

Upon the moment of my breast cancer diagnosis, it was clear that I wanted to view my cancer journey as a love journey rather than a battle to be fought. Perhaps it's because I was diagnosed on Valentine's Day and it seemed an overt sign from the universe, but, regardless, I preferred to stay away from terms like *fight*, *battle*, and *poison*. While I appreciated that narrative and how helpful it's been for so many, it simply didn't resonate with me. Not because I was naïve to the dire nature of cancer. I've witnessed several family members lose their lives to this disease. But because I needed to balance that reality with a more compassionate outlook where growth and transformation were possible.

Three weeks after my bilateral mastectomy, my oncologist informed me that because my cancer had spread to my lymph nodes, I would need six months of chemotherapy treatment. I was devastated and scared. Of all the challenges of my cancer journey up to that point, chemo was the thing that frightened me the most. But given that I was on a love journey, I knew going into chemo that it would be one of my greatest teachers, offering lessons and blessings over the course of those six months – some of which would be quite difficult.

Knowing this, I chose to see chemo as a friend that I welcomed to my healing team. With the aid of my therapist,

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a Zen priest who has helped cancer survivors navigate their psycho-spiritual experience through the disease, I created a visualization to support my goal of befriending chemo. I saw the chemo as a loving energy – collaborative, powerful, and protective. I envisioned it helping to clear my body of any harmful, wandering cancer cells. Together, we would cleanse my body of cancer, and, ultimately, I would recover and heal fully as it left my system. I chose to see myself as strong, energized, beautiful, inspired, and engaged with the situations and people in my life. I would welcome the quiet

Befriending Chemo

A breast cancer survivor's unique approach to facing the disease without "fighting" it

by Paige Davis



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moments of rest, introspection, and, especially, surrender.

Surrender is tricky, particularly for a recovering "doer" like me. I had always assumed that fears were obstacles to be faced head on. This was great when it came to physical feats like bungee jumping or skydiving (not that I've done those things), but when it came to feelings and situations with no tangible

I had a choice to release any preconceived notions I had and to jump into the unknown with love, strength, and grace.

I fully appreciate the kaleidoscopic moments that marked my cancer journey. It was difficult – YES; but it was also meaningful and transformational.

I have no idea what lies ahead. But I do know that, while cancer hasn't defined me, it has transformed and transmuted me. I walk in the world with a new perspective and a deeper knowing of myself. The collective and collaborative energy from others (including chemo) is perhaps one of the most important lessons of surrender that my journey through cancer has taught me. Not only could I not do it on my own, but I'm not meant to. It is our birthright as spiritual beings living this human experience to love and to be loved, to connect with others, and to show up even when we don't know how to do so. I'm proud and humbled. These aren't just lessons about cancer, but about life.

Paige Davis is a mindfulness and meditation teacher and breast cancer survivor. This essay is based on an excerpt from her book Here We Grow: Mindfulness Through Cancer and Beyond (She Writes Press). You can follow Paige at hellopaigedavis.com and on Instagram @hellopaigedavis.