



A Message of Hope for Patients with Cancer

By Dr. Caleb Ng, ND

In practice you meet individuals that you never forget. There are some that are almost like family, some that require a little more attention than others, and some that are just characters. And then there are those that come into your life and you know that you are better off for having known them. I had the opportunity to meet one such patient and have never forgotten her remarkable courage and great sense of humour. Karen had come to my office with a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer. She had a poor prognosis, a level-headedness about her, and an inspiring sense of hope. She also had a husband and a son whom she loved dearly.

Karen's struggle with cancer first began in 1994. She was told that the firmness of one of her breasts was cancer and that it had evaded regular detection. With a mastectomy and a series of chemotherapy treatments she was still left with a low chance of long-term survival. For Karen this was unacceptable. Her son, Luke, was four years old at the time and she wanted her son to have a mother while he was growing up. With conventional medicine, naturopathic medicine and extraordinary determination Karen beat the odds. She eventually saw him graduate from high school. She was an advocate for terminal cancer patients and gave talks to not only cancer support groups, but UBC medical school on her experience of being one of the 5% long-term survivors for her type of cancer. Her philosophy (and perhaps a reflection of her sense of humour) that she lived by became a button that she wore and gave to people. The button said "I'm Not Dead Yet" and was a gesture of defiance to her cancer. Karen wanted terminally-ill cancer patients to know that hope drives the human spirit and the human spirit happens to be a very powerful tool in fighting cancer.

What I've learned from several of my cancer patients is that a good guide to knowing what treatments to choose, whether they are conventional or alternative, is asking yourself "will I be able to look back and be proud of what I chose to do?" And my advice to cancer patients and any patient with a terminal illness is the same: have courage, chose life, and be proud of your accomplishments.

Karen was not the norm. And there are others who share a similar experience. We are still only guessing at why certain individuals do make up the small percentage for being long-term survivors of metastatic cancer, but in my practice what I've been told from those that have beaten the odds is that "you have to try".

To Karen and others that have inspired me to give hope to those who need it: thank you, you will always be remembered.

Written with permission from the Da Silva Family

Karen Da Silva is survived by her husband José and her son Luke. Dr. Ng is co-founder of the Mountainview Wellness Centre and is a member of the Oncology Association of Naturopathic Physicians. For more information on Dr. Ng visit www.mountainviewwellnesscentre.ca. To book a consult call (604)538-8837.