.

After his sixth chemo session his PET CT Scan report revealed that his body had become cancer free. To Abhinav, it felt like an overdue victory. He was on the top of the world, while being under strict advice of the doctor to complete the treatment and not get complacent. He religiously completed all the chemo sessions and radiations and the treatment ended on 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2010.

Abhinav felt guilty for hiding his condition from his parents and avoiding meeting them consistently for the last few months, even after their insistence. On 6<sup>th</sup> March 2010, he went to Jaipur. He met his parents and explained to them everything that had happened to him since he got detected with Cancer. He apologized for hiding the fact from his parents. His parents were in shock. His father had tears in his eyes and couldn't stop thanking God for being with his son. His mother, on the other hand, fell unconscious. For the next two days, she had to be looked after as she was inconsolable and took ill. However, Abhinav kept reassuring them that the worst was past them. Their son was healthy and a fighter. He was reassured himself that his decision of being treated, in discreet, was in everyone's interest.

Abhinav had some catching up to do with reference to regaining his health. He was still facing problems in breathing due to which he was prescribed steroids. However, the side effect of taking the steroids was that his weight rose to 87kgs.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2010, Abhinav rejoined office as well as began weight training one week after that. He had missed being in the gym. Gradually, his breathing became normal and he restarted aerobics in June 2010. He regained his stamina. The follow up reports were very positive.

***Back in the gym, he surpassed his pre-cancer level in weight training in early 2011 along with improved performance in aerobics. He boasts of doing 1500 flying kicks daily and double the weights he used to lift before treatment began.***

He was extremely happy for his restored hair growth and that he looked like himself again. In fact, many people complimented him on looking even better than before treatment. At his workplace, he has been approached by many people who request him

to share his experience. Abhinav feels immensely satisfied when he hears a transformed tone of people after interacting with him. As per Abhinav, he is a thankful man who proactively reaches out to those in need. He has also taken up a course in Actuarial Science, considered one of the most challenging branches of study within finance. He has big aspirations for his future.



*Abhinav feels eternally thankful for the support and strength he had. He has coined a term Cancer Champion and uses it for people who use the experience of cancer as a stepping stone to transform into a better version of themselves.*



*The traditional form of worshipping  
Now seems the way .....  
But soon the realization that one needs  
to move forward.. .*



Sailakshmi Balijepalli aka Sai



Connect with the soul...

Dr. Sai quotes an anonymous thought: "There are infinite imaginative possibilities when we allow freedom to go beyond our perceived limits. If we can dream it, we can build it. Life through unconditional love is a wondrous adventure that excites the very core of our being and lights our path with delight".

Sai's childhood was spent in a spiritually stimulating environment, where listening to religious speeches, talks on moral lessons from epics, divine songs and prayers and studying art were the norm of life. She grew up understanding the value of community service and kept asking questions about

She was well settled in her profession as a medicine lecturer, when she had to consult doctors for a lump in her right breast. It was found to be suspicious and was surgically removed. Reports confirmed stage IV malignancy. It was as if someone had put emergency brake in her speeding car. Perhaps a divine intervention. At least that is what Sai chooses to believe.

Her first reaction had nothing to do with the medical or the emotional elements as one may assume. The reports gave her the much needed jolt to think about 'what is she doing with her life'. Was



the purpose of the soul from a young age. She always felt that God has created every human with a purpose and one's ultimate calling is to identify that purpose and work towards fulfilling it. As a kid, she loved philosophy and the question, "Who am I?" jaunted her a lot.

When someone is born to a family of doctors, it's taken for granted that the person will also become a doctor. Dr. Sailakshmi Balijepalli aka Sai, is a rare example of an internationally acclaimed Neonatologist, who left a soaring career in medicine to transform availability of quality healthcare to infants living in extreme poverty.

Her sister, Sarada, also pursued medicine and became a cardiologist. Sarada has always been Sai's motivator, friend and mentor in all her activities. It was she who inspired Sai to take the decision to quit her medical practice to establish an administrative set up for providing intensive care unit services to poor children, significantly contributing to reduce infant mortality in the country.

she following her passion for community service? Was she working to make the system more inclusive of the disadvantaged? The answer was 'No'. The answer changed her life. She decided it was high time to transform her compassion into real-time actions.

Sai quit her job by the time radiation therapy started. Having a family of doctors helped in keeping the emotional involvement in the treatment low. Everybody knew exactly what was wrong in her body and that she would be absolutely fine after the treatment. This gave her the much needed support as well as a sense of normalcy.

***She put Cancer in its place – a medical condition that needed to be healed.***

***Sai often calls the experience of Cancer her 'blessing in disguise'. She believes that if not for the experience, she would have never taken a break for six months and actually designed the idea she had for many years.***

Sai was frustrated with the inadequacies of the

healthcare available in India. She witnessed the number of children who were becoming victims of the inefficiencies of the system and saw doctors increasingly accepting these deaths as a routine problem. Often, she observed that the intensive care unit had limitations. Children were often admitted to the ICU a little too late, and more important, many parents of the patients could not make firm decisions on whether and how much to spend on the afflicted child. They had other children and they were severely limited by their inability to afford the ICU facility.



These observations and her internal reluctance to submit tamely to the existing situation pushed Dr. Sai to search for solutions. Initially, she assumed the role of a proactive doctor who visited orphanages around her hospital to identify, refer and treat sick children.

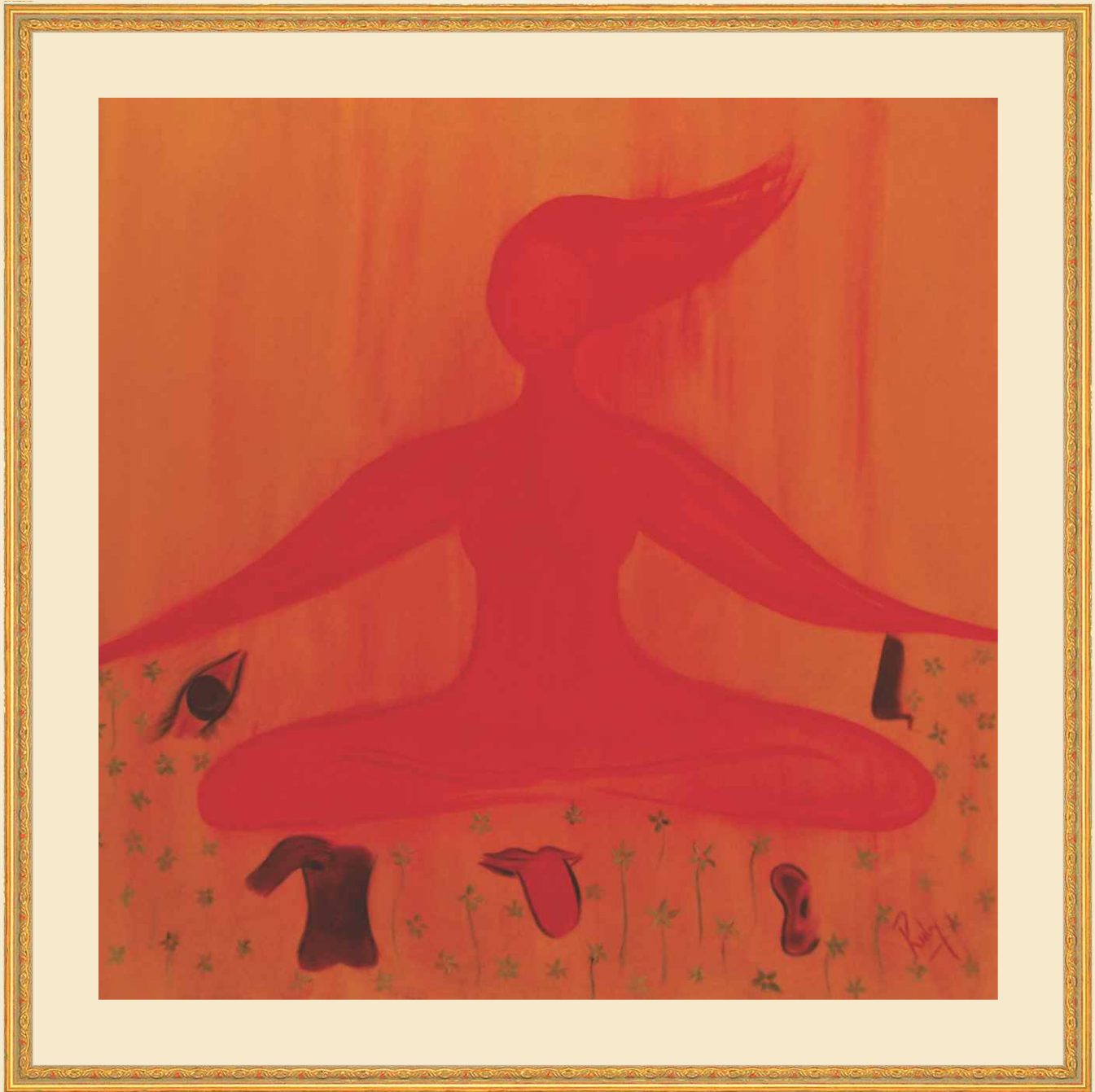
Later, to achieve large scale impact, she created a project that connected private doctors to orphanages around their hospitals. To quote her, "It started in 2006 as a community pediatric health project of Mehta Children's Hospital, where I was working as a junior consultant in the neonatal intensive care unit. We tied up with 60 pediatricians initially who were friends, colleagues and teachers and matched them to 60 orphanages based on their location. We asked them to take up ownership for health care of the children attached to their orphanage".

Initially everyone was enthusiastic, but because of busy schedules, they were not able to visit the orphanages regularly. However, they were willing to see all the children referred to them free of cost. Accordingly a nodal clinic model was started where the children would be referred to the nearest pediatrician. However, it was still a bit of a challenge to stay within a medical and hospital system and deliver effectively on this model. Sai decided to improve the model's efficiency.

Sai herself was being treated for breast cancer while she took Ekam from an idea to a reality, all in six months. She would take off only on the days of undergoing chemotherapy. Rest of the days she would resume business as usual. Cancer never deterred her spirit, in fact added to it. So much so that in October 2010, Ekam received official permission from the NRHM (National Rural Health Mission) to appoint 234 Nurses in all 37 medical college hospitals and district headquarter hospitals in the state and monitor all 41 sick newborn care units (SNCUs) established in the state for reducing the neonatal mortality rate as part of a public-private partnership initiative.



*Sai's belief in meditation as a source of healing strengthened after Cancer. She credits it for her transformed life, while many infants and their parents with limited means credit her for her magic touch that saves their kids. She is in every way an extra ordinary human being.*



*Sensory experiences are impediments in the journey  
And thus need to be conquered ...*

**Padma Kinger**



**Take charge of your happiness...**

When Padma at 40, was facing hair loss as a result of radiation therapy, her elder brother, Rajkumar, would often tease her over usage of artificial colour and chemicals on her hair over the years. He would joke that it took Cancer to give her new, better hair she always dreamt of. Most of Padma's chosen memories from the experience are those that brought her closer to her brother.

For the first time in their lives they connected as siblings – eating meals together, taking an evening stroll, watching movies and sports together – even having occasional fights over TV remote. Those four months were significant for the siblings for the first time ever they poured their hearts out to each other.

Rajkumar is 10 years older than Padma and was a father figure for her since childhood. Currently based out of Dubai, Rajkumar took a four-month sabbatical to care for Padma, when she underwent treatment for Breast Cancer. Leelam, Padma's older sister joined them regularly, managing her time between her husband, two kids and her siblings.



Padma's life has been unconventional and seemingly challenging. She lost both her parents at the age of eight. Her father, a modest vegetable vendor met with an accident on an unfortunate day, while she lost her mother to ovarian cancer. Although academically good in school, it took Padma a while to find a professional footing after pursuing Diploma in Engineering and MA in Sociology. Her twenties were spent building a career, which involved several job and industry shifts.

Padma has lived independently since a young

age. Working in a city like Mumbai meant long working hours, long commutes and unhealthy food choices that the fast-paced metro-city life brings along. Thriving in the work environment also meant long, stressful, deadline-oriented, high adrenaline days. Days quickly turned into years. Being a single woman, it fell upon her own self to ensure adequate nutrition and a healthy lifestyle. Padma notes in retrospect that she fell short on both those requisites.

One day, while getting ready for work, she noted something unusual and suspicious. It was a lump in her left breast. A small lump may be an inch or two,



she later noted. However, the tasks of the day quickly took the better part of her attention and she carried on with the day as usual business. She continued to ignore it for a few weeks. Looking back, Padma confessed that she should have sought medical advice immediately. She must live with the consequences of not doing so. **“Nothing is more important than a healthy body and one must treat it like a temple” she noted.**

The day she discovered liquid discharge from the breast, she was jolted. It could not be ignored longer. She called her closest friend, Leela, and both of them rushed to a nearby clinic for screening. The reports revealed a six to seven inch lump, which needed to be surgically removed and tested for malignancy. Rajkumar, her brother and Leelam, her sister were informed and both of them prioritised their youngest sister over every other thing.

Once presence of cancerous cells was established, a long-time subconscious fear surfaced in Padma. Her first reaction was refusing to be treated in Tata Memorial Hospital (TMH). Initially she was surprised by her own assertiveness. Gradually, she discovered

the source of those emotions. Padma was very young when she lost her mother to Cancer. Her contact with her mother was limited for few years before she passed away. For Padma, the memories of her mother were tied to TMH. When the doctors suggested Padma to go to TMH, the subconscious grief of losing her mother as a young girl surfaced.

Life threatening situation give rise to spiritual consciousness. Once the grief of parental loss was re-experienced, Padma became deeply spiritual about the entire experience of her own Cancer. She reconnected with her mother's memories and addressed many tough aspects of emotions. It gave her strength to endure the radiation therapy. Having her brother care for her at home healed her quickly. It was her brother who cared for their mother years ago, when she suffered through cancer. The time the siblings got to spend with each other brought them immensely closer as a family unit. They relived their childhood and enjoyed this time together.



Padma cut down her social life significantly, which helped cut down the hype and stigma one is prone to experience with unwanted interactions with poorly-informed yet highly-opinionated people in the society. She took a break from her job and spent her evenings watching movies or taking strolls with her brother. She continued to being herself, treating cancer like she would treat a stubborn fever – do the needful and get back with life.

***However, the challenges are what bring out the core nature of individuals. Being the self-dependent, level-headed, strong woman that Padma is, she shrugged and said to herself “it could have been worse!”***

***As Padma recovered from the treatment, she took charge of her own happiness in a significant and unique way.*** She enrolled herself into a three-

month counselling course at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). She not only understood her own self better through the programme, but also honed her communication and interpersonal skills by learning about individual and collective psychology. She made new friends, much younger and much older than her, each with a fascinating and challenging life story of their own. She stepped out of her comfort zone and understood that all experiences teach important lessons. She came out of the course with a new name christened upon her by her new friends, 'Paddy'.

Today, Paddy leads a healthier lifestyle, has resumed her job and aims to do a full-time programme in counselling. She does not shy away from sharing her experience with people, however at the core of her heart wishes to leave the experience of cancer behind and move on to better things in life.



*What separates Padma from others is the ability to have an honest conversation with her. Her self-awareness and self-consciousness is very high, making her able to connect the dots between different life experiences. She emerges through challenges as a better version of herself, a champion.*



*With Best Compliments From*

*UK Beswal*



**Raina Joshi**



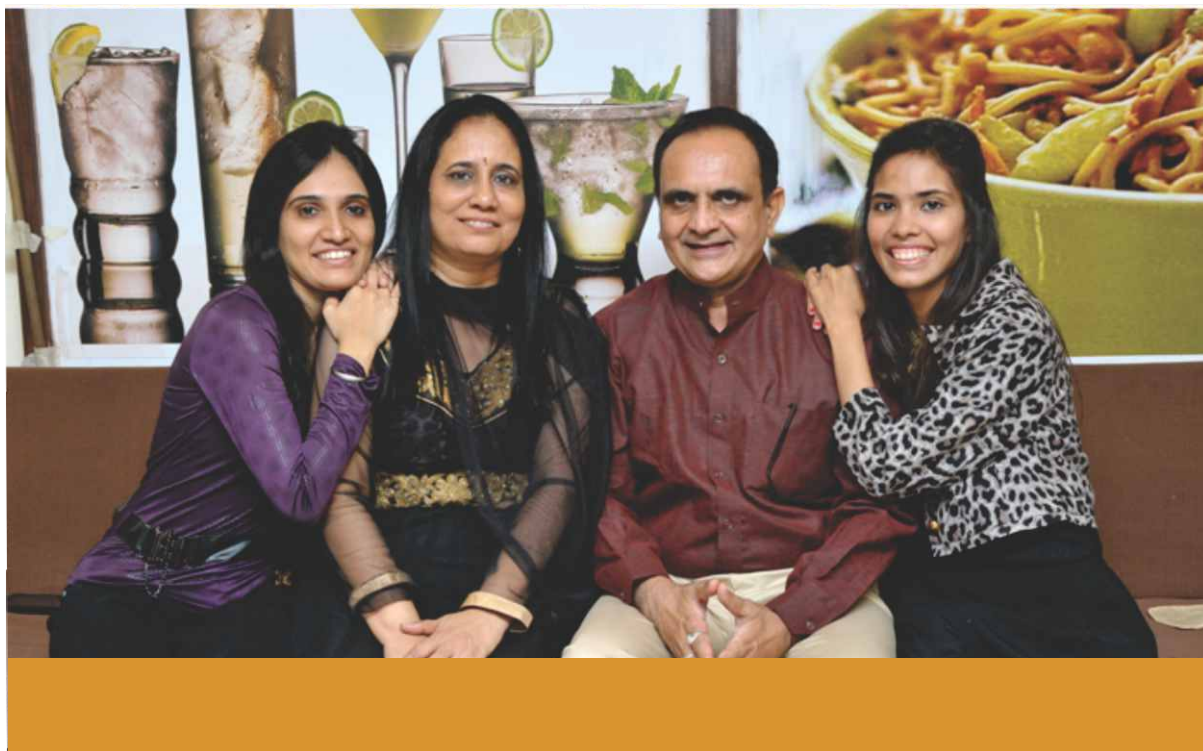
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**Rise like a Phoenix...**

***“The phoenix can wing its way through the desert skies and still, defying fortune's spite, revive from the ashes and rise...!!”***

***The little Phoenix Star “Raina Joshi”*** who revived herself, rose to become Dr. Raina Joshi.

Raina, the name brings to one's mind; a portrait of a thin built, little girl with a cheerful smile on her charming face. Just like her million-dollar smile, her story fills one with positivity, pride and optimism.



Born and brought up as a normal healthy child in a middle class family by proud parents Jeeta and Mahesh Joshi, Raina was always full of energy and enthusiasm and a bright student at school, not only in academics but also in all extracurricular activities. This vivacious girl had one and only one dream since her childhood- “To become a doctor” and serve people.

Dedicated to her dream, she entered 10<sup>th</sup> grade, the year of board exams which was happy and normal till her 1<sup>st</sup> terminal exams in September 2006. Thereafter, she started having weakness and malaise as normal girls face during their adolescence. This ultimately turned into something serious. It was a landslide for her parents to see the blood report diagnosis. Their daughter had been suffering from “*acute lymphoblastic leukemia (all)*.”

However, Raina knew that the fact couldn't be changed and thus began ***The battle of her soul with her own body...!!!***

She was immediately admitted to GCRI (Gujarat Cancer Research Institute), Ahmedabad. Even at that budding age, she was the perfect epitome of

strength. It was a great surprise to everyone that she didn't cry during her whole bone marrow examination procedure. When she was told what she was suffering with cancer, she said. “I know it's dangerous, but if I am that chosen one by God, I will fight it happily and conquer this exam of my life with all my positivity, so that even the Almighty will have no other way but to take me out of it...***if my body has challenged my soul...I'll never let my soul to bow down.***” Since that moment itself, she had that smile

on her face as ever before...yes she never cried! and she never questioned “why only me?”

That day changed her life but it was impossible to change her mind and now she was more determined to fulfil her dream to become a doctor.

When she was in hospital, people showed pity on her condition which irritated and disturbed her a lot. She was asked to skip her board exams that year. But, this phoenix star had no fear of death and had full faith in her soul and will. In February 2007, she declared to her doctors that she would appear for board exams at any condition. It was a critical phase of her treatment where a single mistake could spoil everything. It was risky to discharge her for exams. Faced with her determination, doctors supported her decision. They say “God helps those who help themselves.” She wrote the exams and returned back to the hospital.

***'Achieve small goals and fulfil your dream.' She just cracked her 1<sup>st</sup> goal when she scored 81% in her board exams.*** She was delighted to see all those happy eyes looking at her with great pride in them now.

In spite of the people suggesting her not to take Science stream as it would be difficult for her to cope up with; she opted for the same. All thanks to her parents and teachers' continuous support that encouraged her all the time.

Meanwhile, her treatment was still going on and she had to pass weekly chemotherapy cycles and spinal cord injections and face the side effects. She had even passed through all the complications from minor thrombophlebitis to fatal Anaphylactic shock. But nothing could take away that cheerful smile from her face. With every complication, she grew stronger and her positivity got multiplied.



remained a top ranker. She was constantly supported and appreciated by her teachers. Currently, she is an intern doctor in DDU bringing back lost smiles on her patients' faces by treating their teeth and oral cavity problems. She feels proud when her patients return home happily after the treatment, blessing her for the work she has been doing.

She didn't limit herself with her own achievements. During her treatment and academics, she studied about the disease and aspects which lead to mortality of patients, who die of complications rather than the disease itself which actually shows good prognosis. Her smile has been a constant source of inspiration and positivity to the cancer patients in her hospital whom she guides during their treatment and gets them cured of it smoothly. She always tells one line **"CARE CAN CURE!"**

She is also a volunteer at an NGO- *Yuva Unstoppable*, where she goes to teach slum kids every Sunday and contributes a bit of her to brighten their future. Also, she is a part of *"Sanjeevani...Life Beyond Cancer"*, where she got a platform to spread her positivity.

She celebrates **13<sup>th</sup> December as the day of her Re-birth, when the Phoenix star burnt herself to live and rise again and shine brighter than before...!!!**

She tells every leukemia child, doubtful about their survival, one thing..... **"If I can....then YOU CAN.....!!!"**

She was not allowed to go to school due to low WBC count which could lead her to suffer from infections, so she studied at home itself with the cooperation of her school and tuition teachers, who solved her doubts on phone. However, she was finding difficulty in completing her exam papers' lengthy answers due to physical weakness. So she appealed to Gujarat Higher Secondary Board authorities to provide her with 'half an hour extra time' in exams. To this, the board gave her a writer facility to help her out but she denied for the same and fought with the board authorities, with the help of her parents and news media. After 4 months of fight, the board authorities agreed to it, and decided to give half an hour extra time....1<sup>st</sup> time in the history of Gujarat Board exams. Gujarat Board has kept open this facility to all needy aspirants till date. She had opened the doors of hope for everyone.

She scored 77% in her 12<sup>th</sup> board but unfortunately she didn't get admission in M.B.B.S.; so she decided to reappear for exams again, score well and secure it. Yes she really did that. Second time she scored 81% and secured admission in Dharamsinh Desai University (DDU) Faculty of Dental Science, Nadiad.

With that, she completed her 2<sup>nd</sup> goal...

Throughout her 4 years of dental program, she



*Raina proudly says, "Yes I am a Leukemia survivor and I will try my best to help others survive too." She considers herself to be that rare lucky one whom life gave a chance and opportunity to prove to others that survival is in their own hands. Survival lies in their will to survive.*



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Seema Khanwalkar

45



Peel layers of old self and reinvent ...

“You educate yourself, you work hard, you go through life like a mission, get married, have children, and think that your life has been hard. Until, one day, a realization that life can be harder hits you like a bolt. So, what do you do when you hear of a diagnosis called Cancer?” exclaimed Seema. These were the first thoughts that hit Seema Khanwalkar, when she discovered she had cancer. She felt like she was falling into a blank space. She felt numb. It took a while for the realization to set in, for the enormity of the disease to dawn.

husband Errol, two daughters aged 17 years and 8 years, and a small group of close friends. It was important to keep the support system small but effective. Errol took charge of the medical details, the finances and the logistics. Their daughters were young and were in a confused daze while all this happened. They weren't sure why everyone was suddenly offering sympathies to their mother. Seema sat them down one evening and explained that they would have to be strong and continue without their routines feeling disturbed.



Once you accept it, she remarked, with strength and determination, everyone around begins to deal with it. Seema had a difficult time carrying on with her routine life and not feel sickened, because everyone around her, the neighbors, colleagues, even strangers expressed shock. Seema had always been a fitness enthusiast. She would regularly exercise and encourage other people too. People around her couldn't deal with the fact that she, of all people had to deal with cancer. Amidst much curiosity and disbelief, some speculated 'bad karma', while others insisted 'God is testing her'. People, although in good intentions, were eager to know every detail of her medical condition every single time. It was then that Seema decided to distance herself and focus on her family and herself to cope with the situation.

Seema's immediate support was her family, her

A dear friend of the couple, Hriday was the emotional rock in their house. He, along with a few other close friends was always around to lend the support. Seema's family was all set to go through the journey with her, except Seema herself. She wasn't prepared for the unknown. She needed to know exactly what was going to happen to her. Her doctor, Dr. Talati provided that knowledge to her. He explained the different stages of the treatment and how her body will respond to it. Dr. Talati also provided the calm, the reassuring presence that Seema needed. His kind eyes and calm demeanor helped reduce the enormity of the disease. He encouraged Seema to continue teaching and work on projects. He gave her a 'good days' chart post chemo and it became her mission to work towards those good days. Seema found the ten days between chemo cycles to be intense and action-packed. She

continued to teach, help in the house, cook, knit, plan for the next chemo cycle and then went to the chemo to sleep for about 5 hours feeling accomplished, much to the amusement of the medical team.



Seema found a spiritual connection with her inner self during the course of her treatment. The first impact was inside the classroom in her way of teaching. She found herself to be calmer, more relaxed and empathetic. She reached out to the students and colleagues much more. She herself found her lectures to be richer and more meaningful. The second impact was felt by her family, inside the home. Seema said "I learnt to listen, to my children, to the rhythm of my house, and appreciate every small moment". This made gave me intense joy.

The third and most significant impact of her realizations were found to be on herself. She learnt to be with herself, enjoying the company of her thoughts and not run away from them. **She accepted herself for whom she was, her unique perspectives became stronger as she embraced them.** For Seema, with awareness came a calm and she learnt to see pain and suffering around her with different perspectives. She said, "I did not like the shade of helplessness on the faces in the hospital. Why do cancer patients have to look like that? Cancer may take away some of the external beauty, but surely it cannot touch the inner beauty. It makes one search within self, for what you can contribute to the external world, besides physical beauty.

I found myself facing me, someone I should have left behind a long time back. And this was my chance. **I decided to peel layers of my old self and reinvent myself".**

After recovering from her treatment, Seema joined hands with her friend to work on a self-initiated project of designing chemo scarves for cancer patients. She was clear that she wanted to do this for herself and not for other people, even though the beneficiaries will be other people too. She found a way to fulfill herself and find happiness, spurring her to think of more innovative ways to reach out to millions of cancer patients who possibly go through similar feelings of hopelessness that she faced. She has made it a long term goal to harness energies to rehabilitate patients especially from the disadvantaged background.

***"Since childhood I always heard how important it is to pick yourself up when you fall. Never before was the relevance of this so important to me. My Cancer was my wake up call, very loud and clear".***



***Currently, she is in talks with Sanjeevani... Life Beyond Cancer for a potential tie-up and exploring possibilities of working with cancer patients in the future.***

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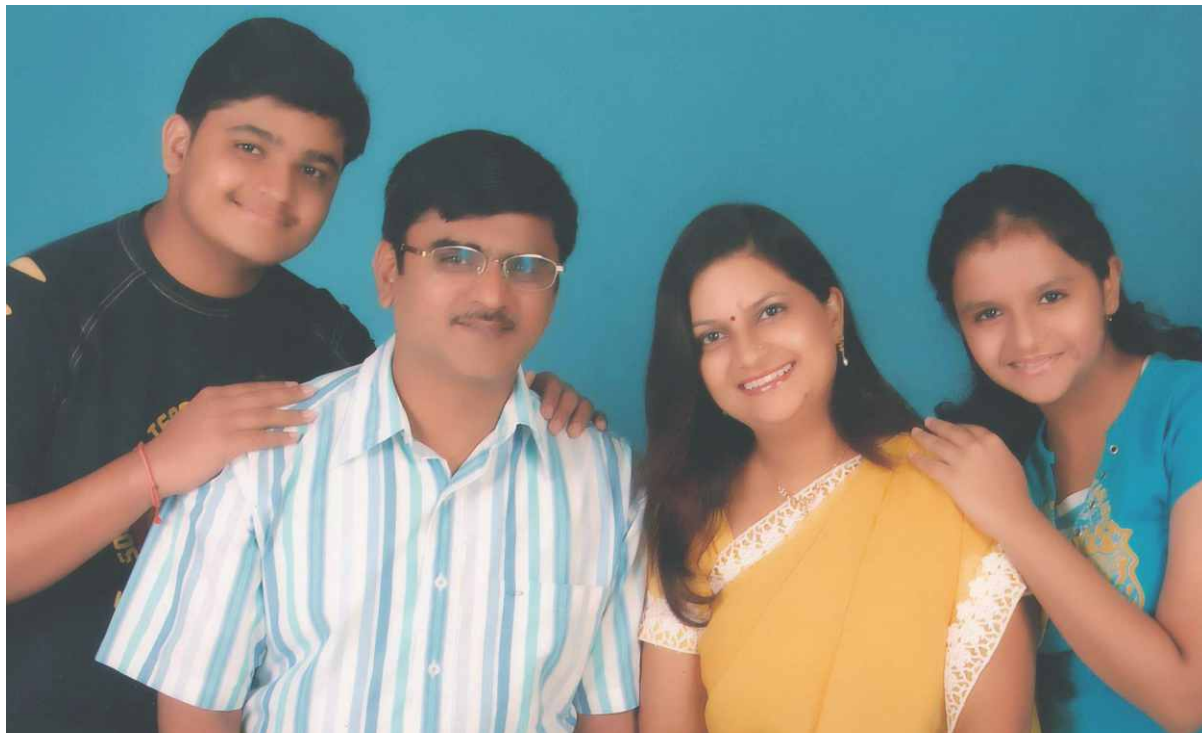
D K Srivastava



**Positivity and love are what make life fulfilling...**

On 16<sup>th</sup> April, DK Srivastava was admitted to Sanjay Gandhi PGI, Lucknow for a splenectomy that would change his life. He talked with his wife through the night, unable to sleep, uncertain of what little

and drained of energy. He then consulted Dr. Niraj, a good friend who he fondly referred to as the Raymond Man. On his advice, DK underwent a CT Scan of his abdomen and a liver endoscopy, the



time he had left with her. It was white cell cancer; the recent bone marrow biopsy had revealed splenic lymphoma. He was devastated when he had heard the news. Images of his wife and kids flashing before his eyes. There were so many questions, and few answers. What would happen to his family? His children were still in school and his wife had no work experience despite having a M.Sc. He prayed all night for the strength and courage to deal with what lay ahead.

It was 2007 and at 43 years of age, things were running very smoothly for DK. He had a beautiful, charming wife and two happy-go-lucky kids. He was posted as Dy. Chief Materials Manager at North Central Railway, Allahabad and his schedule allowed him to play golf and cricket regularly. Being a tad bit overweight had motivated DK to attempt a four-week diet regime. The results were clear as he started to lose weight rapidly, losing 8 kilos by the end of the plan. He looked leaner, felt younger and more energetic, and everyone greatly appreciated his new look. Life couldn't be better, or so he thought.

One day, DK experienced a mild fever that lasted longer than a week. The doctor prescribed antibiotics and Crocin, and in a few days, he had recovered. But the fever kept coming back, lasting longer each time and occurring more and more frequently. He continued to lose weight and started feeling tired

results of which showed that his spleen was enlarged. He was informed that this could be due a variety of reasons such as typhoid, malaria or infection. A follow up with an endocrinologist resulted in a bone marrow biopsy aspiration test, which revealed a low TLC and platelet count. This too pointed to an enlarged spleen with no specific diagnosis.

Then one day, a breakthrough occurred. Dr. Neeta Kapoor and Dr. Vineet Agrawal of Central Railway Hospital, upon examining the blood reports, caught sight of something more serious. DK was transferred to SGPGI, Lucknow, where his elder brother was posted. There he met with the Head of Oncology, Dr. Sonia Nityanand, who revealed that he had splenic lymphoma and that he needed to undergo a splenectomy, removal of his spleen. Fears regarding his family's future and his long recovery process overwhelmed him. He was already living on borrowed time. How would they get through this?

But after being reassured by senior surgeon, Dr. Rajneesh Singh, and being surrounded by supportive family members, he decided to give his future a fighting chance and underwent the surgery on April 18<sup>th</sup>. The operation was a success.

***Now begun the long journey of recovery. First and foremost, he experienced feelings of appreciation and gratitude for the people who had***

***stood by him during such a tumultuous time in his life. He thought of his friend, Sanjay Rastogi, who had organized blood donors incase of need during the surgery. He felt immensely indebted to his wife, who stood beside him bravely, reminding him that she needed him in her life, urging him to pull up his strength and move forward onto the path of recovery.***

DK has faith in God and believes that positivity and love are what make life fulfilling.



After the operation, DK decided to seek further medical care at Tata Memorial Hospital in Mumbai, one of India's premiere cancer research hospitals, under the watchfulness of oncologist Dr. Pai. During one of the counseling sessions at the lymphoma clinic, he asked Dr. Pai why he had contracted splenic lymphoma when he didn't drink, smoke or consume tobacco. Dr. Pai had explained that the cause or trigger for cancer was not known, that it could happen to anyone, and that he had been lucky to have been diagnosed so early. He advised to always be cheerful and trust in the almighty.

With his recovery on the right track, slowly but surely life started turning over a new leaf. His son passed his 10<sup>th</sup> grade exams with flying colors. His wife had taken charge of the family, including learning to drive the car and managing the financial aspects such as banking. His attitude towards life underwent a big change. He started finding pleasure in small things; even a smile from a small child would fill him with joy. He decided to always be cheerful and happy and eliminate stress from his life. He started getting involved in social work, finding ways to help people in need. He realized that doing charity gave him a positive direction in life and he became an informal counselor for cancer patients. He started receiving calls from family members of patients who were newly diagnosed with cancer about treatment options, doctors in the area, and how to cope with and fight cancer.



*As time passed, he regained his strength and started participating again in activities such as cricket and golf. He opted to be posted to Mumbai for ease of commute to the hospital and joined Central Railways as Chief Materials Manager.*

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**Harvinder Singh Chopra**



**Will is mightier than fate...**

Harvinder Singh Chopra, in his forties is a dashing, dynamic man. With his lively demeanor and larger than life personality, one can never guess the challenges he has endured.

In 2013, this hospitality entrepreneur in the vibrant city of Jaipur, decided to pursue his ambition of expanding his modest business of banquets and B & B guesthouse into a multi-facility high-end hotel – *Raja Park*. The order was tall, but larger was his spirit. He managed to raise a loan worth two crore Indian rupees and was all set. However, this journey had turns he hadn't envisioned.

while also believing that nothing is impossible. Harvinder's is one of those rare cases that continue to spread hope among people.

Harvinder underwent 36 chemotherapy sessions, 20 minutes each, 5 days a week. Most people give in after 20. His thyroid gland was completely burnt in the process and he had open pores all over his face and neck. It was not an easy journey for him, but it was definitely not the time to give up. His wife, Vinni Chopra, who he calls his pillar of strength, was the one who held his hand through this journey. When treatment started, Harvinder weighed 115 kgs. By



Morning of April 23, 2013, which he very distinctly remembers, he felt severe inflammation in his cheeks and sought emergency medical help. Reports revealed stage IV oral cancer. Discovery of cancer subjected him to ridicule by the doctors in Jaipur, who discomfited him for ignoring the symptoms of oral cancer for long enough for the case to have become fatal. There was no cure for his case, the doctors said before giving up on him.

Oral cancer is the only localized cancer, the kind that does not spread to other parts on its own. Doctors refused to treat his cancer through surgery, for that would have definitely caused cancer cells to spread and reduce the life expectancy significantly, already projected below 10%. The only option was radiation therapy and hope. That is exactly what Harvinder chose, knowing that chances are very low

the end of his treatment he came down to 65 kgs.

Otherwise a healthy man, Harvinder was in the habit of chewing tobacco for 15 years. He looks back and describes it as not an addiction or a dependency but "just a habit". He would chew some in the morning once at work. He said he never kept it in the mouth for long. He quit chewing tobacco seven years before cancer was diagnosed. Since a few months before biopsy, Harvinder had been facing oral issues. Unable to completely open his mouth, he sought advice of a dentist friend, who did not suspect any risk. It took immense inflammation and pain to raise the alarm and make Harvinder to sit up and confront the problem.

Radiation therapy failed to show transforming results the first time round. While seeking opinion, Dr. Nidhi Patni told him exactly what he needed to

hear, "It is difficult but possible". Harvinder looks back at his initial experience with many oncologists in Jaipur. Most of those sessions left a bad impression in his memories. Instead of being supported, he felt discomfited and given up on. He felt like just a case file for the doctors who didn't want to go any distance.

Harvinder does realize that he ignored his symptoms and fell short of seeking specialist medical help well in time. However, whatever the reasons, people with any medical condition should be treated with a basic dignity. He has come out as a strong believer of building clinical counseling and rehabilitation institutions in our country.



The diagnosis came at a time when Harvinder was neck down in debt. Like any ordinary person, he turned to his parental family for financial support. However, knowing the amount of debt, they disowned him in fear of being chased by banks for recovery, once Harvinder was no more. There were only four people who refused to believe those predictions. They were Harvinder, Vinni and their kids.

***Harvinder noted, "If you lose yourself, there is no fight. Will is mightier than fate".***

Since the time cancer was detected, Harvinder was stirred by the prospects of what was earlier unthinkable. A future for his family without him! Being the husband, father and provider of the family, the vulnerable aspects of those relationships came flooding to him. He spent hours in retrospection, thinking about Vinni and the things she always wanted to do, many of which he didn't pay attention to or didn't approve of. Never once did Vinni complain. Vinni was a multi-faceted woman – a *sangeet visharath* in Sitar. She left that hobby, after marrying Harvinder, as she didn't want a conflict between her role as a homemaker and her passions.

He briefly regretted every occasion where he fell short of meeting her expectations. Be it choosing particular holiday destinations or financial decisions, Vinni's opinion came second. However, "better late than never", he said. It was now time to change those patterns.

Harvinder embraced the overwhelming emotions experienced during treatment. He melted with love, gratitude and respect over the dignity with which Vinni handled social, parental and marital responsibilities. The experience redefined their relationship and brought them closer as a team. It also redefined Harvinder's personality. Once on the road to healing, he came out stronger than ever before, determined to revive his business, social life and most importantly personal life. He ensured that Vinni pursued her interests once again. He bought the franchise of a music academy, which is now managed by Vinni in capacity of the Director.

This high end hotel Raja Park is in the process of envisioned transformation. Harvinder has ensured the banks their credit hasn't doomed.

Harvinder's journey has been of battling the odds. His survival and good health post radiation has shocked some in disbelief, including doctors, and left others pleasantly surprised and eternally hopeful. It takes someone with immense courage and strength to endure the physical and emotional trauma. So what's his philosophy, one may wonder. He exclaims with conviction, "***War is the same but fighters are different***".



***Harvinder's energies are focussed on building a better future of his family and wants to do as much as possible for them.***

*A special thanks to*

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**Shubhada Varadkar**



**Dance of Hope...**

Shubhda Varadkar – the artist with a magic touch. Transforming lives through her own journey of life through chemotherapy and radiation, depicted in her production *Mayurpankh - Dance of Hope*. Shubhda shares her experience of overcoming ovarian cancer through immense conviction of staying connected to her passion – dancing, proving that hope and strength can conquer every challenge, including Cancer.

Mani Award".

A post graduate in economics, Shubhda was a newscaster with Indian Television in Mumbai, as well as a lecturer of Economics. The call of the tinkling anklets made her give up her all other careers and devote all her time and energy to Indian classical dance. As one of the articles on her dance performances puts it, she is hailed as a Prima Dona in Odissi and one can experience "joie de vivre" when she performs.



"During a performance in London in 2006, I was bleeding profusely. I ignored it and completed the performance. Back in Mumbai, diagnosis reported a 10-inch tumour in one of my ovaries. Doctors were shocked wondering *how* I managed to perform – I should have been bed-ridden in pain. They continued to be in shock when I performed regularly between my chemo sessions."

However, cancer was never bigger than Shubhda's spirit. The stage was set for the most demanding and remarkable real-life performance by Shubhda.

Shubhda is an extraordinary individual in every sense. A proficient exponent of Indian classical dance – Odissi, her dance is fascinating union of eloquent expressions, graceful movements and captivating postures right out of Odissi's legendary heritage. An A grade National artist, Shubhda, is recipient of many prestigious awards like "Mahari Award", and "Singar

Born into a prominent Maharashtrian family, she is the granddaughter of Dr. V. R. Khanolkar, the first Dean of Tata Memorial Cancer Research Institute. Inclined towards Indian Classical dance since childhood and being academically sound, her parents never objected to her formal training in Bharatanatyam. While in Senior Secondary school, she attended the performance of Guru Shri Kelucharan Mohapatra. Mesmerised, young Shubhda knew it would be her performing Odissi dance-form on stage in future. She approached her then guru Shri Mani, receiving permission to undertake further training under Guru Shri Kelucharan Mohapatra. There was no looking back ever since.

When she shared the news of cancer with her mother, Shubhda anticipated succumbing to the emotional response and weakening. However, even though the initial intake of the news was full of shock,

her family soon readied to extend full support to Shubhda in this journey.

Being a professional artist, Shubhda was worried about the stigma and reduction in offers that would have accompanied the public knowledge of her medical condition. Dance is a competitive profession, which is predominantly based on the physical ability of individuals to perform and act. **Shubhda could not have convinced anyone with her words that something like Cancer couldn't keep her from the drug of her life – dance. So she did something better – she let her actions prove it!**

Once Chemotherapy began, Shubhda started losing hair from her body. She got herself a short-hair wig and pretended to have undergone a make-over, off-stage. However, on-stage this wasn't as simple. Odissi dance involves an elaborate *mukut* – a head gear, which needs to be balanced on one's hair. This was impossible on a ready-made wig or extensions. This is when Shubhda's mother made a special wig for her fighter daughter, with strings that could be tied behind ears, securing it in its place.

Though apprehensive, her doctors and guru supported her decision. While Shubhda wasn't allowed to practice, she conceptualised the dance, lying on bed. She thought she would do just the basic *abhinaya*, but ended up performing the whole recital.

A chance meeting with another cancer patient at a dance competition she was judging, changed Shubhda's perspective on making her own experience public. Observing and sensing the trauma of a lady present at the competition, Shubhda discovered her ongoing treatment to cure cancer. Unlike Shubhda, the lady understandably had severe psychological trauma accepting her medical condition. She shared her shattered life post discovering her status as a cancer-patient. She used to be a dancer like Shubhda before getting cancer. However, unlike Shubhda, she quit dancing. Her health was deteriorating rapidly for she was largely losing hope in every aspect. Cancer seeped into her self-identity, weakening every other significant part of her life. This was when Shubhda, for the first time in two years, shared her own experience of going through a similar journey and coming out stronger. The impact this conversation had on the lady was life-changing. May be, for both of them, in different ways. It was a magic touch for the lady, who promised to embrace her identity as a complete human once again. She took up dancing again. Simultaneously, for Shubhda, it was an eye-opener to the real-time

challenges Cancer brings for most, if not all, patients.

It was then that she decided to come out loud and clear on her journey. **She penned *Mayurpankh, an autobiography in Marathi depicting a detailed account of her life, including the journey through cancer. Further, she choreographed a dance sequence known as *Mayurpankh – Dance of Hope*.*** This rendition of the cycle of acceptance, depicting each emotion experienced by people undergoing cancer treatment – shock, denial, anger, depression, bargaining and acceptance is performed by her troupe, often times for people undergoing cancer treatment. Such is the power of this soulful production, it rightly touches people with new hope, as the title suggests.

With immense support from her family and close friends, especially her mother, Shubhda endured a year and a half of therapy and came out a stronger person. In retrospect, she asserts that Cancer is not the end of the world. It is a challenging journey to go through it but one must hold on to the things and people important in their lives. She emphasizes on the importance of keeping hope alive, keeping oneself engaged in some vocation or passion and most importantly, believing that one can overcome cancer and its implied stigma.

Shubhda also addresses lack of primary screening and detection facilities in our country, making it very difficult to *prevent* cancer. For the past three years, she has been working closely with the cause of rehabilitation of cancer-survivors. Her passion is not just limited to dance, but extends in every aspect of her life – she puts her heart in everything she chooses to do.



*Shubhda is celebrated national artist. "Dance is the drug that cures me from every problem. Even during my treatment, I just wanted to perform!," she says.*

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**Naresh Kalra**



**Make the best out of it...**

Naresh Kalra, a Signaling Engineer, knows the meaning of being crushed at both ends. A layer of helplessness engulfed the words, as he spoke from his legally disputed home in Bangalore, "It's been very hard to survive but there is no other alternate. I have been on the verge of crying many times. But at the end of it all, One has to live with what one has". And make best out of it. Naresh is a fine example of this.

Chandigarh, where he decided to continue his treatment. Radiation therapy made him weak. He faced difficulty digesting most foods for a year. That year was one of his worst years, healthwise and financially.

The medical expenses were unforeseen by Naresh and Poonam. Right before the surgery, they had taken a loan to buy new TV, which was diverted towards medical bills. His parental family was always



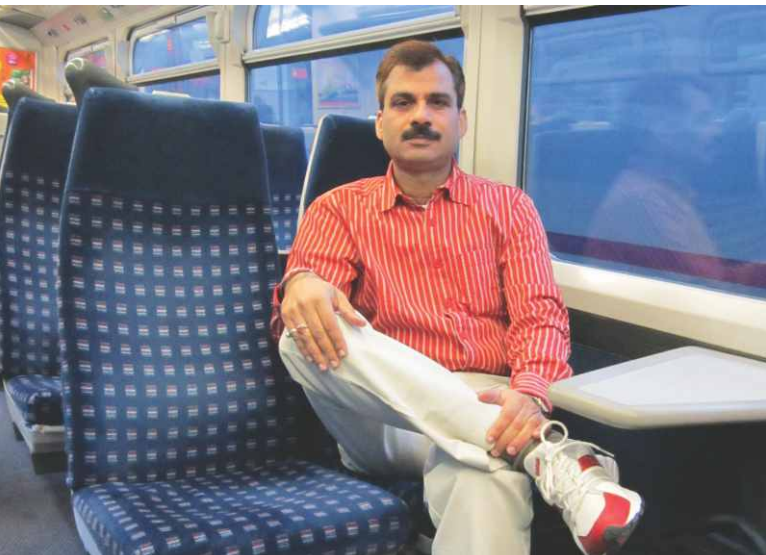
When he started working for the Indian Railways in Ambala city in late 80s, working as a signaling supervisor, he did not see a long medical battle coming his way. He married Poonam in 1994 and they had their first child, Kanika in 1997. Right after her birth, Naresh had a persisting stomach pain and growing fatigue. After the initial in vain home treatment, he consulted the railways hospital in Ambala.

In 1999, Naresh experienced unbearable stomach pain and was rushed to a multi-specialty private hospital in Chandigarh. Through CT Scan, a lump was detected in his large intestine, along with unusual blackness in several parts of stomach. Biopsy revealed Stage II malignancy in the large intestine. Poonam was told about the malignancy before Naresh. She has been his pillar of strength throughout. She let the doctors break the news to him and held him through the period of denial and acceptance. Naresh applied for a transfer to

by his side through this time. His brother settled the remaining medical bills and everyone only prayed for Naresh to regain his health. However, for the next few years, the stomach pain would shoot regularly, making frequent consultations and occasional hospitalization, necessary.

In 2000, Naresh and Poonam had their second child, Akshit, following which, Naresh moved to United Kingdom (UK) for five years, on a railway third-party deputation. This was a tough decision and primarily financial. Years of medical treatment had depleted their savings and Naresh found a good opportunity to recover it. However, the doctors in the railways hospital refused to sign on the medical fitness reports stating that Naresh requires regular follow up. Naresh pulled it off by acquiring a second opinion and promising to follow-up with a specialist in UK. His case files were prepared and approvals given to him for moving to UK.

Naresh lived in UK for five years before moving back to Ambala. Being a signaling engineer, all his postings were on field. The work environment – the noise, pollution, long and stressful work hours were all taking a toll on his fragile immunity. In 2007, he was transferred to Jammu on a field posting. The unstructured project he was put on became highly stressful for him to handle. He sat with Poonam to discuss and took the call to quit railways.



Post railways, he moved to UAE to work for a systems engineering company, choosing a non-field posting, aligning his lifestyle with his health requirements. Things were good for the initial months, before the day he discovered blood in faeces. It alarmed him and tests and reports revealed 'polyp' in his intestine. Naresh had to be hospitalized and treated in Sharjah. The treatment worked and he resumed his routine within a week, though more cautious than before.

In 2009, the family moved back to India. The family felt it was the right move as the kids had grown up and needed a more settled life. They invested in a house in Bangalore and things were smooth for a while. During a routine Colonoscopy, Naresh could not endure the shooting pain half way through the process and the test had to stop mid way. This should have alarmed the doctors, given his medical history, but the doctors made a report saying everything was normal, skipping the part of induced pain. Post a few weeks, in a similarly alarmingly painful incident, Naresh was taken to another specialist doctor, where the CT Scan suggested suspicion at the same spot in the large intestine where Naresh had been

previously operated, leading to a second surgery in the same spot.

In the meanwhile, the family also discovered that they were cheated under a property scam in the new house deal, starting a prolonged legal battle, still on. Naresh and Poonam have endured this journey with immense dignity. With the prolonged medical treatment condition and precarious nature of relapse, they have gained a passive acceptance of the situation.

***Naresh is quick to point towards the silver lining – the people he has met and who have stood beside him, during this journey.*** He feels fortunate to have family and friends he could depend on. One such friend is his long time colleague, Ajay. Ajay gave a simple formula to Naresh to deal with every challenge – TCNK aka *Tussi Chinta Na Karo* (Don't worry, mate!). Although in light humour, his colleagues, especially Ajay boosted his morale and saw him as an inspiration.



*Today, Naresh just wishes to lead a life without several tensions. He hopes the legal battle would end soon and they can keep their house. He wishes good health for his children.*

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## Writer's Note

When Ruby ma'am first asked me to write and edit the short stories in this book, I was both excited and sceptical at the same time. The scope of the book immediately drew me. I imagined the conversations I could have with some very dynamic people who are in this book. I took some time to commit to do justice to the spirited people and their journey through Cancer. I had just come back from London and was looking for employment, feeling a bit overwhelmed. This project put me back on the radar of the social sector in India. I am glad I had the opportunity to be a part of this initiative.

The best part about this book is the people in it. Interacting with them about their lives has been very inspiring. It is a tribute to every courageous person confronting life-threatening medical conditions with strength, dignity and faith. In a society where quality and affordable healthcare for all is missing, people who battle the odds remind us of the power of endurance and spirit. It also reminds us of the necessity to continue fighting for universal healthcare as a human right.

During my interactions with most of them, I came across a common sentiment. Many cancer-conquerors, as they like to call themselves, remarked that they wished they hadn't ignored the early symptoms, which made them suspicious. It was often late when they sought medical advice and their treatment was intense, longer and more painful.

As a collective society, we do not have the habit of undergoing regular medical check-ups. Further, this cultural practice is highly gendered. Many women shy away from seeking medical help even if they notice suspicious symptoms around private parts. I believe that we must change this reality. I sign off with a commitment and hope that each one of us makes it a habit to get routine medical examination. Cheers to healthy and happy living.

**Nikita Patodia**

CO-ordinator

Sanjeevani...Life Beyond Cancer



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# Designer's Stance

My association with Ruby ma'am is more than a decade old. When I was introduced to "Sanjeevani" I immediately decided to join as volunteer and contribute for the people who are less fortunate than me, but still have the fighting spirit to conquer the greatest enemy to mankind 'Cancer'.

Over the years I have discovered, how people are picking up the pieces and moving forward after surviving cancer.

Being a designer, I design and conceptualize books of various genres. While designing this book, I had to keep in mind the entire spectrum from initial diagnosis to journey back to life. This book addresses the real issues experienced by cancer survivors and provides their personal experiences for dealing with the physical, emotional and spiritual changes.

Look around a physician's waiting room and you'll see that reading remains a favorite way for patients and caregivers to pass the time. For avid readers, a bright side of cancer treatment is that it provides extended stretches of time for plunging into a book. Thereby embarking on new journeys through this book we are sharing stories full of guidance, inspiration, faith, hope and strength to help persons fighting cancer during their cancer journey. The memoirs of 'Cancer-conquerors' will give the readers information about disease and how to cope better.

This book has been a learning experience for me and has spurred me to explore more.

Until then..... All is well..... life is good.....Stay Blessed!!!

## **Sanjay Borode**

Director

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Uchitra Chopra  
Upin Batavia  
Yogesh Kumar*

Sanjeevani...Life Beyond Cancer, an award winning registered Public Trust, is a special purpose organization, set up for prevention and early detection of cancer and providing care, counseling and rehabilitation to persons fighting cancer.

Our active In-hospital interventions for cancer patients and their families include:

1. Counseling and Emotional support thru rehabilitated Cancer Survivors,
2. Nutritional support,
3. Provision of prosthetics and
4. Fun events

Awareness / Advocacy Activities to help create awareness for prevention and need for early detection as well as support for patients include:

1. Advocacy with all stakeholders – Federal and State Governments / Philanthropic Organization / Donor Groups etc,
2. Inclusion of Youth via the Sanjeevani Youth Brigade,
3. Creation of content for awareness viz., Films on Breast Cancer,
4. Facilitating Cancer awareness camps,
5. Facilitating Cancer detection camps,
6. Holding Cancer survivor conferences,
7. Holding Care Givers conferences, and
8. Holding Can-a-thons / Can-a-rides (Walkathons / Bike rides to reflect the I-can spirit).

For latest updates on our activities kindly do visit us at:

WEBSITE : [www.sanjeevani-lifebeyondcancer.com](http://www.sanjeevani-lifebeyondcancer.com)  
FACEBOOK : [www.facebook.com/sanjeevanilifebeyondcancer](http://www.facebook.com/sanjeevanilifebeyondcancer)  
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50% of these **CANCERTAINLY** be prevented

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One third of cancer incidence is tobacco related.

**Diet** - Eat food rich in fibre. Eat foods of different colours.

**Lifestyle** - Exercise regularly.

**Breastfeed** babies.

**Vaccines** are now available for prevention of cervical cancer and liver cancer.

**Bring these changes into your life and prevent cancer.**

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