

The Power of Positivity

by Elana Zaiman

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Every day we have a choice: to keep moving forward and to enjoy life, or not.

In the summer of 1998, my mother-in-law invited her friends to their rented West Seattle home for a brunch to welcome me, her new daughter-in-law, to Seattle. The dining table was full of green salads, fruits, hummus, and other delicacies, and the dining room was full of people I imagined I would see again over the years.

A few weeks later, Linda, a brunch attendee, phoned to invite me to lunch. When I asked her how it came about that she decided to call me, she said, "When I met you, I knew I wanted you in my life."

For 15 years, we've been in each other's lives. We've spent hours walking around Green Lake, lunching in this or that restaurant, meeting up for coffee, talking on the phone. Our topics of conversation: work, family, marriage, children, health, emotional and spiritual well-being. For 15 years, Linda has been a loving guide and a supportive friend. Shortly after we met, she put me in touch with a writer friend who introduced me to the woman who would become my writing mentor. A few years later she orchestrated an afternoon facilitated by a consultant friend to help me figure out my next career move. A friend like Linda, one does not often find.

In January 2000, five months after my first and only child, Gabriel, was born, Linda was diagnosed with breast cancer, and a few weeks later had a double-mastectomy. Then there was chemo and radiation. While many of her friends were devastated, Linda maintained a positive and hopeful perspective, never giving into despair. When one drug didn't work, she tried another.

As time progressed she added alternative therapies to her conventional treatments. She saw a healer, naturopath, chiropractor and shiatsu master. She did whatever it took to stay alive and live as healthfully as possible. She told her doctor she wanted quality over quantity. In

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"A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

— Winston Churchill

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2008, when the cancer made its way into her bones, she continued to maintain her positive and hopeful perspective. I never heard her curse God, get angry at God, or at any of the people in her life. If there was an underside, she never exposed it. This was sometimes hard for her family and friends, who wanted to emote with her; but that's not what Linda wanted. It's not that she didn't want to talk about the cancer, she did; she just chose not to get bogged down in emotions, including her own. She chose to focus on the positive and live her life.

On August 9, 2015, I received an email from Linda with the heading: Need to Talk.

When we spoke, she told me that the cancer had made its way into her brain, and she asked me, her rabbi friend, the question I knew she was going to ask: Would I officiate at her funeral?

Linda knows me. She knows I'm emotional. She knows it will take every fiber of my being to hold it together during the service. She knows I probably won't hold it together, and perhaps that's what she wants, someone who will be herself, someone whose voice will shake and whose eyes will fill with tears and who will have to pause numerous times to make it through, but who will make it through with the

help of everyone there, whose own eyes will be filled with tears and whose hearts will be full of grief.

A week after this conversation, I met with Linda, her husband, her sister, and her brother-in-law at her dining room table for a breakfast of blueberries, smoked salmon, her favorite bread from Macrina Bakery, a kugel, and a strawberry custard tart.

"I'm getting things in order," Linda said between bites of bread and sips of tea. "I'm having good discussions with the people I love, and I'm making sure everyone knows my wishes."

When I asked her how she maintained her positive perspective over the years, she had this to say: "It's worked for me. I think we have choices. My choice was to keep moving forward and enjoying life. I just put one foot in front of the other. I got to visit Turkey and China. I got to play. Did I get to do it all? No! But I got to see my daughter married to a wonderful man. I have two grandchildren who are the joy of my life. I have incredibly wonderful people around me. I'm loved, and I know it. And I love in return. I've always felt thankful and blessed for the people in my life. I have a sense of overriding gratitude."

When her sister expressed concern about the pain she might be in as she neared the end, Linda said, "I don't expect to be in pain. They sent me narcotics. Brain cancer isn't painful. Don't let your mind go there. I'm not letting my mind go there. The mind is a powerful thing. I expect it is going to be okay, and if I expect it is going to be okay, it will be okay."

This Linda is a strong and positive woman. If any of us are able to adopt even half of her strength and optimism, we will stand in good stead. ♦



BRAIN GAMES ANSWERS / From Page 18

Answers to Crossword Puzzle

P	S	I		S	N	I	P	E		A	D	E	P	T	
I	N	N		A	B	O	U	T		V	I	S	T	A	
T	A	T		L	A	U	G	H	T	E	R	C	A	N	
C	R	E	S	T				S	E	E	N				
H	E	R	O	I	C	S		R	E	G	I	M	E		
	A	L	E	R	T	S		M	E	D	I	A	N		
A	F	C		R	A	I	L	S		D	E	N	S	E	
A	L	T	O		B	R	I	N	G		A	N	E	W	
R	A	I	D	S		S	T	E	E	P		E	S	T	
P	I	V	O	T	S		S	E	N	E	C	A			
	R	E	R	E	A	D		R	E	L	A	P	S	E	
					E	L	I	S			L	Y	O	N	S
P	E	R	S	P	E	C	T	I	V	E		L	O	T	
R	O	Y	A	L		T	A	C	I	T		I	R	E	
E	N	E	M	Y		A	R	E	A	S		S	E	E	

Answers to Sudoku

1	9	5	3	4	7	2	8	6
8	4	6	5	2	9	1	7	3
3	2	7	6	1	8	5	9	4
2	5	3	4	7	1	8	6	9
7	1	4	9	8	6	3	5	2
6	8	9	2	3	5	4	1	7
4	7	1	8	9	3	6	2	5
5	3	8	7	6	2	9	4	1
9	6	2	1	5	4	7	3	8



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