

The **Pink** Notes

A raw and honest account of a young woman's journey to beauty, hope, and healing while peeling back the many layers of cancer.

"Through painting experiences with words, Pink Notes, draws us into the intimate life-changing realm of coexisting with cancer. Jackie's poignant telling illuminates the physical, mental and emotional ordeals, from diagnosis through treatment, while embracing the preciousness of each moment, the ultimate healing."

Nischala Joy Devi, Author,
The Healing Path of Yoga

Jackie Savi-Cannon

The Pink Notes

The Pink Notes

...A raw and honest account of a young woman's journey to find beauty, hope, and healing while peeling back the layers of cancer.

Jackie Savi-Cannon

Copyright © 2008 by Jackie Savi-Cannon

All rights reserved. No part of this book can be used or reproduced by means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage/retrieval system without written permission of the author, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Published by JSC Lifestyle Management.
Books maybe be ordered through www.jackiesavicannon.com.

ISBN 978-0-9811093-0-5

Printed in The United States of America

Cover design by Jon Gillies

To my husband Jay Cannon whose boundless love and support allows me to live my dreams every day.

To my children Owen and Emma who remind me to never underestimate where purpose will present itself.

To my family members whose support and love was boundless and with me every step in this journey.

To my dear 'Tea Pot Club' whose insight and dialogue was intoxicating.

To my dear friends who never missed a beat in providing me with exactly what I needed to heal.

To all medical staff and associates that participated in providing me with great care.

To Lisa and Simon for their careful attention to detail in the editing my notes.

To you for your choice to read and experience my *Pink Notes*.

My deepest and most humble thanks to all of you.

Table of Contents:

Foreword by Joseph A. Tedesco, M.Ed., ATP	...xi
Introduction	...1
Chapter 1:	
<i>What Are The Pink Notes?</i>	...3
Chapter 2:	
<i>Note #1: Propulsion starts...</i>	...7
<i>Note #2: The physical...</i>	...9
<i>Note #3: Cancer, beautiful?</i>	...12
<i>Note #4: Children...</i>	...13
<i>Note #5: The roles of people...</i>	...15
Chapter 3:	
<i>Note #6: My direction...</i>	...25
<i>Note #7: Layers of prep...</i>	...27
<i>Note #8 The rose ceremony...</i>	...31
<i>Note #9: The pharmaceutical rep...</i>	...35
Chapter 4:	
<i>Note #10: At least my anger is my own...</i>	...45
<i>Note #11: Frustration of the unknown...</i>	...47
<i>Note #12: Ripped buddha...</i>	...51

Note #13: The conference... ...52

Note #14: Away in St. Catherines... ...57

Chapter 5:

Note #15: There is no spoon... ...65

Note #16: The sea of sky... ...69

Chapter 6:

Note #17: Heroes need to cry too... ...72

Note #18: My residual self... ...75

Chapter 7:

Note #19: Mortality... ...85

Note #20: My perception is my power... ...89

Note #21: Is this part of the gift? ...91

*Note #22: Life threatening is a matter of
interpretation...* ...95

Chapter 8:

Note #23: All alone in the playground... ...104

*Note #24: Living in the now even when
it's not pretty ...* ...107

Note #25: My new normal... ...111

Chapter 9:

Note #26: Almost full circle... ...124

<i>Note #27: Pieces of the puzzle...</i>	...128
<i>Note #28: The road is long...</i>	...134
<i>Note #29: Finding my new place ...</i>	...139
<i>Note #30: The new rhythm...</i>	...142
<i>Note #31: Reflections of the journey...</i>	...146

Chapter 10:

<i>Note #32: Working toward mindfulness...</i>	...154
<i>Note #33: Time to just “be” and explore my spiritual connection...</i>	...156
<i>Note #34: Discovering the spiritual bridge...</i>	...162
<i>Note #35: New Year; New freedom...</i>	...164
<i>Note #36: Exponential love...</i>	...167
<i>Note #37: Final note...</i>	...172

Foreword

It's funny how our minds work. When faced with an unimaginable truth, it searches to make sense out of senseless situations. This happened to me when Jackie, my health conscious, thirty-eight-year-old friend told me she had breast cancer.

No—it can't be. She has two kids. And an adoring husband. We've been friends for over twenty years. No, not my Jackie.

My mind whirled with fragmented thoughts as she told me the news on the phone.

“What will you do now?” I asked.

“Well...” She went on to list the succinct details of her life over the next year.

“You sound so calm,” she said to me.

“Do you expect me to freak out?”

“I'm not sure. It's weird how people are taking the news. Some are crying, others freaking out, and there are calm

Foreword

ones like you. I didn't know what to expect.” Jackie didn't know her cancer diagnosis had already travelled through the grapevine. A few days before, another of our good friends had called.

“Don't let her know you know. but...” Jackie's news made me sick: Silent waves of disbelief echoed back and forth between our mutual friend and I, punctuated by explicatives. “Fuck'en Cancer -man!” It had claimed too many of the people I cared for.

When I hung up the phone, I thought about what would be best for Jackie. I decided to stay calm and am glad I did. Her well thought-out plan told me she was already on top of this senseless situation, and I knew it wouldn't beat her.

“It's not going to be easy, but you've been training for this all of your life,” I said. “You've stayed fit and fought other battles, and your body is ready to fight. But you're going to have to let people help *you*. No more super girl. You can't carry this one by yourself. You have to let people help; it's your gift to them Jak. Jay (her husband) is going to need to help you as will your friends.” We talked a bit more, then hung up, promising to stay in touch. That's what our group of friends does the best—we talk about every detail of the experience. I sat quietly while thoughts of Jay and their kids entered my mind. I was watching the wheel come off my friend's life, but could

Foreword

do nothing to change the situation. Then I thought back to a reoccurring memory I've had since I was seven or eight-years-old.

I was riding in the car one summer, on our family's regular trip to see my grandma. It was a trip my mom, my two sisters, and I made every Sunday. Over the years of weekly visits, we were fortunate not to have had any significant accidents. It was a good thing because this was years before car seats, when kids readily hopped seats or sat cross legged in the back playing games. On this clear and sunny summer day, my mother suddenly yelled, "Oh my God, something is wrong with that car's tire—look!" My sisters leapt to the driver's side back seat. "Sit down—now!" my mother yelled.

We quickly eased back and sat in our seats, then my eldest sister jumping to the front seat. I had a clear view of the action. My mother gasped. "She [the driver of the car] doesn't know. Someone has to tell her. She has to stop. Oh-my-God...!"

As her last words came out, the other car's tire broke free. Sparks flew and smoke bellowed.

"Hang on! Oh God!" my mother yelled as she swerved and braked to miss the tireless car. The screeching of tires and the smell of burning rubber filled the air. I watched, transfixed on the car without a wheel as it limped to a

Foreword

stop. Much of the traffic had pulled off the road, including our car. Then three people jumped out of a single car. A tall man was in the lead and opened the passenger door of the disabled car. He said something to the young woman behind the wheel. She sat with her hands clasped to the steering wheel, staring forward. She was helpless. Her wheel had fallen off. Another man was also trying to get the woman's attention. Then I saw a woman slide into the back seat and touch the driver's arm. The young woman then collapsed against the steering wheel.

“Thank God she's not hurt,” my mother said, then pulled onto the road.

Why had this memory emerged? I thought of my conversation with Jackie and it became clear. Her wheel had fallen off. She had not planned on cancer forcing her to the side of life's road. And like the three people who stopped to help the young woman, Jackie's friends would rally around her. She would need us. The cancer treatments would render her helpless. But would she accept our help? Fortunately for all of us, she did. Jackie had the insight to recognize the importance of friendship to her journey ahead and within weeks had reached out to friends, family, and co-workers.

She also decided to write about her experience while going through it. In the process, she not only allowed those around her to help, she also gave back in a way that would

Foreword

give us a chance to see from the inside what is possible through perseverance. Each tiny step forward and every emotional step back allowed us to feel her humanity and know it was okay for us to be human as well. Vulnerability leads to strength. Jackie has taught us that. She also taught us that commonality builds bonds. We may all be uniquely different, but our common emotions are what make us the same.

She invited us to watch as she struggled toward a life that was more in focus with the person inside her. When she asked if I would read her notes and comment, I was humbled by the offer. As I witnessed her change both physically and emotionally, I changed as well. Her shared experience became a gift of gratitude, transformation and demonstrated the potential of the human spirit. Her senseless situation now made sense.

Joseph A. Tedesco, M.Ed., ATP

Introduction

I'm sure at some point we have all asked the question "What if," followed by some extreme circumstance. "What would I do if I found out my partner or spouse was cheating on me? What would I do if someone broke into my home? What would I do if I won the lottery?" We try to imagine our reactions, but the truth is we don't know until our hypothetical situation becomes a reality. Life, however, is lived in reality. And there are times we find ourselves in difficult circumstances that test our strength, commitment, intellect, and resolve. When push comes to shove, some people rise to meet their trials head on, while others shrink back in fear.

Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do some have to endure pain and trauma? I don't have the answers. In my case, I don't pretend to know why I had to go through the heart-wrenching ordeal of breast cancer. But I have learned it's easier to ask *what* than *why*. "What am I supposed to learn about myself? What can I gain in order

Introduction

to live life to its fullest?” Believe me, this isn’t always easy, and it’s taken me some time to learn. I’ve been faced with a variety of challenges over the course of my life, but the last two years I’ve ridden an emotional and physical rollercoaster that has pushed me to find inner strength I didn’t know I had. On this turbulent journey, I have gained knowledge, insight, and found a sense of peace and fulfillment that saturates my soul.

My notes that follow are honest and raw. They tell the story of my journey to find a place of elevated living by diving into my darkest fears. Although your circumstances may differ from mine, the potential to find strength that lies within is the same. My wish is that my *Pink Notes* will help you discover yours.

Your friend,
Jackie Savi-Cannon, 2008

Chapter 1

What are The Pink Notes?

It is at the end that I am able to write the beginning. The first layer of the circle is coming to a close. I say layer because this road never really comes to an end. It is an on-going continuous spiral that I have no choice but to follow. Although at this point in my life I can rest, reflect and rejoice over traveling through the heaviest terrain. Two years ago the momentum of my life came to a screeching halt, when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Although it was one of the most difficult things I have had to face in my life, I was able to make peace with my diagnosis by looking beyond my fears and seeing opportunities for growth and education. I wanted to explore this insane surreal process of cancer treatment. Finding purpose to the madness gave me a place to channel my energy. Looking back, the reality of the road I travelled has not yet sunk in. Was that really me? As I tell my story to others, I have to remind myself that it's my life that I'm

The Pink Notes

speaking about. I can also honestly say that, although it was one of the most difficult times of my life, it was also one of the best years of my life. The growth and gifts I have received from this experience have far exceeded my expectations. It is those gifts that I wish to share through these *Pink Notes*.

The *Pink Notes* began as a way for me to communicate as vividly as possible what it was like dealing with a diagnosis of cancer and weathering the treatment. I could express my pain and frustration as well as my enlightenment and transformation. I wasn't sure what I would do with these notes; I just knew I needed to write them. The more notes I wrote, the more I yearned to share them. I wanted others to know my thoughts as they occurred. I wanted the content to be raw and in the moment. If I wrote them in reflection, they wouldn't be the same. When we reflect on an experience, we do it through the eyes that have already gained the wisdom. In writing during the chaos, we can experience it in its purest form. I decided to email my *Pink Notes* to a small group of my caregivers, including my loving husband, Jay, two longtime friends, Joe and Darlene, my friend and former business partner, Maria, and my friend and incredible mentor, Susan Duxter. I was also blessed to have my loving parents, sister and extended family, and many other caring friends rally around me throughout my journey as well. I chose those five individuals because of the closeness we shared in the variety of our relationships. I wanted to give them an

What are the Pink Notes?

inside unedited glimpse into the soul of a young woman going through cancer treatment. My only request was they email me their heartfelt reactions. We can never really know what it is like to experience someone else's pain. Hence the response, "I can only imagine how you feel." Through this *Pink Notes* exchange, I have tried to bridge that gap and let others view what it was like dealing with a life threatening disease. Those involved in the *Pink Notes* group diligently sent me their replies. Some of their poignant replies are found in these pages.

My husband, Jay, is originally from England—Liverpool to be exact. As most newly diagnosed families do, you start a collection of awareness paraphernalia. Pink bracelets, pins, magnets—you name it and people sent it. It makes us all feel like we are making a difference. Jay found these silver pins that were shaped like a teapot and had a small pink breast cancer ribbon on them. A cup of tea is a staple of the British culture, and he ordered them in bulk. Any time someone did something nice or helpful for us, he would send them a pin along with a thank you note. A cup of tea represents a cup of "cure-all" in England. He sent out many pins throughout the course of my treatment, with the first ones given to Darlene, Joe, Maria, and Sue. We fittingly called our on-line group the *Teapot Club*. A beautiful and inspiring dialogue developed because of them. The evolution was deep and amazing. This book, then, is the collection of my *Pink Notes*. It is a raw and honest account of my journey

The Pink Notes

to find beauty, hope, and healing while peeling back the many layers of living with cancer. The woman you meet in the early *Notes* is quite different from the one who completes them.

There may be a variety of reasons this book has reached you. My wish for you is to discover your own opportunities and gifts in whatever challenges you are facing. If you are a newly diagnosed cancer patient, I wish you strength and resolve. If you are a caregiver, know that your efforts are appreciated even if you feel helpless. If you are neither but are looking for light, I hope you find it in these pages. My intention is for all who read this book, to realize we are capable of looking past our fears and enjoying the beauty that resides on the other side.

Chapter 2

One of the most difficult parts of coming to terms with a cancer diagnosis is trying to process the fear and anxiety that comes with a life threatening illness. The shock is so overwhelming that a flood of emotions consume your existence. Your mind vacillates between incredibly shallow thoughts and juvenile moments to contemplating your mortality, which chills you to your core. It's bizarre and yet beautiful at the same time. And it's these moments of challenge that we really find out what it means to be alive.

Note #1: Propulsion starts...

Like most people, my goal in life was to become a person who seemed wise, calm, centered. I wanted to be someone who had a great sense of direction and contentment with my life; someone who was happy regardless of what was occurring in the chaotic world around me. I believed that in order to do this, I must embrace life in all its glory and

The Pink Notes

disaster. When we face it head on, we evolve into a person who works with the natural rhythm of our life instead of fighting it. When we allow our energy to run with the natural momentum of our “path” we propel forward into a higher level of living. We can live more in one day than many have lived in a decade—if we allow ourselves to.

As a thirty-eight-year-old health and wellness educator, that is how I look at cancer. The physical impact of this disease scares me to death, but I try to focus on the gifts from life I am receiving and the intense “living” I'm doing each day. Sometimes when I really think about it, I feel like I'm in a parallel universe. It's me and Jay caught up in some weird script that can not really be my life. Then I realize it is us and this really *is* my life, and I feel like a nuclear bomb explodes through every cell of my body. How am I supposed to deal with this? Can I really get through these sickening treatments? What happens if I still die in the end? The intensity of this surreal situation can be overwhelming and crippling.

Then I breathe...and breathe...and shed a few tears. I go back to the script and realize I can create the ending. I *do* have a say in all of this. I don't have to fall into the trap of feeling helpless. I still control how I react to each day. I control my ability to open my heart and experience as much joy, love, laughter and sense of purpose for each day that goes by. If I seize as much of life as I can, then I have already won! Deep down I believe I will win because

I know I have a purpose that I must fulfill. When we trust in the strength of and listen to our inner voice, we can find the answers we are looking for. We can let that voice guide us.

I know I will succeed, because as long as I can remember I have loved to create pictures and tell stories that challenged, motivated, and entertained anyone who would listen. The difference now is that I finally know what it is I have to say. My message is crystal clear. My dance with cancer is the final chapter that must be written before I can pass on the message. My purpose is to experience all that I can on every level so not to miss any detail that may change someone's perspective. As much as I hate being out of my comfort zone, deep down I know I thrive on it. In the past, I have grown the most from some of my lowest moments.

Note #2: The physical...

On the day we left the surgeon's office after hearing my pathology results and confirmation that I have healed from surgery well, we hit the highway to join friends for a weekend of horseback riding. I love long drives because I find I do some of my best thinking as I gaze out the window. In the blur of billboards rushing by, one captures my attention. It is a huge photo of Christopher Reeves in his wheel chair. Under his black and white photo are two words— "super man." It moves me like I know it did

The Pink Notes

every person who looked up and saw it. I realize that people admire education, physical strength, and superheroes. This manufactured inspiration is unfortunately superficial. My career in the health and fitness industry has left me falling into that trap many times. That is why so many individuals find themselves continuously searching for more. When real people overcome extreme challenges at their weakest moments, they become real heroes. Christopher Reeves, in his most frail state, had more power than ever. The perception of my role is beginning to surface.

I find myself struggling and hanging on to the superficial. The physical implications of cancer are some of the hardest things to get my head around. One minute I am a confident thirty-eight-year-old woman working hard at maintaining her appearance without completely succumbing to vanity. The next minute I'm falling apart emotionally as I stare in despair at myself. Although far from perfect, I knew my body was strong and shapely and all in all, I felt comfortable in my own skin. I felt great about myself and knew that not many women could say that. I was at peace with my body; my wit and intelligence made me sexy. I had the comfort of knowing I could still turn a few heads but most importantly I knew in my Jay's eyes, underneath the marks and softer spots, I was still a bombshell. I was quite confident I could rock his world.

Jay and I have a remarkable relationship, including a wonderful sex life. Although I knew deep down that would

Notes 1 ~ 5

never change, I still felt like I was turning into a biology experiment, and I hated it! I went from hardly needing a doctor to having many. The blood work, ultrasounds, biopsy, surgery, consults were turning my perfect life into a medical journal. Combined with my inability to bath myself during surgery recovery, the multiple scars and my ever softening body, I was left feeling like a freak show when I looked in the mirror. I went from challenging men to arm wrestles to asking for help to cut my food. That feeling of weakness crippled me.

And I still have to loose my hair! What then?

In the end, I know this will all pass. My logical brain reminds me of this. There is a natural cycle to every situation; the resolution eventually comes. Sometimes we must be very patient in order to reach it. Nonetheless, riding this rollercoaster of emotions gets exhausting. At times I can be the poster child for inspiration, then flip to a spoiled brat who doesn't want her toys taken away. In this case my toy is my perception of femininity. I'm also constantly analyzing my own involvement in my treatment. What is a cancer patient supposed to do? What is the right way to do this? I have always joked about the Nirvana lyrics, *I wish I was like you; easily amused*. Ignorance is bliss and my analytical mind has sometimes felt like a curse. My brain never rests. I feel I am finally living the lyrics. On some level, I am ignorant about the threat of cancer. I am not really interested in learning

The Pink Notes

every fact written about it. There are so many theories on why we get it, how we treat it, and how often it comes back. One thing is certain: With so many variables, there are no concrete answers. Why waste energy on the unknown? I have breast cancer and I will get treatment. Other than that, the rest of my energy goes into living and loving every moment of my life. So back to the horses...

Note #3: Cancer beautiful?

It's funny how all this stuff is happening around me while this great debate is going on in my head. The kids love the ranch, while I enjoy the company of good friends. And while life is happening, the fact remains I have cancer. I can not stress enough how bizarre and surreal this feels. It is so absurdly scary and cool at the same time. Everything I know and have been told about cancer over the years is ugly. This illness devastates and kills. Can I see past that? Can I let myself?

While horseback riding through a lush picturesque trail, I saw the most beautiful mushrooms along the path. Some shined like porcelain. Others were brilliant red and orange. I had never seen anything like them. When I think of a mushroom, I picture this brown fungus. Who would have thought I could see such beauty in something perceived as ugly. Some mushrooms are considered magic! Is it possible to look beyond the vulgarity of cancer and see something beautiful, something magical? Everything is

relative and a matter of perception; I want to challenge myself to view and experience the beauty in cancer.

Note #4: Children...

The decision to challenge myself is important on many levels. As a young woman with two small children, in some ways I have no choice. It is my responsibility as a parent to teach my children life skills that will help them deal with adversity they will inevitably face in their own lives. I must admit one of the hardest parts of this whole process is the impact it will have on my kids. The adoration I feel towards them fills me with the greatest joy and humbles me at the same time. I can't help but feel guilty knowing they are now burdened with a mom who might die. It is tragic to think that cancer might cheat these two precious jewels. I hate the fact their sweet innocent world has been tarnished. I've tried to prevent this since the day they were born. All I can hope is that this "cancer time" will blend into vague memories and leave them with gifts and lessons that will enhance their future lives.

My Owen is such a gentle soul. From the day he was born, whenever I look into his eyes, I feel as though he looks through me. His gaze pierces through my well-thought-out persona and he sees my fear and weakness. And with that same gaze he tells me it's okay. He loves me anyway. When I watch him, I perceive depth and wisdom. I know one day, in true Owen form, he will be ready to explore it.

The Pink Notes

When Owen embraces his fear, he experiences pure exhilaration. I have seen this so many times and it will only get better with time. That's why I don't push him too hard. I just try and help him navigate. He can be pretty intense when he's focused. Even before the cancer, I filled each goodnight kiss with love and a secret apology for the mistakes I would make as a mother tomorrow. They were wrapped with a promise that I was doing my best, even though it might not seem like it to him at the time.

My Emma is my sweet little cherub with an electric laugh. When I look at her, I am mesmerized by her beauty and fiery strength. I see the potential for a vibrant, intelligent woman who can accomplish great things. Her energy and enthusiasm is endless. Much like her mother, under all the "attention seeking" adrenaline, is a loving nurturing sensitive soul. I get excited when I think of all she can become in her life. I am excited to see what she will choose.

In the end both of my kids are their own person; their spirit will drive them to follow their own plan in life. I am here to pass on all my knowledge and provide opportunities for them to thrive. After all, I am their mother. That is why there is little room for sadness. Owen and Emma don't deserve it because they provide me with too much joy and happiness to feel otherwise. That is the gift they have given me during my recovery.

Note #5: The roles of people...

In moving through the recovery of surgery and processing what lies ahead, I realize that I need people for different reasons. My house and Jay are my safe places where I can break down. I can cry and be weak and self destructive if need be.

I am grateful to have my home. It is the place I can recharge my armor in order to handle the reality of my life in the world. Outside, I've found that some people are waiting for me to break down when talking with them to satisfy their own needs to be Florence Nightingale. I quickly begin to identify other people's emotional agendas, as they use my crisis to satisfy their own agendas. I realize I don't need to break down nor do I want to break down. There are only so many tears I can cry in one day. It's not a matter of trying to be a rock or a hero. It's just recognizing that people give me different things that I need. That is why they are in my life in the first place. Some friends I like to laugh and act ridiculous with. Others I like to intellectualize and analyze things to death for no real reason. It is all part of the healing process. Just because some moments are not super intense and don't involve tears, that doesn't make them any less valuable and purposeless. I need to recognize what I need at the time and focus my energy in that direction. Telling people I had cancer was hard. Initially, I was so embarrassed! How could a fitness professional have cancer? I almost

The Pink Notes

felt like my career and identity were over. I remember talking to Susan while I was waiting for some test results. I asked her opinion, because she had already succeeded as a speaker. She said most people would admire me even more for being an over comer. At that point I didn't really get it. Once the news came and I actually had to start announcing it, I felt incredible anxiety. In many ways the anxiety over telling people was worse than having the illness. How could I devastate my family like this?

Jay and I decided we would tell my sister, Kristina, and brother-in-law, Anthony, first. I figured they could help me break it to my parents. It was bizarre, because we were sitting outside on the patio on this gorgeous summer day talking about this intense subject, while the kids ran around playing with their friends. I guess it was a good distraction. It forced me to hold back my tears as best as I could. We sat and had the usual chit chat. There really isn't a good way to announce such shocking news. Once I said the words, it felt like a bomb ignited within them. Kristina went into the house to cry. Fear had gripped her. Anthony went to her to console her, not really knowing what just hit them. I can't imagine what it is like being on the other end of the news, but I really didn't have the energy to make it better for them. They had a couple of days to let it sink in before we told to my parents.

After a nice family lunch that my mother prepared, Anthony took the kids to the park to play. It was time to

tell my parents. The knot in my gut tightened and my skin tingled. I hated what was about to happen. Here we go again. I start. I cry. I say the words. My mother is staring at the floor and my dad is in a daze gazing at the wall. I could feel the same bomb igniting in them. As parents, their worst nightmare just came true. And I'm going to say those dreaded words: "I can only imagine how they are feeling." I must admit though, my parents took it better than I expected. There was no dropping to the knees, European-wailing style, I thought might occur. I thought for sure my mom would break down, but she held it together, which I appreciated. But I knew her heart was breaking. No matter how old we get, we're still our parent's babies. I worried most about my dad. He had done so well dealing with his issues with alcohol; I didn't want this to send him back to his old coping methods. Kristina reminded my dad that he needed to be strong and not fall into previous coping traps. He got the not-so-subtle hint and promised he would be fine.

Slowly, I started breaking the news to everyone. Shock and tears were common denominators in most reactions. The thing I hated most about telling people was the common thread—fear. I immediately saw the fear of me dying in their eyes. I had to use so much energy to explain my prognosis and the positive side of it. But that didn't matter. I knew in their mind a cancer diagnosis equaled a death sentence. I had to pace myself, because I only had so much strength to block out *their* fear. In the end,

The Pink Notes

everyone's concern was genuine and I had to let them absorb the information in their own way. Cancer affects everyone around the one who is diagnosed.

Jay and I started joking about the drama in some responses and the oblivious ignorance in others. It was comical as well as annoying when people would begin to ask me how I was doing and what was next, then before I could finish my first sentence, they would talk about their own health issues as if they were remotely comparable. It was comforting when the few calmer reactions came. "My tests came back and they were positive for cancer," I would say, then wait for the drama. But it didn't come. These individuals were sad, but immediately kicked into a more logical, productive, and positive discussion. It was most refreshing. We could have a rational discussion on my prognosis and course of treatment in a way that felt beneficial. I wished more people could be like that. Then there were the die-hard rescuers who desperately wanted me to fall apart in front of them so they could help. Like this would make the cancer go away! Hysterical crying is not always necessary. There is a time and place for it, but I find it exhausting when it's overdone. You can only cry so much.

Telling the kids was another hurdle. Our first instinct was to keep it a secret, but after some good advice from smart friends, we decided to share our family crisis. We found hints on the Internet on how to tell our children as well. I

Notes 1 ~ 5

walked on eggshells trying to figure out when and how to tell them. As always, I was over thinking things instead of just getting on with it. But one afternoon everything just felt right. The kids were hanging out and we didn't have to go anywhere. I felt pretty calm overall, so I thought this would be a good time to tell them. There was less of a chance of me completely losing my emotions.

We sat on the couch and I began to explain I had cancer. Owen replied, "Are you going to die?" I took a long, deep breath and said no. I explained there were all different types of cancer and stages and some people die from it. However, mom got to the doctors early, and because she is strong and healthy, she was going to be okay. I believed it and wanted to reassure him. I explained that I had to have an operation and take medicine for a while, but in the end I would be just fine. The next vital question: "Can I get cancer?"

"No sweetie, it isn't contagious."

After confirming for Emma that she would not require an operation too, we talked about how their love and affection would help me get better. After about twenty minutes, Owen asked "Can I go now?" And that was it. No wailing. No drama. I love how kids require so few details to be satisfied. According to them I was not dying and they couldn't catch it, so life continues. That was great and I was so relieved! Things were moving forward. I started to

The Pink Notes

figure out who filled what role. Jay was there for the meltdowns. My home was my safe haven where emotions could run free. My friends were for laughing and acting silly, having drinks and smoking a few cigarettes. What the hell? I already had cancer. My mom and sister kept life simple and were my back up when the kids needed to be watched, dropped off, or just distracted. You really do reap what you sow; the amount of help and support was incredible. I almost didn't feel worthy. Considering cancer is life threatening, I am experiencing it under ideal circumstances:

Great family and friends

Fast, free health care

No pressure to work (cutting back is different from losing your home)

Associates through work kept me strong. I was still able to portray the persona that people admired, respected, and looked to for guidance. Although some may say I was trying to put on a brave face, I viewed it as a necessity to remind myself of what I am capable of, and what my true purpose was. Dealing with cancer was only temporary; I couldn't let it become my whole life. Seeing that look of hope and inspiration in their faces showed me I still had it. My worst nightmare was going from a source of motivation and strength to becoming someone to be pitied and feel sad for. The more I realized the roles people played for me the better I was able to use them. People need to feel like they are providing you with something of

Notes 1 ~ 5

value. They need to know they are important to you. It's human nature to need to feel we have a purpose. So I tried to learn to accept the help I was offered because I knew it was helping them as well. My children reminded me of the simplicity and sweetness of life. Watching them laugh and play allowed me to feel joyful in a pure way. Owen is always stopping his activities to come over and give a gentle hug and kiss. Emma will age thirty years instantly to assist me with my chores "because we need to be careful because of your surgery." The kids give me a strong sense of hope and drive that everything will be okay regardless of the mess that is quickly approaching. It's difficult feeling helpless no matter who you are.

Although this illness is totally about me, I have realized I have to let the people around me do their part. Honoring their need to participate reminds me that I am not alone on this journey. I hate needing help, but it is a blessing to know it's there for me. I am getting better at not feeling guilty. I have even learned to ease up on those who think they are helping, but are actually annoying the hell out of me. Sometimes people have the worst timing or say the most inappropriate things, but I can always tell when they mean well. I hope this experience will allow them to grow and evolve in their own way as well. The same way I am using this blessing to become productive for the future. I can't just lie around, but throwing myself into work commitments isn't an option right now. So I will use this hiatus to create, gather information, write, and paint, so

The Pink Notes

that when the opportunity finally presents itself (I am healthy again) I can continue with my life's purpose. By then I'll know.

From: Jay Cannon

Sent: Thursday, September 21, 2006

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Darlene; Joe; Maria

Subject: RE: Pink Notes

I just sat here believe it or not and had a cup of tea (the English medicinal/emotional/spiritual/recreational you name itcure all!) My head started spinning a little with the chores of work and I said "f@*k it" I'm going to read the pink notes. The notes are phenomenal and although closer to my heart than the other members I'm sure they stirred up lots of emotions. I must tell you this, over the last two weeks I have seen Jak transform into the calm level headed centered person she talks about in the notes. She has truly come to grips with the illness and it is truly amazing to watch her deal with it so courageously and with total dignity. *I'm blown away!* In a funny way, she is helping me cope with this and she is the one who is sick...How awesome of a gift is that? Sure I can do my bit with housework, kids etc to

Notes 1 ~ 5

help me feel like I'm doing my bit but just knowing she is at peace with what is going on is a tremendous burden lifted from me, I feed off her and if she is sad I am also. I know the road may get bumpier but I feel we can tackle and beat anything thrown at us.

Once again the notes are so spot-on it's scary. I too see the things she sees in our kids, I just couldn't put it down the way she does. Again I just wanted to let Dar, Joe, and Maria know how proud and inspired of her I am. You know I've got to tell someone, so who better than the teapot people. These notes should some day be shared with millions in book form as they are inspiring to all with or without illness. Can't wait for the next batch.

PS Jackie, "You are Woman to love" simple as that.

Oh and "FUCK CANCER" btw, Love all.

The Pink Notes

From: Joe Tedesco

Sent: Wednesday, September 20, 2006

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon

Subject: Re: Pink Notes

Jak,

I have read over the PN's and I am speechless and crying. I can't place the crying. I don't know what the emotion is. I am not exactly sad, angry, frustrated, exhausted—the usual things that make me cry. I think it is a new emotion a moment of being totally overwhelmed that you leak emotion—being so filled with life that it falls out of you.

I will write more later.

I love you!

Joe

Chapter 3

Some people are thrill seekers, adrenaline junkies. I am an emotion and sensation junkie. I love to feel things—good and bad—in their entirety. I remember during some of the lowest moments of my life thinking, “If someone was watching this, how would it make them feel?” I love listening to a piece of music where the simplest sound gives me a rush greater than any drug. The thrill of hundreds of people laughing at my words, or moving left because I said so, reverberates within my soul. I love so hard I have to cry. When I feel strong, I feel untouchable. Every emotion and sensation is pure, raw and in its most extreme form. I love that. Cancer brings on such a flood of intense emotion, it can be crippling. Frustration, anger, and fear are the big three you have to find a place for in the beginning. These emotions are about as raw and extreme as it gets. I plan to experience cancer in its purist form—every sensation, good and bad. There will be many tears, but much joy as well.

The Pink Notes

Note #6: My direction...

After selling my interests in the club, I have been working on developing a career as a professional speaker. That is ultimately what I love doing. I've had success, but it has taken a lot longer than I thought. I found myself struggling with the typical juggling act—between work and family time. My family has always been first, but I really wanted to succeed as a speaker. At times, I would be resentful towards this time management struggle. In moments of frustration I would say “If I didn't have a family, I would have made it by now!” Yet I always knew everything would eventually work out and that I needed to “be present to the moment” and experience it in order to succeed in the future.

Part of finding success in any area of my life is being patient and persistent. The small steps I was making somehow still didn't seem like enough. Like most women, I had this self-inflicted pressure to succeed. I didn't want to disappoint Jay with the choices he was so lovingly supporting. I felt the direction I was moving in was not as clear cut as I had hoped. I was entering a field I was passionate about, but I did not feel settled yet. The package was not complete on some level. All I knew was those who I had worked with loved me and I just needed to keep plugging away. My moment would eventually come. Ironically after I got over the shock of the cancer diagnosis, I felt an overwhelming sense of peace, clarity, and

purpose. It all made sense now. Very simply, I needed to beat cancer. All the confusion about my career was gone, because I instantly knew this was what I had to do first. The uncertainty of my direction was now crystal clear. With that, I felt a new-found power I never experienced before. In a warped, bizarre way, I was excited to see what the cancer would bring me. Instead of backpacking through India to find myself, I was going to find myself in the surreal life of this dreaded disease.

Note #7: Layers of prep...

My sense of clarity and purpose comes from realizing that everything in my life has led me to this challenging moment. We build our lives in layers that prepare us for what lies ahead. There are always signs around us as to what we need to do next. Jay and I had always made it a point to live our lives as balanced as possible. We appreciated what we had and openly gave thanks. I loved watching the baffled look on some people's faces when we would show our support and gratitude for each other during conversations at various functions. Most people are programmed to expect the typical married couple bickering. But it never enters our minds to put each other down and feature our short comings. We realized early on in our relationship that we got more out of each other and felt happier and loved if we acknowledged the daily efforts we made toward achieving a healthy married life. We constantly would say how lucky we felt and some how

The Pink Notes

nothing really bad ever happened to us. We weren't untouchable, mind you. There were the day-to-day stresses of work, kids and finances. But overall, contentment and peace reigned in our marriage.

Leading up to our battle with cancer, we had some challenging preparatory tests to face. My dad went through a series of events that finally forced us to deal with his drinking problem; we couldn't deny the secret any longer. Everyone knew he was an alcoholic, but we avoided dealing with it until we had no choice. I was so proud of him with the way he faced it. He's much happier and healthier now, and most importantly sober. I have the comfort of knowing my mom enjoys her husband again and my kids will remember a healthy grandfather. It was scary and awkward at first, but in the end we all grew from this experience. In hindsight, this may have been the first layer of our preparation.

Jay's dad died unexpectedly in October, 2005. That was our next test. Although the death of a parent is inevitable; it's still never easy. When it happened, I felt pain for Jay. I knew his dad, Arthur, was in a better place and had lived a full life.

At a glance he was a strong, handsome man, enjoying his senior years. He left this world having lived life to the fullest. Who could ask for more? This gave me peace, but I knew it did nothing for Jay. He went to England and

fulfilled his duties as a good son. I hated that he had to go with only his brother and sister. I felt helpless but I knew deep down he would be okay. My passport had expired, which was my excuse for not going. But on a deeper level, I knew he had to do this on his own. This was growth that Jay needed to experience; it was part of his evolution as a man. He could find closure in his past as well as an opportunity to establish the type of man he wanted to be, going forward.

My role was to hold the fort at home and keep things normal for the kids. I knew Jay would be different when he came home. What scared me was the uncertainty of what to expect. I wasn't there to help him, to read him. That is what I am used to doing. I am the one who comes up with the insight that, most times, helps people find solutions for dealing with their life challenges. Supporting Jay through this difficult time would also reinforce for me that I am helping and fulfilling my role as his partner. In this case, I was the caregiver looking for recognition. I wanted to know that my efforts to provide support were fruitful. It's hard to help someone who is so far away and you can't read what they need. Once he returned and we hugged, I knew we would be okay. He talked about his personal growth and how he felt more of a man. I felt peace in my heart because I knew this experience had been so difficult for him. I saw that he had already begun to find a place for his loss. He was using it to become a better man, father, and husband. We all grew from this experience.

The Pink Notes

It was only a matter of time before life was great again. In hindsight, this may have been the second layer of preparation. This is a simple fact of life. Everything we choose to do prepares us or weakens us for the next natural phase of life. If we live and learn, we grow. If we live and do nothing, we get nothing. In my life, I have done both but have eventually learned it is better to learn because wisdom is power. The message is so simple and cliché. We all know we only go around once. So why do most people walk around vacant, oblivious; sheep? I try to teach this message in my work. Regardless of the area of your life—work, relationships, health—life skills are life skills. Once you master them, you can apply them consistently across the board. It is the formula that sets apart those who find the success they seek and those who continue coasting through life dazed and constantly waiting for something to change.

In looking for balance in my own life (workout and still party like a rock star), I've realized that you can't fight the natural balance of the universe. We need sheep in the world. I mention life skills so matter-of-factly but in all honesty it takes time, commitment, and a willingness to learn these skills. Once we learn them, we have to continually practice and fine tune these skills. It takes commitment but we all have it in us to realize these skills. It comes down to choosing to carry out the steps. We also need a certain amount of tragedy or what we interpret as tragedy. It moves in cycles. If you look at history, it lays

it out for you. We move through life and play our role. I can accept that. I also believe we have opportunities to manipulate the role we are destined to play. Certain things are inevitable and beyond our reach, like natural disasters or death, but when we allow ourselves possibilities, it makes the inevitable easier to bare. I chose a long time ago to not live as a sheep. Inevitably something brought me here. I have given in to that. As I have said before, the rest is up to me. I truly feel we have more influence on our life experience than most of us allow ourselves to believe. As I continue to try to find a place for what is happening to me and battle the feelings of anger and fear, I repeatedly remind myself of the power I still have. It is very difficult sometimes when everything around you is telling you otherwise. I am better at it some days than others.

Note #8 The rose ceremony...

Women all over the world are diagnosed with Breast Cancer. They are all different—different ages, shapes, personalities. All different individuals who were all equally devastated when they were diagnosed. I try to remind myself of that when I get self absorbed in my own ideas. I have come to realize it is vital to share and honor that common bond of devastation. It is a common badge we have earned the right to wear. I have also realized it is okay to hang on to all the wonderful things that make us individual spirits. Over the last ten years, ironically, I have always been active in raising money for Breast Cancer research.

The Pink Notes

Whether it was through company fundraisers or local events, I did my part. It made me feel good to participate in making an effort to change the course of a disease that was devastating the lives of women, my “sisters,” around the world. It never entered my mind that I would be spending the money I helped raise! *The International Dragon Boat for the Cure Races* is an annual event that I have committed to. Our team *Maggie’s Wings* came into existence after my good friend Darlene’s sister passed away. Every year we paddled our guts out and came out top fundraisers. It was always an emotional and inspiring day.

This year’s race occurred a few weeks after I was diagnosed. I didn’t even know if I could do it. My emotions changed depending on the day I was talking about it. It was too close but deep down I knew I couldn’t skip it. I had made a commitment to Darlene (our team captain). How could I run out on a cause that is helping women like me? It was absurd. As much as I wanted to stay home and hide, I had to be there.

The day had arrived. I prepared myself for the conversations I would inevitably have with those who didn’t know about my diagnosis. I had the script ready in the back of my mind. I had said it so many bloody times I could go on auto-pilot. All in all the day began well. It was different this year though because I was not only racing for a cause, I was also racing for myself. The emotions I felt as the day

progressed were all so new, I didn't have time to figure out how to process them.

It wasn't until the Rose ceremony that I fell apart. Traditionally Darlene would recite a poem in honor of her sister and we would all gather around. Then the survivors would make their way in their connected boats and toss roses to honor those women who had passed. It was an incredibly powerful moment in the day. We'd usually cry and get recharged to paddle our guts out all over again. This year was different. Tammie, our boat drummer and a survivor, grabbed my hand and led me to the beach without notice. I told her I didn't think I could do it. She said I had to. I started to cry in silent protest. I told her I hadn't even started treatment or had surgery or anything.

“The day you are diagnosed is the day you become a survivor,” she said.

I cried more and could see she was too. We walked to the beach, but I wanted to bolt and run. It was too soon to go public. I usually love people watching me, but not like this.

Tammie said, “These are the women that will help you get through this.”

I didn't want to belong to this group. I didn't want to bond with them. I didn't want to be a survivor. I climbed into

The Pink Notes

the boat on auto-pilot. Thank God I had sunglasses on! I sat motionless as all the women (older than me) clucked around me. I even witnessed catty behavior! Women are still women I guess. When will we ever learn? I stared at the floor but desperately wanting to jump out. I didn't belong there! The woman next to me asked who I was paddling for. I didn't know how to take her question considering it was a fricken' survivor boat! I tried to respond but couldn't talk. She was sweet and gave me a moment. In the weakest, most pathetic voice, I said, "I was recently diagnosed" and stared at the floor. God I wanted to jump out. She put her arm around me and cried with me. She said I would be fine and to look around at all the other women. The women behind me, who had initially given me that "what are you doing here" look, now gave comfort. I guess I did belong there. It was the common devastation that brought us together. As much as I hated every minute of it, it forced me to accept my destiny. At a glance I stood out like a sore thumb but inside I blended in.

The ceremony continued and I cried the entire time. Thank God for sunglasses! Even after years of survival, they still cry. I guess it never really goes away. It becomes woven into the fiber of who you are.

As we paddled to the shore, Jay was there. It was good to be back to the familiar. He hugged me and I cried some more. Thank God for those fucking sunglasses. The other

survivors respected our moment together. Afterwards, they came and gave me words of encouragement and support. The wave of emotion was starting to settle. I joked with Tammie for throwing me that curve ball. She knew I needed it. She also knew I would never have stepped in that boat if she gave me warning. She lost her husband to cancer and survived cancer herself, all in her 30's. She has since become a strong voice for awareness, education, and fundraising. I figure if anyone knows the process, she does.

Note #9: The pharmaceutical rep...

As I continued down my long road of the treatment regime, I found with every consult and meeting I always stood out like a sore thumb. The same way I looked awkward in the boat. It was always the same. People would stare at me in the waiting room. It was like they were waiting for one of my parents to come in and sit next to me as the patient. I ran into a social worker who does my workshops at the hospital, while waiting for my first appointment with my medical oncologist. I switch "on" whenever talking to people who are work related. The "speaker" in me takes over. It's a curse really. I eloquently spoke of my situation and put on my brave motivational persona. The woman behind the reception was in earshot. I went in to see Dr. Yoshida. Jay was meeting me there from work. He checked in moments after me. He asked the woman behind the desk if I had gone in. She replied,

The Pink Notes

“Is she a patient?” Jay gave an obvious yes. “Oh, I thought she was a pharmaceutical rep, the way she was talking earlier,” she replied. Jay and I thought it was hilarious.

It continues to be like that. Every waiting room or support group, I continue to look like the pharmaceutical rep. It’s comical but it gives me comfort. I have found some balance in all this. I can share our common goal to beat this repulsive disease. I can still learn and gain insight from those who come from different paths. Yet, I can also maintain and nurture the part of me that cancer cannot take away. My mind, spirit, and drive cannot be altered. I won’t let it. Cancer treatment is temporary. When it is all said and done, I want to always be the pharmaceutical rep.

From: Joe Tedesco

Sent: Tuesday, October 03, 2006

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Darlene J.

Szecsei-Albano; Jay Cannon; Maria Meret;

Susan Duxter

Subject: Re: More Notes!

Hi Teapots!

My God, I have just read the Pink Notes. You said just react, so here goes! Jak, I am struck by the level of your candor, by how honest and real and aware you make me

Notes 6 ~ 9

feel while reading the PN's. Thanks for this gift, and thanks for the gift of your friendship. Through these Notes you've offered me a perspective on life so impossibly honest that I can only struggle to reciprocate.

I must say that if the potential title of this book isn't called *Fuck Cancer*, I will be disappointed. I sit here torn completely apart; my insides and outsides are shredded.

I have always prided myself in being the strong, logical one; the one who sits back listens, then imparts logical and cold hard thought. But I'm immobilized, struck dumb. In my thirty-eight years of living, I have never felt so insignificant and so full all at once. Words, language, the writings of others are nothing in comparison to what I am reading, to what your words make me feel.

I remember the moment you and I became friends. We were in Chicago. We walked to a park and sat. I listened to you; you opened up and confided in me. I don't know why other than it was meant to be that we con-

The Pink Notes

nected, that we share a moment of humanity. I can't understand why, but you gave me your trust that night and I met a friend who I have and still hold dear. From that day forth I've been committed to protecting you and loving you as a friend. What strikes me now is that I am meeting my friend all over again, but I don't feel worthy of the depth you are taking me to. Your *Pink Notes* make me look at myself in raw ways, in gut-honest ways, in ways I have never wanted to before. I hate experiencing the depths of emotion going through me, but you challenge me to do so. I hate it and love it at the same time! I feel so free in some ways, but so overwhelmed in others.

I feel eclipsed by the weight of your words, by your experience of life. My friend has cancer and she is changing. Who is she? She is who I want to be. Who do I want to be? But don't get excited; I still know my job is to keep you centered! LOL. We exist as friends because we choose to do so. That's what friendship is—a choice to be in each other's lives, to experience a facet of life we would otherwise be unaware of. Your experiences in life as my friend—

Notes 6 ~ 9

things you have told me and played out in front of me—have become part of my existence, my reality. By sharing your experiences, you've become a part of me like my arms and legs.

Just so you know, cancer sucks. It fucking sucks because it threatens our friendship my dear, dear friend. I want to stop it! I cry and I am angry and sick that I can't just make you who you were. It makes me feel out of control, helpless and sick! We have a connection, a role in each others lives that made sense. Now it's changing. It makes me uneasy, worried, yet grateful because we are still friends.

You scare me. You challenge me as a person to experience *all* of life—good and bad—but I don't know if I am ready for this. Am I? Maybe I am. To be strong has been easy. To be weak, well, I have never wanted to be seen as weak, as vulnerable. But your *Notes* force me to open up. To see myself through your experience. You make me feel life.

A sheep you say? That is an excellent perspective—to do what is expected. A gift of predictability. To let others feel as

The Pink Notes

though their thoughts are on target, to make them feel okay. Your honesty hurts. I am filled with tears from emotions unnamed. You've always relied on me to tell you that you were full of shit, to tell you you're crazy, to be unwaveringly honest. Now you are doing this to me. I can no longer hide behind the masks I've created to protect myself, and I am grateful. I've always taken everything so seriously, but now I feel challenged to step out of the small emotional box I've kept myself in. This scares me and exhilarates me all at once. A moment of deep despair, confusion, anger, of absurd reality—of being alive.

A thought. I remember you and me painting at the University of Windsor. You were taking art classes. I was admittedly dabbling, and you gave me a bit of advice. You warned me that when I was painting and too focused on a particular part, I should take the small piece of my painting that I loved and destroy it. Why? Because it would distract me and the entire work would suffer. I would be too involved in one place and neglect the total picture. I learned that painting was a slow process. To be successful you needed to act and then wait. To let

Notes 6 ~ 9

it dry and then act again. Cancer—it too has become a distraction. But to become too distracted by this one piece of our lives would detract from the whole experience. Remember that! A life warning: To hold precious one part of your life is to neglect the whole picture. The *Pink Notes* recognize all! The light is on. I applaud your honestly—and I share it!

One day we'll be old, we'll be old friends together, and this adversity will make us smile when we look back on it. Smile in the face of adversity. Shoulder-to-shoulder we stand as friends. We will be as proud of ourselves as I am of you today!

Thank you for shining your light on your life and inviting me to look at mine in the same way. Thank you my friend. Cancer may be tragic, ugly and needing a small part of our attention. But the big picture, the one you are painting will only get better, because you are giving it *all* of your attention.

Love you!

Stout Tea Pot

PS F@*K Cancer!

The Pink Notes

From: Jay Cannon

Date: Wed, 04 Oct 2006

To: JT, Darlene, Maria, Susan

Subject: Re: More Notes!

Joe Tedesco aka Dr Joe.

Teapot members.....

Wow, you took your time coming forth in writing your emails, but you did so with what I can only describe as an emotional explosion.

I know Jackie is a brilliant woman—that's why I married her! But to see these notes bring out such heartfelt raw emotion from you is just fantastic.

I know when people are facing life's adversities they tend to put on a brave face, but deep down are just crumbling inside. I, too, felt this way when Jackie was diagnosed. We have to be strong, one day at a time, chin up—all the old clichés that still ring true, yet you have to buy into them. Through her strength and honesty, Jak has helped me to really believe and see the whole picture, the complete map of our

Notes 6 ~ 9

lives. The art analogy was brilliant, Joe. She has recharged my energy and belief to help us all get through this.

Jackie is a life sales representative and I'm buying it!

Okay, I feel like having a lie down after reading Joe's response. Joe, next time don't be afraid to tell us how you really feel—LOL. You are a true friend to Jackie and me. You're someone our kids look up to, and look forward to seeing and spending time with. But most of all you are a good person and it's a pleasure to know you.

Forget the lie down; I'm having a cup of tea.

Jackie, you are woman to love and know that I love you inside and out.

Jay

Oh yeah and F@*K CANCER.

The Pink Notes

From: Darlene J Szecsei-Albano

Sent: Monday, October 02, 2006

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Jay Cannon;

Joe Tedesco; Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: Re: More Notes!

Layers of prep—my favorite. Sometimes things just don't make sense at the time, and then one day everything makes so much sense. I don't believe our paths are set; I believe the opposite. Our paths are very unset. Only the lucky find meaning and strength through hardship, and find moments to reflect and appreciate their luck, health, and happiness. Chaos is our time to feel the highs and lows and peace to reflect.

Good stuff Jak!

Dar-out

Xo

Chapter 4

There is so much to absorb with a cancer diagnosis. It is similar to mourning someone's death. The difference is that someone is me and I am not dead – but I could be. It is truly bizarre and tests my ability to cope with the extreme. Dealing with the anger, frustration and fear is a daily battle. Some days I think I have finally got a grip on it, and then out of nowhere I drop the ball again. There is still so much unknown territory to travel.

Note #10: At least my anger is my own...

As I have said before, the thing I hate most is not having control of my time and my body. There are so many stupid appointments. It's so repetitive. I feel like a lab experiment now, because I have had my port inserted. I was really nervous about getting this done. I didn't know what to expect. Part of me is always afraid that I won't handle the pain and in the end won't be able to handle the whole process. It was a huge relief when I saw Dr. Ala because I

The Pink Notes

knew her through work. I felt embarrassed to let her in on my secret. The old “how can a fitness person have cancer?” thought crept into my mind. I had to let that go because there really wasn’t anything I could do about it now. The positive side of this situation was that she could also really appreciate my concerns; she has seen me at my best and knows what I am capable of. She is probably the first medical person I have dealt with who I felt totally *got it* when I was talking. She’s young. She also has two small kids and likes to work out. She could appreciate where I was in my life because she’s in the same stage as I am. She has a very strong, nurturing quality about her. It was a great comfort. The procedure went well and I was coming down off the roller coaster—or so I thought.

All my stuff, appointments and obligations, from yesterday were finished. I had great classes. I met with my dietician and signed up for the various support programs available to me through the *Cancer Centre* and *Hospice*. After school, Owen finished his homework quickly so we could get to the *Kids Can Cope* seminar. It was the first session of their support program and we wanted to be on time. Everything was running as smoothly as can be expected. The kids enjoyed their first session. The really hard part for me was listening to them introduce themselves to the rest of the group. Hearing Owen say, “Hi, my name is Owen and in my family the person who is sick is my mom,” was unbearable. The noise in my head was so overwhelming, I wanted to cry. I barely heard Emma say

her bit because I was desperately fighting back the tears. In the end, they had a lot of fun and connected with the rest of the children in the group. I think they will benefit from it. At least they know that other kids are in the same situation.

I made it through my multi-directional check list with my chin up. The next day I was at the hospital bright and early for my port surgery. I am not a morning person so that was a big deal. Afterward I treated myself to an afternoon nap. I thought I was finished for a while. But that wasn't the end. I received a call for another stupid appointment the next day at 1:15 p.m., which meant I couldn't have the facial I was *so* looking forward to. I hate jumping when someone else says to. As I sit and listen to Jay making golf plans, I get to look forward to sitting in the fucking hospital for two hours getting poked, instead of having a facial! It is such bullshit! Ultimately there will be opportunities for facials and other pampering services. I know that, but right now it is the message it sends. I am still under the control of the treatment. I fucking hate it. At this very moment the only thing that is really my own is my anger.

Note # 11: Frustration of the unknown...

These negative feelings are coming in rapid waves. I am angry, because I'm used to being the leader who organizes everyone else. Now I have to take a back seat and let other

The Pink Notes

people dictate how I am going to spend a large part of my time. I am angry because I can't seem to get a grip on what is going on inside of me. Physically, my body is steadily being manipulated. This is part of the healing process, but from the outside it is extremely difficult to see that. It reminds me of when I found out I was pregnant. I felt out of control because something was happening to my body that was beyond me. The uncertainty was always there. I didn't plan on getting pregnant. We had just married and I hadn't properly prepared my body by taking the right vitamins and eliminating alcohol. I was too busy enjoying being a grown up, a newlywed, a business woman. I kept wondering if my baby was in jeopardy. Jay was really excited, which made me angry. It was easy for him; it wasn't his body. He wasn't responsible for the baby's survival or health. He didn't feel like shit all day long. Until I actually saw Owen with my own eyes, it was hard for me to truly relax.

The fear of being an unprepared parent opened my emotional floodgates. I was mad because I wasn't ready. And of course I had to feel *some* guilt, since so many women struggle with infertility. I seemed so selfish. In hindsight my life was following its natural order. I needed to be pushed from my comfort zone in order to grow and realize the gifts of motherhood. Now I have Owen whom I love in a way that is so pure and evokes newer and deeper emotions every day. When it came time to have Emma, I felt strong and empowered. My body and mind were solid

and I was ready. I felt confident and secure the second time around, which allowed me to enjoy my pregnancy so much more. Like most women, I had learned the ropes the first time around. Now, after those two life-altering experiences, I have two gifts that I cherish. With them, I grow every day. Cancer evokes the same feelings in me as my first pregnancy. The fear, the uncertainty, the uncontrollable changes going on in my body all gang up to overwhelm me. What makes it harder to deal with is the lack of an obvious gift at the end. The stakes are now life-threatening.

Once again the mind and body that I relied on—that which made me who I am—are being challenged. It just seems so much harder this time. My logical brain tells me I will weather each phase and the self-destructive mindset I am in right now will soon be over, but there is still a tiny part of me that is holding back from functioning properly. I am hiding.

I used to get a charge from my workouts. The rush of physical strength empowered my mind as I pushed my body to its limits. That's how I work. But right now my body is not my own. I don't have control over it, and it is taking me longer than I thought to get my head around this fact. As always I try to find some purpose in all of this. I desperately try to find the gift that will be waiting for me at the end of this process. I am desperately keeping my mind, eyes, and heart open to whatever it may be.

The Pink Notes

Much like parenting, I'm sure the gift will always be ongoing, and always at risk. You never really sleep soundly, figuratively, and literally again. Your emotions are always on.

Like parenting, cancer is with me now for good. Since this is reality, I have to somehow find a place for it in my life. Figuring it out takes up most of my days. Sometimes the challenge is exciting and I feel my old self coming through. That cocky, superior, I'll-kick-your-ass attitude. Sometimes it exhausts me and I want to escape. That is when a nice glass of wine comes in handy. Combine that with shitty TV and a few novels, and I have burned a few days. I know the exhaustion will pass and my take-no-prisoners attitude will prevail, but it is an ongoing struggle. I have no choice, really. It's not in me to give up, because that equates to failure and failure is not an option. One of the books I fittingly burned through was Lance Armstrong's *It's Not About the Bike-My Journey Back to Life*. The following quote always stands out in my head:

Pain is temporary. It may last a minute, or an hour, or a day, or a year, but eventually it will subside and something else will take its place. If I quit, however, it lasts forever. That surrender, even the smallest act of giving up, stays with me. So when I feel like quitting, I ask myself, which would I rather live with?

Sometimes I feel so profound, but every now and then I think I am full of shit!

Note #12: Ripped Buddha...

I've been through an emotional hurricane lately. From the great highs to the bottomed-out lows. I went out on a bike ride today, which reminded me of who I was. I got the body high that I was craving so desperately. I jumped on my bike, and as soon as I turned away from my street I suddenly became anonymous. Everything bad disappeared. The further I rode, the more anonymous I became. My body felt strong and the cancer seemed so far away. I have always loved exercise. That rush of strength and pushing my body. Even though I am not a typical jock, that part of me is. Riding my bike today was different. Usually I work out for prevention and aesthetic purposes but today I rode for self-preservation. The rush I experienced from this realization was quite different. I liked it. We are all going to die at some point. That is a fact of life. But it's different when the possibility is slammed in your face. In the past, my goals were to be strong and ripped. Now I work out to feel alive...to feel possibilities... to break down barriers of the past and let my new existence come in. Cancer is part of my life for good. I am slowly accepting that. I know I cannot change that reality, but I can still control how to integrate it into my life. We all know exercise is medicinal. That is nothing new. I am just realizing it on a deeper level. If people—ill or not—would

The Pink Notes

let themselves, just for a moment, experience the spiritual euphoria of feeling so mentally connected to their physical body, they would want to do it again and again. The key is finding the right groove. Picking the right thing, at the right intensity, at the right moment. That sounds complicated but it isn't really. The complicated part is letting your mind free for a moment to figure it out. You can't multi-task that one. Until you feel the emotion full-out, you miss the whole thing. Now I use exercise for preservation and regeneration. Don't get me wrong, I miss being ripped and lean but I know that formula. I can get that back when it's necessary. Now I look for a greater formula—for wisdom and growth. One of the social workers at the cancer centre said I was very wise for my age. That was the greatest compliment I could receive, since that has always been an ongoing quest in my life's journey. So that is my new task—to be a ripped Buddha. I knew because of the length and intensity of this bike ride, my body would be in pain the next day. I didn't care. I haven't moved and pushed myself like that in a long time. Later on that evening my body crashed, but the rush I felt during that ride kept me going for days.

Note #13: The conference...

I was scheduled to speak at the annual *Can Fit Pro* Conference. I was nervous because I did not know how I would hold up given everything that was going on. It was nice to have something to focus my energy on in between

surgery and the start of treatment. I was moody at the conference, although no one knew it. I didn't know if I had the strength to keep up the brave public face for that length of time. I didn't have the security of coming to the comfort of my home. I kept forgetting things and losing my focus. I did, however, attend some great workshops that motivated me. I've had some really great creative ideas lately, so I was enjoying that part. Some of the new information I received in other workshops will help me develop my ideas. I felt anxious because of my own upcoming seminar. Normal nerves would have been okay, but having cancer exaggerated my nervousness. Over all my emotions were running on high octane.

For obvious reasons, I attended a seminar that dealt with exercise and breast cancer. This is an area that is new to me, so I was interested in doing my own research. There really isn't a lot of information regarding this area, especially not for younger people. Unfortunately I was extremely disappointed; the speaker was not giving me the information I had hoped for. The recommendations for exercise were patronizing and the description of treatment reminded me of cheap shock value, which was depressing. All I could picture were physically challenged victims who were just getting by during and after treatment. *I don't want to just get by!* It may be okay for the unfit elderly woman, but it wasn't for me. Not in the prime of my life. I can't go out like that. I just kept thinking *That's it? That is what you've got to inspire me with?* I was angry

The Pink Notes

and upset. I wanted to scream at the speaker and sink down and cry at the same time. If there were any other women my age hearing this, I am sure they would be just as insulted as I was. I am sure I wasn't being objective in my opinions because I was still processing my own raw emotions. That whole experience rocked me so hard it took everything I had to go to the VIP reception that evening. I felt so emotionally weak but forced myself to go. My friends, Tammy and Sheila, who also attended the conference, kept pushing me because it was an important networking opportunity. We all went. At the reception, I kept looking for excuses to hide in the conversation between the three of us. With more prodding from my girlfriends, I finally introduced myself to all the important people, accomplished the networking I needed to do, and then gracefully left. I felt elated because I persevered and did what I needed to do. Small triumphs like that did wonders for me. I made sure to let myself enjoy it.

Saturday was a new day and it was my turn to be the professional. I was determined to make my seminar a success. I did a dry run, and then got dressed. My eyes were so red. Up close I looked ill. What kept me grounded was the fact that I forgot to pack light underwear to wear under my white pants. I was forced to go commando. A little humor can go a long way. If I felt nervous, I would just chuckle to myself about the fact that I had no underwear on. Thank God my white pants had lining. I double-checked myself, then headed out. Once I stepped out of my hotel room it

was *show time*. Walking through the convention centre towards the room I was speaking in was similar to my marathon bike ride. I felt strong. I was switched on until the end of the seminar.

Once I started to talk, I was in the zone. I knew I was on because I didn't have to think. It just flowed. The only stretch was including my story. I wanted to use my experience with my illness to enhance the impact of my speech. My heart was pounding; I didn't want to let my voice change. I started to speak slowly, so my emotions could keep up. Slow and steady. Then my heart rate started to go back to normal. I had made it out of the starting blocks, and was off to the finish line. In the end, my seminar was a success and I received tremendous feedback. It left me on an amazing high for the rest of the night. This was another small triumph for me to enjoy. I knew things were subtly different though because I didn't feel confident going out on the town to celebrate that night. That was part of the treat of being away at such events. We would diligently learn and fulfill our professional responsibilities, and then enjoy a night out. Instead I was exhausted. Emotionally I had nothing left, which of course left my body wanting to melt into my hotel bed.

The trance workshop I attended the next morning gave me great ideas for future projects. The presenter, Misty Tripoli, was a free spirit and taught in a style that asked us to test our boundaries. I loved everything about her work-

The Pink Notes

shop. I desperately wanted to let go of my emotions, but I would have burst out in to tears. It was all I could do to keep the tears light so my eyes wouldn't swell. Thank God she turned the lights down. She was looking for testimonials afterward, but I just couldn't keep it together. I will email her later to let her know how much I enjoyed the experience.

The conference came to an end and Sheila, Tammy and I made our way home. I was exhausted when I got in. The conversation in the car and everyone hovering around me when I finally walked in my house made it difficult to breathe. The next day I was scheduled to go to the hospital three times for tests and my first consultation with the doctor. My armor was weakening.

I am not accustomed to so many hospital visits. My emotions are mixed and highly charged. My mind is overwhelmed with the amount of drugs I am about to take. I just received a five-year prescription. What the hell is that? I must realize and try to accept that the staff does not know me. But I can't help feeling frustrated and angry over what the medical team is telling me. I have to remind myself that I hate the answers to my questions, not the people themselves. They are stating the facts and not making things up to intentionally upset me. It is what it is. They are doing their best to provide good bedside manner and handing it out based on the average patient. They state the facts and stay neutrally supportive. Unfortunately, I

don't feel average or neutral. I think of myself as pretty intense with a Zen-like quality. I guess it is up to me to nurture that side. This is why I need space and time to rebuild my armor. This is where I have to stay organized so I don't overdo it. The time to recharge is crucial, if I am going to get through this.

My fear is that I won't be myself when it is all over. I know I will change, but I sometimes fear I won't have enough left inside of me to live life the way I want to. I don't want to wind up just making it. I need to do something with all this that will impact my life for the better. Chemo is coming and I am nervous.

Note #14: Away in St. Catherines...

Jay and I booked a weekend in St. Catherines, Ontario. It is our getaway to the Niagara region—a place we both love—before the games (chemo) begin. I am on the up-swing again. I have a new haircut and have ordered my wig, which looks exactly the same as my haircut. Preparing for the inevitable is a necessity. Even though I hate my new haircut and wig, I am making the new look work as best as I can. However, I am feeling soft and I have a mom haircut—the two things I hate. I keep telling myself it is only temporary. I try not to look too close. We are on our B&B getaway now. It's beautiful and that's all that matters. I was very productive before we left so I can let go now. As the date of my first chemotherapy treatment

The Pink Notes

approaches, I keep going back and forth with the bald thing. Sometimes it freaks me out and sometimes I couldn't care less. Jay and I were discussing it while eating dinner at a wonderful restaurant by the water. Jay put it into perspective for me perfectly that night. I was talking about how in some ways I loved the idea of all the attention I would get sitting there with my bald head and Justin Timberlake hat on. His response was "It's like the pig mask." It was a brilliant comparison and that is why he is my husband.

When my friend, Chris, and I were together many moons ago as art students, we took a whole series of photos involving me and other friends wearing masks, one being a pig mask. We took shots all over Royal Oak and Detroit, but the best one of all was on an escalator at the Water Tower Place in Chicago. The photos were brilliant, but the rush from the attention was the best. Looking at being bald in this way somehow makes it easier to deal with. It's just another way of pushing people's buttons and making them react out of their comfort zone. This time, however, security won't be escorting me out of the building.

On a deeper level, cancer has brought out love, compassion, and a reassessment of people's priorities. It has touched the human side of so many. When you look beyond the physical elements, you see that your mind and heart still function magnificently. There is no need for sympathy. Instead, see the strength and the resolve.

People can admire you for the things you have, but when they want to become who you really are, now that's a true compliment. Possessions are simple trends that come and go. But integrity and character are the substance of a *real* human being. The way we impact the world and the people around us is what counts. People constantly tell me how strong and positive I am—how inspiring that is. I don't know how else to be. I am not trying to be a hero, but I do feel it is my responsibility as a human being to do something with my experience. We all have that duty, really. Sometimes we just need to back away from the noise of the trivial shit in our lives to see what our own personal responsibility is. I always knew I was meant to teach people. The cancer has just given me more power in disguise.

From: Darlene Szecsei-Albano

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon, Jay Cannon, Joe Tedesco, Maria Meret, Susan Duxter

Date: Fri, 20 Oct 2006

Subject: RE: Here are some more...

I experienced death early in life. I have always been close with animals, wishing to be a vet as a child. I constantly mended and cared for wounded animals, while my mother nearly fainted as I ran clinics in our backyard. My soul mates from a young age were my dogs. With six and seven years

The Pink Notes

between my sisters and me, I was often shooed from their sisterly bond. With zero neighbors and European parents sheltering me from anything and everything, I turned to my dogs. I've always had one or two since the age of four, even today. I shared everything with them, (now you think I'm weird I know, but we're being raw). I sobbed relentlessly as each one passed, and learned early that what you love the most may not be forever. Each time a dog died, it took with them a chapter of my inner most secrets. My mom said she remembered when I was four that I lay on our Golden Lab, Bukshi, crying and complaining about her! Dogs will lick your tears ya know, they're salty, they like that shit.

In my career I have been a healer helping people and families live and die. The most honored portion of my career was the latter. To be in the presence of someone at the very end of their life, and to share that moment is quite powerful. No, I wasn't chosen; there are some people that have no one in their life and nurses are given the privilege of sharing that moment. It ain't always pretty, but definitely a privilege. I have also watched families grieve, and

Notes 10 ~ 14

depending on the culture, that can be very dysfunctional, but there really isn't a functional way to grieve.

One of the hardest things I've done is to watch my sister fade away before my very eyes, but more so seeing my parents suffer. The turmoil in their hearts was harder to bear than letting my sister go. My dad has always been the balanced Libra, weighing the details and making objective decisions. He has always been black and white and I always knew what his opinion would be. This or that, no in-between. My sister did pretty good with her bone marrow transplant until she was transferred to ICU. Here you become the new family in the waiting room, and you study how other families function. We soon realized that everything is pretty good until the doctor calls you into "that room" and then families come out crying and hopeless. We lasted 5 ½ days until the doctor summoned us to the dreaded room. We unanimously agreed that my sister would not want heroics and a life of machine-sustained organs. She fought a hard fight with dignity and courage and her thoughts were being conveyed to us through her failing body.

The Pink Notes

Although she could not answer us, I remember whispering to her, "Mags", if you wanna fight, we are here; and if you wanna go, we are here. It's up to you, whatever you want, we love you." Soon after, she started to fade.

We went home to the apartment in New York and my dad with his Parkinson's wasn't too mobile, so he would wait until we got home for dinner break before my mom and I would go back to our living quarters in the ICU waiting room. He asked what happened today, but my mom detached and kept busy in the kitchen. I went on about my sister's organs, oxygen levels, blah-blah-blah-blah. My father grabbed my hand. That hand that seemed so big when I was young and now shaking with Parkinson's, age spots, holding a cane, wear and tear of years of creating with them, sustaining our family, the war, raising kids, falling in love. And they suddenly felt so small and weak. He asked me, "Tell me please, is she going to live or die?" I turned and placed my hand on his and suddenly felt the shift in power; it was at that moment that I realized I had become the adult. My father and I were equals now. We had experienced a

Notes 10 ~ 14

tragedy together, on the same level. He wasn't explaining what the war was like and me trying to understand; I wasn't explaining my perils of nursing life and he trying to understand; we had switched places, miraculously for that moment. We completely consciously and unconsciously understood that from this point on I would be taking care of everything from here on in, and the power was passed: he was done making the big decisions. I looked at him, and as our eyes met and welled with tears, my lip quivered. I took a deep breath and said, "Dad, she's going to die." He nodded and we silently sobbed as we held hands. It is so difficult for my parents to have lost their daughter. They have never been the same and never will. How can they? I am different too.

I don't live irresponsibly or responsibly; sometimes I seize the day, sometimes I don't. My life isn't perfect, but I am not cynical either, although sometimes I can be. But I feel balanced. It ain't pretty all the time, and I am not always proud of myself, but I am happy just to be sometimes. I am not afraid to die; living can be scarier. I hope this doesn't freak you

The Pink Notes

out. Like I have said before, we have already established that you are going to survive this, which is why I feel comfortable sharing this. Thanks for stimulating my archives.

Love ya,

Dar

From: Susan Duxter

Sent: Thursday, October 19, 2006

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon

Subject: Re: Here are some more..

Jackie:

Took some time to digest your writing. At times my heart both breaks and soars as I read your thoughts, and this time I wept. It's astonishing how your words can trigger such deep raw emotion—you have a gift my friend. I applaud your insights as you preview your life day by day. I am too overcome to write more today but you are in my thoughts.

Sue

Chapter 5

Chemotherapy is a word that scares and puzzles people. Unless you have experienced it or cared for someone who has experienced it, you don't really know how it works or how it is administered. All you know is it makes people bald and look ill. I think the anticipation of it is almost worse than actually having it.

Note #15: There is no spoon...

It is the morning of my first chemotherapy appointment. It's 7:00 a.m. and I have been up since five. I don't know how I feel right now. I feel a bit crappy since I have had wine every night for the last few weeks. I've lost count really. Add in the ridiculous amounts of food I have eaten and I'm left with a toxic mix. This definitely contradicts the balanced lifestyle I preach. I am proof that when you decrease activity and increase calories, you gain weight. Ten pounds actually. How gross! I've been assuming chemo would ruin the fun of that self indulgent behavior

The Pink Notes

so I went overboard to compensate—psych 101. At this point, my chemo appointment is another thing on my day timer. It is the conclusion to a jam-packed week.

M-dietician, meet Shelly from the *Look Good Feel Better* Program, *Kids Can Cope*

T- Port insertion

W- Heart scan

F-*Chemo*

In the middle of all the poking and prodding, I have tried to keep life running as normal as possible. Whatever energy I have left, I give to the kids. The grown ups, I figure, will get over it. My children deserve to have their mom willing and able to be there for them. I refuse to let them down. It's just not an option.

The funny thing is I feel I have been through so much and have learned and grown so much in a short amount of time. The truth is I haven't even started. There is still so much of this process left. That's the freaky part. I feel so mentally exhausted sometimes and then I think *Holy fuck I haven't even begun. How am I going to do this?* The ultimate answer is that I have no choice. It is what it is. The ride is inevitable, but the vehicle is still my choice.

To quote *The Matrix* (brilliant film), "There is no spoon." The idea is you cannot bend a spoon because that is impossible, but if you truly allow yourself to believe the

spoon is not real, you will be able to bend it. In other words, your perception of reality impacts how you move through it. As I have said many times, there are no rules when it comes to the creative process and opening the mind to new things. As long as it drives you to do great things, then believe what you need to.

Cancer treatment is so individualistic and I figure there are no rules there either. I've been given all the facts and possible side effects and at first I was overwhelmed. I broke down with self-doubt. You constantly hear stories of people enduring things much worse than this. The doctors speak in generality. This is the typical outcome with this drug, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. I have to remind myself that I have never been typical, and I don't intend to start now. I have finally realized that it is much more fun being *a-typical*. I have concluded that I'll sit, listen, and digest the information. And I will learn from it, because that is essential, and then in the end I'll do it my own way. I am not sure exactly what that is yet but I do know "There is no spoon!"

I finished teaching my workshop for the hospital staff, then drove to the other side of the hospital to the cancer centre. Jay was meeting me there. The participants in my group had no idea where I was heading after our session. It was bizarre. I guess I wanted to keep things as normal as possible to very last second before the insanity started. As I pulled out of my parking space, I could feel myself

The Pink Notes

getting a bit nervous until I caught a glimpse of what was in the back of my minivan. We had just recently purchased a new dishwasher and our old one was sitting in the back of my car. Jay had not had a chance to go to the city disposal yet. I couldn't help but smile. It was just one more quirky part of the puzzle. I have no idea why I found that so amusing, but nothing about this process really makes sense.

Jay and I had to wait at the cancer center because they were running behind. I actually didn't mind. I was in no hurry. The whole process is still so surreal to me. I imagine it is for all those people going through it. Sitting there, we laughed at how crazy it was listening to people talk about their different cancers and drugs they were taking like they were talking about plants in their gardens. I felt calm while waiting. I have developed a great ability to channel my anxiety. I suppose I had a lot of practice from previous toxic relationships. I got real good at hiding chaos behind a loud voice and jokes. Now I managed to use that coping method to my advantage. Instead of blocking things out, I have learned to relax and step back from the madness. I am still there watching, but I don't have to react. Yoga and meditation have taught me this. Although I am nervous, I feel very calm.

They call my name. It is time to go in. There is no turning around so it is time to sit back for the ride. I let myself go on auto-pilot so I can conserve my energy to carry me

Notes 15 ~ 16

through the ugly parts. I know if I pace myself, it will soon pass. Auto-pilot mode begins:

Sit in the chair.

Listen to explanations (blah, blah, blah, blah)

Prick of the IV

1st bag, 2nd bag, 3rd bag

Four vials of bright red stuff

Last flush

I felt waterlogged, but it was done. The amount of drugs is bizarre. If I were a cartoon, you would see the level of liquid swooshing around in the whites of my eyes. I felt a bit stoned and tired at the same time. It is hard to describe, but I knew that I wasn't myself and the amount of drugs inside me was pretty intimidating. The part that gives me the most anxiety is the fact that I just started. I have over a year of these drug treatments—that's the scary part. Can I hang in there that long? I did some gentle yoga the day after and that felt good. I still feel shaky though. I find I can't let myself think about the amount of drugs that are in me. It freaks me out and makes me feel like the underdog. I gag just thinking about it. I just have to be patient and deal with it one step at a time.

Note #16: The sea of sky...

A clear sky after a long storm always gives me a sense of hope and possibility. As messed up as the world may seem, the beauty in a sky that is so vast helps me see

The Pink Notes

beyond whatever is happening in front of me. It enhances my cognitive and creative vision. I guess that's why artists have been fascinated with depicting it for years.

The last two weeks have been the sky for me. My first treatment was on a Friday. The weekend was foggy, but it began to lift on the following Monday. I felt progressively better on the following days. I also realized our home was getting back to a normal routine. All our traveling was done. Visitors were no longer staying with us. There were less doctor appointments. The kids were back in school, which allowed me guilt-free alone time every afternoon. Most importantly, I felt strong. I ate well and drank lots of fluids. In some ways I felt even better. Before, I was drinking too much wine and eating crap because I was wallowing in unconscious self-pity. I am doing my best not to fall into the wallowing trap too often. My hospital workshops were running smoothly, and I was going for bike rides. It gave me a sense that I could actually make it through treatment without giving up as much as I had feared.

The following week was even better. I was productive, alert, and sometimes had to remind myself that I was in treatment. I felt happy without fear creeping in. There were other signs we were coping well. Owen needed to get glasses because his teacher found he could not see the blackboard. On the way home from picking them up, Emma asked if she would need glasses. She was a bit

Notes 15 ~ 16

envious of Owen's new novelty. Jay and I explained that we didn't know. Sometimes things occur when we don't expect it. Sometimes things just pop up. Owen replied, "Ya, it's like mom's cancer. It just popped up." The four of us laughed and agreed. I confirmed he was right and added, "Life is funny that way, but we just get on with it and keep enjoying ourselves, right?" We all agreed. I knew then and there we would make it and the kids would be okay. God willing, and no other weird developments in my health occurring, we were going to deal with this just fine.

Chapter 6

It amazes me how the physical changes associated with cancer treatment, are what people fixate on. The first thing people think about is losing their hair. It goes beyond our society's obsession with youth and beauty. The physical changes are the exterior manifestation of our loss of control. That loss runs very deep.

Note #17: Heroes need to cry too...

Most cancer patients will all agree: Loss of control is one of the hardest things to deal with. Cancer takes away power. Yet I've had a great two weeks after chemo. I have no stitches and other evidence of medical intervention. To the outside world, I am normal. I feel normal. However, today as I brushed my hair, much more than usual appeared on my brush. It's starting.

I panicked a bit, because I had a full day ahead and visions of my hair progressively falling out continued throughout

the day. The doctor said “two weeks” and he wasn’t kidding. I had just finished telling Jay how happy I was with the way things are going. Honestly, my physical performance and capability was much more important than the hair loss. Sitting around throwing up for six months petrified me. I was ecstatic that so far I felt great. This made the idea of hair loss easier to bear.

Today, though, it caught me off guard. I guess I didn’t expect it would happen so fast. I somehow hoped I would be different from the rest of the patients and maybe it would take longer to affect me. I desperately wanted to avoid becoming a statistic. I needed a little more time to come clean with the hospital groups I teach. Some already knew, because of where they worked in the hospital. As a patient, I couldn’t hide. It was obvious I would have to tell them today.

After the 11:30 a.m. session I began to share my story. (I figured I had given two weeks of great sessions while in chemo. They would have to think I was strong, right?) As I continued, my voice began to crack. I’m losing it. The tears start coming. I apologize. I felt weak and embarrassed. Susan, my mentor, told me you don’t speak about things in your own life that you have not overcome. She was absolutely right, but in this case I couldn’t hide much longer. The women in my group were great; they began to cry with me. I had established a good relationship with them earlier in the year. When I finally muddled my way

The Pink Notes

through, they were comforting and supportive. The news was finally out. A few tears later, I still had my dignity. I completed the next session and made my announcement eloquently, the way I intended it to be in the first place.

But I was sad on the drive home, and disappointed in myself. I know that is stupid, but I really wanted to be strong. I realized I was grieving the loss of more control. My hospital workshops are sacred to me. The contract was a benchmark in the advancement of my career, and I was on top when speaking. This was a big deal for me and my career. Best of all, when people left my workshops, they were intoxicated with their own spirit. They were on a high that I put there. Jay said, “It was like I sprinkled magic dust on them.” It doesn’t get any better than that. It was the part of my world that cancer had not infiltrated. Today, however, it had rudely barged in and I needed to grieve that.

I never intended to hide my cancer. People were welcome to watch as the pharmaceutical rep kicked its ass. But today represented another hurdle that was slowly coming into view. I knew it would. Soon my hair would be gone. As high as this one seemed, in the end I know I will jump over it with grace, and continue my race. I just have to let myself take a few breathes before I leap. You need to stop, breathe and focus so you jump high enough to clear it as well. I would never expect anyone else to be perfect and would not judge their need to vent or rest. So I can’t judge

myself. There is no perfect way to deal with cancer. You just do what feels right at the time. Heroes need to cry too.

Note #18: My residual self...

Even though I knew it was going to happen, when I actually saw a bit of my own hair come out in a clump, it sent a mixed wave through my body. My logical brain said, “This is part of the process; the chemo is working.” The emotional side was beginning to panic. I know I am more than hair, but I was scared to deal with it. Some women display their bald heads like a badge of honor. Others sleep in their wig so they rarely have to see their bald head. I wasn’t sure where I fit in. I knew I wouldn’t take either side. I did know the wig was not practical for teaching but it does help you blend into the crowd when you need to. And it was only a matter of days before I lost my hair.

After my first treatment, I often stared into the mirror, striking certain poses and moving my hair around. I just wanted to enjoy my look that I knew I would never see again. Your hair comes in differently after chemo. Usually it is thicker, which I am looking forward to. I would clasp my hands around my forehead to try and get a sense of what I would look like bald. I knew that if there were ever a time when I had to draw on my self-esteem and sense of self it was now. If I was going to get over this hurdle, I needed to dig deep and remember who I am, what I’m

The Pink Notes

about, and what really makes me who I am. I think some women look cool bald. It's such a dramatic statement when actresses shave their heads for a film role. The difference here is my bald head represents illness and death. No one perceives it as a cool, dramatic statement. People look with an awkward pity for the most part. Two weeks to the day of my first chemo appointment, my hair started thinning. It was a Friday.

As the weekend progressed, every time I touched my head, strands would fall. The handful I was left with during my next shower let me know that would be the last time I would wash my own hair. From then on, I glued it back in ponytails with hairspray to keep it from piling up on my clothes. As the days progressed, I knew it was a matter of time. I could not stand the buildup. I arranged with Michelle, my sister-in-law and hairdresser, to shave it off that Wednesday evening. The inevitable was happening. Having long dark hair made it more obvious. There was no way I could drag this out, because that just adds to the agony of the treatment process. So I gave myself a few days to absorb the event that was fast approaching. *What the hell was the big deal? Men are wearing bald heads everywhere.* It's the lack of choice in the matter. It's the badge of illness and death that is hard to see beyond.

I went for a facial and reflexology that afternoon. It was perfect timing. Get pampered and relaxed before the

shears come out. You're not supposed to put makeup on after a facial, but there was no way I could see my own bald head for the first time with out my face looking its best. The kids were at their friends and Jay opened a bottle of wine. I already had a rum and coke going. University students get drunk and shave their heads all the time.

The time came.

I sat down on one of my kitchen chairs. My hair was off before I knew it, and my head felt lighter and cooler. Jay was fiddling in the kitchen trying to keep things light. I could tell he was trying to channel his nervous energy the best way he knew how. He told me I looked gorgeous. Even though I knew he was saying the best thing he could think of, deep down he must wish I still had my hair. But it did feel nice to hear Jay's words out loud; we had to make the best of an inevitable situation.

I walked to the mirror and didn't even know what to think. I burst out in a nervous laughter. My head is actually much smaller than I thought, and my scalp felt tingly as I rubbed my brush cut.

It's done. It's over. Enough gawking, where's my drink? Step two: Place the wig. It literally takes two minutes to set a wig in place. Michelle and Jay gave me the over-the-top ooohhs and aaahs. The wig did look good, but it was still a wig. My eyes welled up a bit, but it was done. I

The Pink Notes

could move on now. Another hurdle over. The brilliant thing was the kids came home and didn't even notice. I told them at dinner that we had shaved my head and I was wearing a wig. They were shocked. We joked at how I had conned them. That genuinely brought my spirits up. Ultimately, as vain as I am, the general public is irrelevant in my healing process. Seeing my family function in a normal, healthy manner in spite of cancer means the most to me. It was another sign that as a family unit, we were going to be okay.

The days that followed weren't too bad. On some occasions, I wore the wig; others it was a bandana or cap. I was adjusting. A few tears and glasses of wine helped the process. Parts of me were still turned off. It was like I had to tone down my emotions so the new look could be slowly absorbed. I don't know what I felt when I looked in the mirror. I saw so many things. But let's get one thing straight: I don't think at this age I would ever shave my head. Now that I am bald, I have to deal with it. And true to form, I want to get the most of this new-found, let's say, opportunity. I have an opportunity to really delve into what gives me my identity, my self-worth, my sex appeal. The person I see looking back at me in the mirror wasn't who I felt like. It was like being pregnant. My body was changing beyond my control. I didn't like it, but I knew it was part of the process. A means to an end. At the end of my first pregnancy, I had Owen. At the end of this, I will be well and more enhanced. So I determined this was a

physical hiatus of my typical self, and I wasn't going to fixate on my bald head. It was time to turn my energy somewhere more productive and positive. Life skills in action; I can't change it so let's move on. I didn't feel ugly, but I didn't feel sexy either. I was in limbo and, unfortunately, women walk around like that every day when they are completely healthy and made up. Why are we so stupid that way?

I started to think about times where I felt strongest and sexiest. What was it about those moments that made them? It couldn't have been the hair alone. I remembered looking at my body during a passionate night with Jay. He always laughs at me when I can analyze things during sex. I reassured him that it heightens the experience for me. I am definitely not distracted! That's just the curse of my brain; I am a constant observer of every moment of my life experience, and always taking notes.

As I watched my body move and maneuver, my first thoughts centered on the imperfections. Then I realized how amazing I felt and gave in to the experience. I let the dim light wash away the flaws. I gave myself permission to see a beautiful, sexy woman who was smart and well deserving of this moment of bliss. Ahh, the powers of the flesh. I laid there for the longest time afterwards, thinking about it. Jay was fast asleep. As I looked down at my stomach and legs I kept looking beyond the imperfections. My cesarean scar brought Emma in to the world. My

The Pink Notes

softer belly meant I still enjoyed some decadent indulgences in life. I was still sexy. You project who you want to be perceived as, both within and by others, and I want to project my residual self.

The movie *The Matrix* has brilliant concepts for interpreting behavior. When an individual enters the matrix, he or she would present in whatever way they chose—hair, clothing, strengths were all deliberately chosen. No limits. They were projecting their residual self. When you release or free your mind in the matrix, you can do anything. I wish I could float and do Kung Fu at light speed, but we know that won't be in this lifetime. But in real life, I can still project my residual self within the parameters of this universe. In other words, I will never float, but I can project a strong self-accepting woman, one that others can respect and enjoy. We all have a residual self. We're entitled to that. We are the architects in that image. Unfortunately, most people have been stripped of their ability to see their own superior attributes. They continually compare themselves to irrelevant, fictional images. That's one of the silly ironies of life.

So now I cling to my residual self. My body is soft and I am bald. As a fitness professional, that is pretty devastating, but I remind myself of my physical hiatus that I am on. I will keep my body as fit as possible until I can resume something more permanent. I know the next few weeks will allow my new look to sink in. Sometimes I see

a militant skin head (with makeup) and sometimes I see a POW (no makeup). Sometimes I just laugh at the ridiculous nature of the whole thing—the pig mask.

The one thing I am certain of is that, as with everything else in this treatment process, I will not let it impair my ability to enjoy my life. I will deal with emotions as they come but in the big scheme there is nothing to hold me back. I don't know if there will ever be a day that I go out completely uncovered. But in the end it doesn't matter; bald or not, I am always evolving (as we all are) into my best self.

From: Darlene Szecsei-Albano

Sent: Friday, October 13, 2006

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Jay Cannon; Joe Tedesco; Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: RE: Next Batch

.....just tip me over and pour me out.....

During the first workshop you taught you were *human*—you shared your heart and soul with the participants and they embraced you. It was a much better workshop than the second one in which “you spoke eloquently.” Oprah talks openly about the “ugly cry” where you know it's coming and you can't control it. Why should you? Most leaders are admired for their humanity. However,

The Pink Notes

you also have to know your audience. Now, if you keep breaking down in front of everyone, I'll come over there and tell you to knock it off! I went to see our friend, Iyanla, a while back. She said, "Do you know why there is a bend in the road?" Pause. "Cause if you knew what was ahead, you wouldn't travel. Take each journey, bend by bend." Good read Jak, this was never a novelty.

Dar-most caffeine filled teapot out!

From: Jay Cannon

Sent: Friday, October 13, 2006

To: Darlene Szecsei-Albano; Jackie Savi-Cannon; Joe Tedesco; Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: RE: Next Batch

Spot of tea?

Good cuppa Dar,

Jak you stand out in the crowd now, because you always did, no matter what the situation or setting was. You have that certain charisma that gets you noticed, plus "Has anyone ever told you, you look like Catherine-Zeta -Jones?" Blah, blah, etc., etc. My mum says that when we leave our home we are all actors to a certain degree. That's

Notes 17 ~ 18

why when we show our true human colors and go with our emotions, people are so compassionate because we have jumped out of the role-play and what is the expected behavior. I know I'm a big man, but I'm not ashamed to tell you that I have done some whinging (crying) over the last year or so, and to be honest it's done me a world of good. It's kind of like a pressure relief valve. So Jak don't think of them (your tears) as a weakness or failure; think of them as showing your true self to everyone. Granted in your career it won't be good to break down every time you get in front of a crowd, but I don't think you will, because you learned from that experience and the next workshop you delivered perfectly. Keep on doing what you are doing Jak, and the skies will clear up indefinitely. I am so proud of you. I don't know who said this, but I found it profound: "Thank God the future only comes at us one day at a time." Live for the moment is the message and it's a good message.

Be well Teapots

Jay

f@*k cancer

The Pink Notes

From: Susan Duxter

Sent: Friday, October 13, 2006

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon

Subject: Re: Thanks

Hey!

I am off to a watercolor painting class. Like you, my hope is that I will lose myself in creativity while I wait for the healing of my knee replacement to take place. When I read your sometimes raw, sometimes deeply insightful *Pink Notes*, I realize your dedication to making a mark; to turning a terrible experience into something more. This is exactly what sets you apart from the ordinary. You were born to lead Jackie, and your sharing is an indelible battle cry against suffering. I have found so much strength and hope in your words and trust that in writing them, you are also turning your power inward and healing yourself. It's grey and cold outside, but your emails come like a blanket of warmth...proof that though winter will come, spring and summer follow, and our days will be bright and sunny once more.

Love, Susan

Chapter 7

Note #19: Mortality...

Facing one's own mortality is a complicated process. Because our North American culture fears it with the greatest of intensity, it can become crippling when it is suddenly thrown into your lap. I truly believe once we let go of the fear of death that is when we begin to actually live and thrive.

Death is a funny thing. Different cultures have different views on what it means and how it is perceived. Young death is tragic. Long life can leave a legacy. We all are going to die. That is a fact of life that no research will ever change. Accepting your own mortality, I think, is very healthy. Given my background and all the different views on healthy living I have learned about, I have grown to accept the reality of death. Like many people, I have seen friends die senselessly at a young age. I have also watched some I cared for deeply (at that time) go through a

The Pink Notes

near-death, tragic accident. Watching someone you care for struggle for life on machines inevitably changes you. How can it not? Going through that experience had a huge impact on me. It began the next evolutionary phase of my life that brought me to where I am today. It made me value life and my responsibility for it. It also made me realize how fragile we are and that death was a reality. We are meant to be here for a period of time. That length is the variable; no one knows and there is a reason. If you respect that variable, you will honor the gift of each day you are given. That is the way I chose to live. Even when things get out of control, deep down I know there was a purpose, and whatever it is would soon present itself and the difficulty would pass.

As I learned more through education and life experience, the lessons became clearer. It's all the stuff I would teach to my staff, present in my workshops, and babble about to my friends out on the town. My soapbox came out wherever I went. I would joke with my friends that I would die first, because I was the biggest preacher. Life is ironically wicked that way sometimes. Never in a million years was I serious! I was just making conversation. I don't plan to die any time soon.

I made it a goal a few years ago that regardless of what age or phase of life I was in, I would make sure I could look back and feel I had done my best. I made sure I had done the most with the opportunities presented and I had

Notes 19 ~ 22

led my life with character and integrity, in the time I was given. I set that goal and have stuck to it. I'm proud of that. It's also got me by when I felt like things weren't going according to plan. When I would begin to get frustrated or beat myself up for something, I would remind myself of my commitment to that goal. It would take some of the pressure off. Setting that goal is something I am grateful for now, while dealing with cancer. That commitment carries me even more.

New Year's Eve, 2005, is an evening that I reflect on quite often and one that I am very grateful for. My parents decided to stay in at the last minute, so they offered to take the kids for the night. Jay and I had already started our own tradition in which we would plan to cook our own five star menu for ourselves accompanied by lovely bottles of wine. We would have a wonderful feast, let the kids play, tuck them in, and then enjoy the New Year together. That year with the kids gone made it even a more romantic.

We sat in the dining room, dressed up, and enjoyed our beautiful candle lit dinner. We reminisced about all the wonderful things we had accomplished and how blessed we were. The night was perfect. But there is one part that stands out that will be with me always. Especially now having cancer. I told Jay how honestly and completely content I was with my life. If I had to die tomorrow, I could truly say how happy I was, and I had done my best

The Pink Notes

with the time I had. I didn't want to die, but if I had to, I was okay with that. That was a powerful moment for me. My heart was full. It gave me power to enter 2006 on a new high. My wish and goal was for others to feel the same way about their lives. It is not about living irresponsibly, because of the whole "life is too short" concept. It is about making a mark with those around you. Enjoying the beauty that surrounds you and experiencing joy daily. It is so simple, yet so many people don't seem to get it.

The fact that I had that conversation is monumental for me. It sums up my whole core belief and what I teach in a nutshell. In that conversation I knew I was really practicing what I preached. I was seizing the moment before tragedy struck. I couldn't understand why most people had to wait for a wakeup call before they actually started living. I was proud that Jay and I were living our dream. I am even prouder now. I still don't know why I have cancer and I suspect I will never really know. Does it really matter? What does matter most to me is that I didn't need cancer to make me really live. I had chosen to live life to the fullest long before the disease showed up. I had a spectacular life and I loved it. I didn't need cancer to tell me that. So now I go through this part of my life's journey waiting for the next payoff. I remind myself of my personal commitment to my life experience. I still have continued to do my best. Letting go of the fear of death frees me to experience life in full glory. I can't worry about things that haven't happened yet. My purpose is to do the

most with the days to come and not worry about a death that will eventually come to all of us.

Note # 20: My perception is my power...

It's amazing how something can begin to consume your life. That is okay if it's something joyful or pleasurable. It's different when it's something like cancer. In the beginning, it was all the appointments that consumed my time. The underlying confusion and fear about my own mortality is always an extra, heavy weight I carry with me in the back of my mind. Now that the appointments have spread out, it is the actual drugs that are consuming me—literally. My body is not my own. You often read in cancer literature about viewing the chemo drugs as the good guys or the fighters. That's great and all, but it gets tough when you feel like you are rotting from the inside. Food tastes different. The smell of cologne could send me to the toilet. I feel like I am decaying from the inside out. My intestines feel swollen. The back of my throat is raw. My skin has new sensations that are eerie and I've never felt before.

It's funny how events can transform someone in just a few short months. I look at pictures that were taken earlier this year and I don't recognize myself. I don't even know who that person is. I try to think what the day-to-day was like back then and I can't remember. It's perplexing. On one level I want to go back, but on the next I don't even

The Pink Notes

remember what I would be going back to. This brings me back to previous thoughts.

First, I feel all life changing moments have that effect. I remember when we brought Owen home, life had changed so dramatically that I could not imagine or remember what life was like before I was pregnant. I suspect it's the same after you lose someone you love, or discover your spouse is abusing or cheating and they are not the person you thought. It's like that when you have to deal with cancer. There is no going back, and your life will never be the same. Second, it comes back to fear. I am scared because the life I knew is in flux once again. It's getting hard and I begin to doubt myself. I feel so pathetic sometimes and start to give in. I desperately want to give in, but I know it's not an option. I am determined to see more. There has to be something more to this ugliness. I look up to my never ending "sea of sky," breathe, and focus. *Look beyond the fear* I tell myself, *perceive and the prize will come*. I must believe so it can be so. That is the one thing I still control. My perception is my power.

I sat on the couch one night (as I do most nights) and kept thinking about the internal decay happening inside of me. I began to visualize it. I visualized the outside change as well. My skin began to dry, almost leather-like. I felt like I had an outer shell that was hardening. It was like the old self had been slowly and painfully destroyed or stripped away. I imagined this progressive physical decay

represented the treatment's impact on my physical being. The effect on my soul however, was different. There was a fiery light shining deep down on the inside. As I tried to revitalize my spirit and determination, I imagined the glow growing larger. In my mind, I flash forward a year after treatment. I am healthy, long flowing hair, walking tall and proud. Oh how I dream of that day! I pray for that day. I want so badly to walk that path where I see this ride out to the end. I so desperately want to have a different story to tell. I want to be able to say "it can happen the way you intended it to; things are still in your control." And most importantly, that it is worth walking toward the fear, because the gift at the end is blissful.

Note #21: Is this part of the gift?

There are many theories and spiritual philosophies that say you draw the answers you need from within yourself to the questions you are pondering. This last stretch of chemo treatment has seemed to be a bit more difficult both, physically and mentally. They say the effects of the drugs are cumulative. I think that, in combination with the length of time the treatment takes, is what wears a person down. It's hard to stay positive and motivated to fight when it takes so long. That is part of this surreal roller coaster ride. I find myself feeling overwhelmed often. As I try to stay focused on all my work projects and a regular family life, I begin to feel anxious and doubt myself. I start to doubt my abilities to cope as well as my abilities to

The Pink Notes

follow through with my ideas. Who was I? What was I trying to do? I am just another cancer patient in the end. There are millions out there going on this same roller coaster ride. I found the best thing to do was to let the feelings and emotions take their course. It was time to rest and just be a patient. There would be more opportunities to be productive. It was too exhausting to do both. My family and friends also reinforced that it was okay to take a timeout. I didn't have to be the poster girl for breast cancer 24/7.

Because my hope is to use this journey as part of my professional work, everything that happens is viewed from two sides—the patient and the analytical observer. Jay and I are part of *The Lifestyles Changes* program offered through the cancer center. It is a four-week group program that helps patients and caregivers cope with the life changing process of dealing with a cancer diagnosis and treatment. It's my first real experience with group therapy. It is very interesting to see how others are coping with the disease. A part of me gets that *I don't belong here* feeling, but I am finding it easier to accept that on some level I do. As individual as the experience is for everyone, we still have cancer in common and we can always use a little help. I have always believed that you can learn something from anyone you meet, and this group is no different.

One thing I have noticed is that some people have a difficult time coping with life in general. For some who have

shared their stories, cancer is the least of their problems. This brings me back to the need for strong life skills. Hearing their stories, I quickly realize how much more substance their lives could have. The dialogue amongst spouses and individuals in the group is so dark and draining. You don't have to be Dr. Phil to realize they need to make some serious changes on how they view their place in the world, because their problems were present long before the cancer came. I have also noticed that some people are drawn closer together and appreciate life more. That's the happy ending you hope to witness.

The one individual in the group who stands out to me at this point is Lloyd. I am guessing he is in his late fifties. Lloyd has advanced prostate cancer that has spread to his bones. He is in constant extreme pain. He is also heavily medicated so you can detect the fog in his eyes when you are talking to him. During a break he came to talk to me about his horrific experience with chemo and how he coped. He also explained that he is having one more round of radiation and if that doesn't work, he has six months to live. At first I was unsure how to respond. Do I sugarcoat it? Do I perpetuate false hope? Instead, I decided to just ask him how he felt about that. Incredibly, I felt totally comfortable talking to this man about his death sentence. He explained how he had gone through the crying and the "why me?" He had concluded "why not me?" He had made peace with the possibility of dying. At that moment, in that frail looking man, I saw strength and peace. There

The Pink Notes

is nothing more powerful than not fearing death. I have always contemplated this notion but Lloyd was actually living it. He is on a whole different plane of living in his own simple way. We concluded our conversation with “six months can be as long as we make it” and returned to our seats. I guess that was my first real life lesson from a fellow cancer patient. Don’t get me wrong, I have received tremendous support and tips from other survivors, but the part of my brain that craves more got it from Lloyd that night.

Death comes to all of us. That’s a fact we all know and I have mentioned it before. As humans we are unique, because we possess such power, but we’re also as fragile as glass. I have an illness that if untreated will kill me. How wild is that? I don’t plan to die, but could if I don’t follow the treatment plan. In that sense, I am part of a special group. It makes me feel even more powerful and more motivated to discover my full potential. If I can cheat death, what else can I do?

I spoke to a chaplain who worked for many years with cancer patients at the center. In our conversation, I spoke of how I didn’t feel like I was going to die. I felt there was a greater purpose in my journey with cancer. She encouraged me to focus on that. She mentioned that it was God speaking to me. Whatever your faith is, I do believe we all possess an inner voice, an intuition, a sixth sense, (however you want to perceive it) to guide us. She also

spoke of her experience with patients who were dying. She noticed how they all knew that their body and spirit were moving on. They already knew they were going to die before their doctors told them. Lloyd had mentioned that. He gave me the impression that he might be ready. As our eyes met when he said it, I saw through the fog in his eyes. I could see serenity. It was a very powerful moment for me. I felt sadness and happiness for Lloyd at the same time. I was sad he may be leaving his family, but I was happy he had reached such a peaceful place amongst all the pain he was in. It was then I realized how cancer bonds survivors. It was then I started to see the beauty and gifts in this process.

They say timing is everything. Lloyd's impact came at a time where I was feeling weak and struggling. That ten-minute conversation gave me strength and reminded me of my own resolve. I felt renewed. I am still not sure what lies ahead. I do know that I have made it through four treatments. I am half way through chemo. Steady on and I will soon be done. I know there will be hurdles ahead. There always will be, but I know that if I keep looking, there will also be more beauty to come.

Note #22: Life threatening is a matter of interpretation...

In my ongoing quest to improve and grow as a human being, I wanted to deal with one of my weaknesses, which

The Pink Notes

has been a lack of thoughtfulness and empathy. I have really worked hard to improve that over the years. Some people are naturals. Jay is one of them. He has a nurturing soul. That is one of his gifts. Watching him has helped me.

It is easy to coast through life when you're on a high. In other words, no real heavy challenges to face. In the past when I was coasting, I was less patient with those who couldn't keep up. I was so self-absorbed, I didn't really get the impact their personal challenges may have had on them at that time. Don't get me wrong; I wasn't a heel, but in retrospect I don't think I really got it. Part of that is also immaturity. That's why the great teachers of the world have the best things to say later on in life.

I remember crossing the street days after having Owen and my body was still healing from the train wreck we call labor. I had to walk slower so I felt self-conscious as I rushed to make the light. The whole time I knew the people in their cars were thinking "what the hell is taking you so long?" How could they know I just had a baby a few days ago? To them I just looked like a chubby woman taking her sweet time to cross the street. That was one of those moments when I got it. I started to become more aware of those moments as I went on. When I would catch myself going to those judgmental thoughts I would stop and think about what *could* be going on. I would try and think outside of my own self-absorbed life. Cancer is

teaching me more lessons. Yes it is life threatening, but more importantly it is life changing. My life as I know it has been altered. If you put that into perspective, how often does your life become altered? It happens all the time and mine will continue to alter after the treatment process is finished. The life experience is all about life altering moments. Our role and power stems from how we embrace these moments.

At this moment, I have a friend who is going through a divorce and two other friends that are going through professional legal battles. Those are life altering moments that can also be perceived as life threatening. Their lives as they know them are being altered forever, and if they allow them to, these moments can threaten the quality of life they know. I have been thinking about that lately in trying to support them all through these difficult times. My story has a bit more of an epic quality to it, because it's the whole "beating cancer story." However, in hearing my friend talk about her divorce, she sees it as a failure and somehow those around her are not rallying in that same epic quality. She isn't ready to see that it's her perception of her situation that is different. As I was trying to console her, I had my own revelations. Even though in theory my situation is worse—technically, I could die—in real life we are both dealing with devastating situations. She is mourning the loss of her marriage. I am mourning the loss of my old healthy body. I suspect on some level, her perception of what is happening to her is worse than

The Pink Notes

mine. She has lost herself in this moment. Her perception is the enemy and I hope for her own wellbeing and happiness, she will at some point turn that into her power.

I was discussing this point with Jay. I remembered calling him when I found out my test results and telling him “I’ve got *it*.” At that moment our lives changed forever. I asked him what if I had said, “I am not happy anymore. I want a divorce.” Would that have been just as devastating? His answer was yes, because even though I wasn’t dying, our lives still would have changed forever.

My journey with cancer is giving me a greater sense of relating to challenges others are going through. Life skills get us through and help us move forward. Regardless of the situation, we are being challenged with. Life threatening equals life changing. The life we knew is compromised. You have to accept and integrate into the “new” normal. I hate falling into clichés, but I have no choice. As I have gotten older, I have learned obvious lessons and have grown. Cancer has given me an opportunity for learning, which has been both humbling and in some ways necessary. The concept of normal life is constantly changing for everyone. That is what life does and that is what living is all about.

Perception is power. I look at this as another gift. I see it as growth and more wisdom. I don’t really know where to categorize it yet and I am not sure I really need to. For

now I am just enjoying it for what it is. Making sense in the nonsense.

From: Maria Meret

Sent: Tuesday, November 07, 2006

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon

Subject: Re: One More

Hey Jak

I know this time is worse for you and I know the next one will be no better. But then this particular treatment will be over for you forever. If only I could do more that could take away the pain—just tell me. You have been putting one foot in front of the other for months, and this “Red Devil” is very close to being over forever.

Oh, and by the way, you are not rotting! Take that thought and whip it across the room! Your body is being purified and when this is all over, you will be better in every way.

Sheila stopped in yesterday and we were talking about how great you look—go figure. How can someone in the midst of chemo with no hair look great? Your eyes are stunning,

The Pink Notes

your skin looks flawless. So how is it that you can be going thru all this and yet still make us envy you? Does this make any sense to you? Think about that, kiddo!

From: Darlene Szecsei-Albano

Sent: Tuesday, November 28, 2006

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Jay Cannon; Joe

Tedesco; Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: RE: Next one

WOW!

Yes!

Friendship is truly a gift. It's literally the indefinable moment where time stands still and you enter another person's inner most realm. In a split second two people bond, total strangers yet willing to share completely, stripped of boundaries. You feel safe and respected. You wanted to go into each others' lives, to hear, to share. You just can't make this shit up. It's beautiful when it happens. Your friendship is a gift to all of us.

I'm reminded of when we met—you with your Duran Duran hair cut and me with my conservative bob (kinda like now?). But now you are bald. You were always more dramatic

Notes 19 ~ 22

than me—dammit! We met by happen-stance, or did we? We became friends by choice. My “usual” friends went to U of W, pre-lim. I stayed behind to finish Grade thirteen (why I will never know, or do I?), then I met you and your clan of friends and Joe. I learned to “be” to put myself out there, to try and dare. I did many things (repeatable and not!) because I met you that I would have never done otherwise. *You pushed my buttons*, you made me laugh, you made me smirk, you made me *think*, question. You made me realize that some friends are identical twins where others are complete opposites. I will be surprised if you let your kids out of the house when they are sixteen! (haha)

The *Pink Notes* are sooooooooooooo powerful. I am lucky to have you share them with me. What a beautiful piece and peace. I “feel” your struggle. I know it’s long and continuous and seemingly endless while you are in the middle of it. There is an end, but too far to be close enough. You are getting there my friend, you are getting there. Did I mention that you looked amazingly “hot” the night of the BOOBOIR party? Ya know where you MC’d an event half way

The Pink Notes

through F*cking Chemo? *Unbelievable!* Your courage, I can't say it enough!

My office cleaner thinks I have issues, sobbing again at the computer screen and as I two-finger type...

I hope this made sense...just unraveled outta my heart.

FUCK CANCER!!

Love ya,

Dar,Xo

From: Jay Cannon

Sent: Tuesday, November 07, 2006

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Darlene Szecsei-Albano; Joe Tedesco; Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: RE: One More

Teapotters. Jak.

None of us can know what it feels like inside of you right now, but the way you describe it gives us great insight. You are far more than the reflection you see coming back from the mirror—the hair loss (or your “baldness” as Emma calls it) the few extra pounds (who doesn't struggle from that!),

Notes 19 ~ 22

it's all *temporary*. I still see the calmness and logical thinking of the whole "chemotherady" (Emma again) treatment and know this will carry you through. When at times you feel low and want to have a good cry that's what we are here for, (the whole premise of "The Teapot Club") and I want everyone to know it is not a burden or a chore; it is a pleasure and an honour to be by your side. You have challenged yourself before and come out on top so this will be no different. You are not a typical "cancer patient" simply because you are not a typical person, and that is why I fell in love with you. You will realize your sea of sky and it will only make you stronger.

PS Dar, I know exactly what you mean; every time I read a PN I have the same reaction. Thanks to everyone for all your support, kind deeds, prayers and well wishes; you don't know how much it means.

Jackie You are a woman to love.

Jay

F*CK CANCER.

Chapter 8

Although it is imperative to stay as strong and positive as possible, it is also just as important to deal with the hard emotions that come along with a crisis. You can try to avoid them, but eventually these feelings will scream to you and you will have no choice but to stop and listen. It is after you let the crisis speak to you, that you can move on.

Note #23: All alone in the playground...

The culmination of my caregiver's support is like a harmonious playground. The sun is shining. You can feel the gentle breeze across our skin. Everyone is on a high, rallying together, and having fun. I feel strong and they feel like they are contributing. We all feel triumphant in this the fight, which makes it a win-win situation for everyone. And as they fulfill their role of support, they slowly leave one by one. Then it's me alone in the playground. It is me alone with the cancer. The gate is now closed and I'm not

allowed out. The playground begins to change. It is now sterile and gray with no sign of life. There is no more sunshine and the wind begins to pick up. I desperately want to follow everyone else out, but I can't. That is the reality. I can never leave. Ever!

Everyone goes back to their lives and own concerns. They have that right. They are healthy. That is where the line separates us. As much as they can try, honorably and sincerely, they can never know what it is like to be in my shoes. And I can't expect them to. This is the experience every patient has to call their own; that moment when you are completely alone with the cancer—your cancer. It's a scary place. It's lonely, cold, and hollow. It is the scene in the movies where the character finds himself in a street, alone, and you can't see or hear a thing for miles, except the wind. It's like that but dark. I find this moment strips me down to my core. All my strength, resolve, motivation, and hope are all stripped away. I feel like it's making me hollow inside as well.

Up until now I have been avoiding this inevitable moment with as many distractions as I could, until exhaustion and sleep overcame me. I am realizing I cannot avoid it any longer. I have to make a place for myself in this playground. I have to find a home for my fear and uncertainty. My emotions need a place to rest too. As much as I don't want to, I know I have to stay in the playground alone with my cancer: that's part of my reality. I have to make

The Pink Notes

room for it in my life. Could we ever be friends? Can it act as a muse? I don't know yet. I can hope. Kids overcome bone chilling fear of monsters under their bed. Mothers forgive convicts who killed their children. People can overcome a lot in order to find peace in their lives.

Every patient gives their cancer its own face or identity. I'm not really sure how mine looks. I've been too afraid to open my eyes in the playground after dark. I probably wasn't ready. I am not even sure if I am now, but I have to try. I need to stand tall and have a look. I am shaking, cold, petrified. I slowly open my eyes. I just stare straight ahead. I can see dark shadows along the walls of the playground. The energy there is heavy and dark as well. The wind dies down a bit. It's easier to breathe somehow, so we'll test the boundaries here. I may be too cocky getting any closer just yet. We need to come to some understanding first, this cancer and me. I don't necessarily have to win, but maybe we can come to a mutual understanding. I know the cancer will never go away. No one can prove that. But maybe we can agree to coexist harmoniously. The same way the playground ignites when everyone is around. I don't have to deal with the cancer every minute of my life, if I don't want to. Maybe when it's me and my cancer alone, we can create a new energy that works for both of us. In other words, I can give the cancer its place and I can move on with my life without the fear and uncertainty. We can share this body if I can have what I need from it. I believe this is possible. I have to. I have at least

managed to open my eyes. That is progress, because living in the now needs to happen even when it's not pretty.

Note #24: Living in the now even when it's not pretty ...

I was determined to enjoy the holidays, because Christmas is one of my favorite times of the year. I love to decorate and entertain, and it was tough to scale things down so I would not over work myself. My mother-in-law was staying with us, which kept making me want to play hostess, even though no one else expected it from me. I had just started the next set of drugs, Taxol and Herceptin, and the symptoms are completely different. No real nausea, but it feels like there is a continuous electric pulse of pain running through my legs. The first few days after the treatment, my entire body felt bruised. I had some amazing pain killers that probably had a great street value, but unfortunately could not compete with my Taxol/Neulasta combination. So dealing with this new bone pain made it difficult to be Martha Stewart and I accepted that, even though I didn't like it.

Although everything was so exhausting, I still felt joyful. There is so much to be grateful for. I am closer to the end of chemo than the beginning. I am more than half way there. This is an important milestone, mentally. This keeps me going but it is getting hard. I find myself constantly hitting a wall. They have upped my dose of Decadron, which increases anxiety and agitation, and I'm on edge all

The Pink Notes

the time. The hot flashes and hormonal changes have begun as well. It's extremely difficult to stay focused and control my emotions, and I worry about everything. I constantly doubt and second guess my thoughts and goals. I was worrying about what my mother-in-law was thinking—her poor son was burdened with this ill wife. I'm worried about earning money. And worst of all, what if my positive energy and attitude is a bunch of crap and the cancer gets me! My logical brain knew that was ridiculous, but I just couldn't get a grip on it. My world seemed to be crashing down around me. Jay and I would talk and then I would feel better, however the wave of the anxiety soon would come with a vengeance. I was just so frustrated with every aspect of the situation and the hormonal issues weren't helping.

I made it through Christmas and New Year. My treatment date fell just days before New Year's Eve, so my leg pains were in high gear. Some aspects of the treatment were so surreal they seemed like scenes from a Stanley Kubrick film. The thing that finally put me over the edge was my mom's birthday. I knew it was coming up, but had not really made any special plans because of everything that was going on. My mom doesn't like a fuss at the best of times, and she surely wasn't expecting anything elaborate under these circumstances. Jay and I were talking one night about a day of shopping he had with his own mother, who was still visiting. His mom was trying to find a special card for my mother since it was her 60th birthday.

I felt the hardest smack across my face. The avalanche had started. I had completely forgotten it was her birthday! I was mortified. I never forget stuff like that. I was so angry and upset and cried hysterically. How could I forget something so important? I just couldn't get my head around it. I got even angrier at myself for worrying so much about Jay's mom that I had forgotten my own. I felt like an awful daughter. The cancer didn't even matter. The avalanche didn't stop rolling. I woke up in the middle of the night and started crying all over again. I knew it would pass and I kept trying to get a grip, but for whatever reason I just couldn't. I felt absolutely crazy all the while trying to remember it was temporary insanity. Needless to say, that next morning I called my sister and we planned and created a special evening for my mom. Things came together smoothly, thank God. I realized this incident was a sign that on some level I needed to reconnect with my family. I have always loved them dearly, but always did my own thing and kept a bit of distance as a buffer. I am beginning to understand that the time together my parents crave isn't just for them.

Joanne, my social worker, came to visit me during my next chemo and we talked about all the things that were going on. She helped me frame them and put everything into perspective. I admitted I was trying to be the perfect cancer patient. Her response was "What exactly is that?" It was a ridiculous notion. Even in illness, I am trying to excel. What the hell is wrong with me? Did I think that if I

The Pink Notes

could impress people with my attitude, stamina and accomplishments, then maybe I wasn't really that sick? I talked about accepting the situation for what it is. I need to give myself time. We also discussed ways to deal with the avalanche, and she let me know that my accomplishments were tremendous. She has seen many patients over the years and she couldn't believe how much I was doing and was impressed with my ability to read my own emotions. So of course the ego is back in tact.

After talking with Joanne, I have started to give myself permission to rest, change the plans if I felt like it, and to stop worrying about the future. My focus is on the present. Even though this isn't what I want, it is what I need to deal with. I can't run away. I realized I was feeling overwhelmed planning for the future, because I was running away from the present. So now I observe myself and watch for the avalanche. I've learned to defuse it before it gets out of control. I fan myself when the hot flashes come. I forgive myself for eating too much of the wrong foods. It's time to heal. That is my *now* time. That is where I need to focus. The rest will come. I am no longer judging and analyzing the situation. It is what it is. I am no longer fighting the current, and have decided to swim with it. It's much easier. That natural current will also soon take me beyond this *now*.

Note #25: My new normal...

Since my mini breakdown, I am feeling much more grounded. I have always been good at reassessing a situation and figuring out how to move forward. It's funny, because I thought I had a good grip on the situation, but there were all of these levels I hadn't dealt with yet. It's also funny how you think you've got everything under control and don't really need to talk about it, when actually you do. I did. I get a kick out of Joanne's social worker jargon but in the end, it does help. As much as we don't want to admit it, we all need outside help from time to time. Now that I have given myself permission to just *be*, I feel an enormous tension lifted from my chest. When I feel like I am getting overwhelmed, I use visualization to help it pass. In my mind, I watch the stress and tension as it tightens the skin on my chest. It hardens quickly as I become anxious and overwhelmed. As Joanne taught me, I have the power to both recognize it and reverse it. As I take deep breaths, my skin begins to soften and the color lightens. I talk myself through the moment until I am calm and thinking clearly. I am always amazed at how irrational our thoughts can get when we let them. That's the power of the mind working against us. So I allow myself to coast as I finish my chemo.

It is strange, because as relieved as I am that chemo is now finally over, I still look exactly the same when I look in the mirror. The complete road back is a long one. But I

The Pink Notes

still celebrate this hurdle nonetheless. My hair is slowly growing back and I finally feel ready to get back into shape. Once again I'm starting to eat like a healthy person. I'm going to use the next few months to rediscover my athletic abilities. I am okay with the fact that my approach will be different. I know it's not impossible; I just have to find the new balance that works for me now. I always knew my approach to exercise would change as I got older. The cancer has asked me to investigate it sooner. This is one of the many lessons and revelations I have made throughout this journey. Life is constantly changing. We're always evolving. Yet too often we blame the change we are in for all the negativity around us. Cancer patients are always presented with the concept of "new normal." I have always hated that and I finally figured out why. That phrase is used in a patronizing, depressing, context. The underlying message from those who repeat it is "be grateful you are alive." Now that I've realized this, I refuse to use it in that context. Who's to say a person can't be better after treatment? Who says you have to live in fear of it coming back?

This brings me back to the power of perception and our own beliefs. For instance, the medical team has training and experience, but they don't have all the answers. There is no one hundred percent answer to any of my questions. I can't blame the public, because they are uneducated and programmed not to question things and let fear guide their lives. In the end, it is up to me to dictate my life

experience. I believe my treatment is working. I believe I am healthy. I believe that I am one of the millions that survive cancer. I also believe there is so much more waiting for me.

I head into radiation with a stronger mind. There's no turning back now. I have made my choice to focus on living, and I don't need to fight anymore. In Judo, you use the force of your opponent with your own defensive energy to overcome the aggression. There is less effort this way, it's practical, and makes sense. I am using the force of my cancer to work with me to move ahead. I have made the choice to think and dream big. Cancer forced me to deviate from the original path of my life. I now see this new path that I was too afraid to walk at first, is actually higher ground that is beyond my wildest dreams. I feel full of joy and life. The doctors don't scare me anymore. The cancer center is a mere steppingstone on this new path. I am not in a hurry anymore. I can walk slow and take it in on my own terms. If you look throughout history, you'll find that people have defied the odds for centuries. Those accomplishments happened because someone believed it was possible. I believe what is possible for me is up to me. So with that, I step fearlessly forward. I now know I don't have to be afraid. I believe whole heartedly in the vision I have for my life. My "new normal" is bliss.

The Pink Notes

From: Darlene Szecsei-Albano

Sent: Thursday, January 11, 2007

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Jay Cannon; Joe Tedesco; Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: RE: Next Batch

Tea-pots!

Jak, I loved the imagery and feeling that "playground" gave me. WOW, a beautifully written piece; it's like I felt the wind. I felt what it was like to be in your shoes for a moment. Even though I cannot possibly know, I can only compare to my own life's lessons and go from there. I really felt what you were trying to convey. Well done! Aside from the immense pit in my stomach, I can only imagine what the playground is like when you stand alone in it. You need someone to push the swing, to ride the teeter totter, spin the wheely thing; it can all be done alone but with much extra effort. I hate that you have to feel this emotion, this way. But for what it is worth, I have to say this one so far is my favorite piece from you.

As a family member, a friend and a caregiver, many times I've had to leave the

Notes 23 ~ 25

playground and leave people in the playground-alone. It is just as hard for us to leave knowing you'll be all alone, even though we try to be there for you. We know at some point we have to leave and go back to our own lives and it really, really bites. It bites because, well, no matter how much you love someone, as a caregiver in any form you grieve your normal life too, which only perpetuates the guilt-ridden gerbil wheel phenomena. We grieve our past life, we want to help, but then we want to go back where it isn't so difficult. As much as I loved my sister, the long hours in waiting rooms, hospital rooms, doctor's offices and fall-out on the family wore on all of us. I don't think my mom would ever admit it, because she couldn't stand the guilt.

At certain points you daydream, tune-out, just want to wake up and not have to worry about your sister's kids' lunches, their dinners, her laundry, infection, injections, driving, waiting, comforting, etc. We functioned on autopilot for so long, I found myself guilt-ridden if I wished for even a second that *my* life was different, but we grieve too. We grieve the loss of

The Pink Notes

that person's normalcy and independence, their confidence, their privacy that we now invade and impose upon. It's really a weird phenomenon; but if I had the chance, I would *still* do it all again, all the same, with probably the same guilty moments of wishing things were not as they were. I often wish that things were not as they were for you.

I Love You!!!

The interpretation of the life-threatening piece in the PN's is the first time I felt your vulnerability come through. I felt you sounded stronger and powerful in the beginning Notes yet as I analyze, I think your strength is truly in the vulnerability of this piece and I really believe that it is a "race against cancer." At the beginning of a true race we are pumped, prepped and ready; we hear the gun, and we go, sometimes structured sometimes haphazardly. It is in the final laps of any race that our true strength comes through. When we are out of breath, muscles throbbing, emotions deflated and all of the physiological and psychological stuff that goes on as we try to conclude a race, a journey. I see this

Notes 23 ~ 25

in you. In no way I am I discounting the beauty of your previous Notes; this is just how these two pieces made me feel. Thank you for sharing.

From: Joe Tedesco

Sent: Sunday, January 14, 2007

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Darlene Szecsei-Albano; Jay Cannon; 'Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: RE: Next Batch

Um... Period! And Amen! Seriously - what else can be said? I am so full that I am numb.

Love you!

Joe

From: Jay Cannon

Sent: Tuesday, January 16, 2007

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Darlene Szecsei-Albano; Jay Cannon; Joe Tedesco; Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: RE: Next Batch

Potters,

The last batch was totally spot on to what Jak is going through right now. The

The Pink Notes

analogies are perfect (you guys are really clever, I just realized!), but like we have said all along "it is what it is" and sometimes the process is horrible both physically and mentally.

The playground story is particularly interesting and like what Jak said. Although not much fun when everyone has left, it can still be tolerable and this is the key. Instead of going and sitting on the park bench one can still be motivated to carrying on alone, running alongside the "spinnny thing" then jumping on and holding on as it slows again, kicking your legs to and fro to make the swing work, climbing the ladder and enjoying the slide that is at the top, then doing it again.

In our lifestyle changes workshop, cancer patients and caregivers have a swimming pool as a "process map" of treatment from diagnosis (climbing the ladder) to feeling out of control (being pushed from the top of the diving board to swimming in the deep end (first chemo) to eventually making it to the shallow end and climbing out of the pool and into a warm towel, drying off, and all the while the patient is alone in the

Notes 23 ~ 25

pool only being cheered on from the deck by loved ones and caregivers. Trust Jackie to improve on the model (which they have used for twenty years by the way) and come up with the playground scenario. Cancer treatment really is swings, slides and roundabouts, and the whole about being alone, but making it still work tells us what kind of a person she is—brilliant!

I also like the race reference Dar made. We've all been there in an event when your body is telling you to quit (the Dragon Boats race for example), but something inside tells you to keep going and rise above the physical aspect. One such display springs to mind from last October 1st is the C.I.B.C Run for the Cure 5km on the waterfront. We participated with the kids and Jackie kicked off the run/walk with a motivational speech, and then a funky warm up to JT's "I'm bringing sexy back" (sorry Joe it's the other JT).

Anyway, running for *Absolute Fitness* (but ultimately for Jackie) was Kareyn, who is a manager there. I would say she is in her early 30's has three kids, one of which she is still off on maternity leave for.

The Pink Notes

There were all ages present, all sizes all athletic abilities, and some very serious runners.

When we completed our walk, we came into the finish to learn Kareyn had won the women's event in an absurd time of something like twenty-eight minutes, beating runners almost half her age, some from the university running team. I went over to give her a congratulatory kiss and as I leaned in to kiss her, she whispered "I did it for Jackie." I am getting pretty emotional writing this, because it was such a special moment. I will never forget that she spurred herself to do that for us, and proved what can be done when you put your mind to it. We can all take a page from Kareyn's book and think about the determination and resolve she showed that day.

Getting back to the race against cancer, Jackie has hit the "wall" a few times, which is only to be expected and shows her vulnerability; it makes me respect her and love her more.

There is a motto in the British Royal Marines (who are near and dear to me at the

Notes 23 ~ 25

moment, as my nephew is fighting in Afghanistan) and it goes like this: "When you hit the wallget over it!" Jak continues to scale and break down walls and I am so very proud of her.

So as we continue our journey with her, I want to thank all the tea potters for everything you do, be it a card, a phone call of support, a lift to the chemo suite (what an oxymoron that is!), or an afternoon of watercolor painting lessons (thanks Sue). And thank you all. Now that I have welled up again in work (which is a regular occurrence as I read the PN and replies here most often), I am going to put the kettle on and have a spot of Earl Grey (state of me drinking Earl Grey, wouldn't call a King my uncle!). Looking forward to the next batch and spending more time with you Jackie in the playground when the sun comes out.

Jackie, you are a woman to love.

One last thing..... Fuck Cancer.
Love Y'all, Jay

PS Jackie you used to get anxious about a

The Pink Notes

piece of the kid's jigsaw puzzle being missing, it's just you!

x

From: Darlene Szecsei-Albano

Sent: Tuesday, January 16, 2007

To: Jay Cannon; Jackie Savi-Cannon; Joe Tedesco; Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: RE: Next Batch

Good Stuff Jay!!! But, could you be a little more attentive and observant? (HAHHAH) GEEZ! You are a gem-Jay-rock on engine room!

I realized Jak, why you can't see the face of your cancer and what it looks like because it is a fucking *coward* and will not show itself to you entirely. It's a faceless, cowardly entity that appeared out of nowhere in the hope of startling and invading your life when least expected, and now it is afraid of you and your strength. It will not play with you and it won't share your body, because *you will not* let it. You have established an all or nothing attitude. The cancer, because it has no feeling or substance, is just a physiological happening. It wants your body all to itself,

Notes 23 ~ 25

but you won't let it in and it will never invade your spirit. It tries to, but you always find a way to quickly keep it out. Keep writing girl! And keep telling cancer to just fuck right off!

Dar

xo

Chapter 9

As human beings we are given an amazing opportunity to have an experience so unique from any other creature that exists. Our mind can be our greatest asset to realize that opportunity and yet most of us use it to sabotage ourselves. There are so many signs and markers out there to guide us. Those layers of prep are there. Some run deep so we have to search sometimes, but they are definitely there.

Note #26: Almost full circle...

As I mentioned early on in this process, I was going to look for opportunities and gifts. There have been many. Some are small, but all life changing. I had an incredible realization today. So many pieces of the puzzle came together. I was asked to speak at an *International Woman's Day* dinner. I wasn't sure if I really wanted to, but figured it would be good to get out there. The event was supporting breast cancer and it was an opportunity to share my

story, which would hopefully motivate people to donate to the cause. I went in enthusiastic, but with no expectations. I always give one hundred per cent no matter who the audience is.

Sue, who was on the event committee, told me there were at least two women in the audience who were just beginning their own journey with breast cancer. She was hoping my story would inspire and comfort them. I also ran into a club member who told me her sister was just diagnosed. Her sister did not attend that night, because she wasn't ready to "go there" yet. I knew exactly how she felt. That was me months ago on the survivor boat at the Dragon Boat races. The feeling of connection in me felt bizarre and cool at the same time.

Up on stage, Sue introduces me and I began to speak. After a few sentences, I go on autopilot. The adrenaline takes over and the words flow. Quite often I don't even remember exactly what I said. I could not repeat it the same way twice, mainly because I speak from my heart and let it flow. I talked about our power as women and giving ourselves permission to be who we are, without judging ourselves and each other. I shared my cancer story and how I was using it to enhance my life. I talked about really digging deep to see beyond my physical changes and looking intensely to see strength and beauty. I could see the nods and smiles through the dim lighting. I told the story of Emma and I putting makeup on together. We

The Pink Notes

were in my bathroom, as I was getting ready to go out. I was putting on my makeup while Emma was rummaging through my things asking to try everything on. I told her she didn't need any makeup. She insisted that she wanted to be pretty. I told her she was already beautiful and didn't need it. She said "mom, I need this because I want to be pretty like you." I thanked and hugged her. I could hear the sniffles. I had to catch my breath before my voice cracked as well. I wasn't wearing a wig during that conversation. So even bald, soft and pasty, Emma thought I was pretty. It was great, because I was not making that story up. Of course I elaborated how we need to celebrate our scars and lines. It's part of our history. On and on

I thanked them and received a great round of applause. I still had it. The comments and thanks afterwards were awesome. The circle was working its way around. I could feel it. I didn't stay for the whole evening, because we were going skiing the next morning so I excused myself.

On the way home, I was listening to a disc I had not heard since last year. The song was by the band Oasis titled *Who Feels Love*. I have always loved that song. As I listened to it, I was overwhelmed with joy. I remembered the feelings I would get when I listened to it in the past. I always felt the joy as I would dream of my future. The weird thing is there would always be a feeling of uncertainty. I knew what I wanted, but wasn't sure of the path to get there. I was searching for the signs. I knew something was

missing. It was like my destiny was in front of me, but all the pieces weren't clear yet. Driving home that night all the pieces came together. I was hearing the lyrics in a whole new way. The song talks about gratitude and certain lines echoed through my whole body, such as:

Found what I've lost inside; my spirit
has been purified. I'm leaving all that I
see; now all my emotions fill the air
I breathe.¹

My emotions were my breath. I felt so alive. My mind was clearer than I ever remember. It all made sense. I thought of those two women in the audience, and realized the nuclear bomb had just gone off for them—just as it had for me earlier. They felt lost and unsure. I knew *exactly* how they felt, and I could tell them with certainty on that stage that they can do this on their terms if they allow it. I felt drunk with power. I really understood the opportunity and impact I could have in changing someone's life. This is the piece of the puzzle I was searching for. My spirit felt pure, and I savored the moment.

It also reconfirmed my own power over my life experience. I wanted more moments like this professionally, as well as with my family and friends. I wanted my emotions to fill the air I breathe every day. I looked up into the dark sea of sky and was so grateful for this moment. I felt connected with my role in the universe. It confirmed for

The Pink Notes

me then and there that everything was going as planned. My life was moving on to the next chapter. I could feel the opportunity, a new level of life. As I move into the final phase of treatment, I feel excited and enthusiastic, because I know with each day that passes I will feel stronger and the clarity of my vision will grow. The fact that all this is happening as spring approaches makes it even more storybook. The completion of the circle is fast approaching. I can feel it.

Note #27: Pieces of the puzzle...

I am more than halfway through radiation. It's not that bad. Nothing like chemo. I don't really have any obvious symptoms. The area where the beam hits is starting to get a bit pink and I feel like I have extra weight in my shoes, which is subtly slowing me down, but that is about it. I think it messes with my head more than anything. I have reached that point where I'm anxious to get on with my life.

Because radiation is every day, it is a constant reminder that I am still a patient. My whole schedule revolves around these daily appointments. That being said, the sessions are quick and the place is amazing. It's like *Home and Garden* meets *The Matrix*. The décor and detail in the cancer center is beautiful. My machine is *Primus 2*, and I don't mind being in there partly because I don't associate it with all the negative symptoms like chemo. The room is

nicely decorated and the technology is blended in. Amongst the beautiful wood trim, there is the reactor symbol, which reminds me of what is actually going on, just like when I see the *beam on* light while the door is sealed. That is the Matrix part of it. Science blows me away.

I have grown to appreciate *Primus 2*. It's part of my healing. As I lay there while the beam is engaged, I close my eyes and watch it penetrate my skin. I see it as the harsh damaging energy on the outside and then watch it transform as it enters my own body. Once it blends with my own energy it becomes this wonderful healing glow that runs through me. I welcome it. I have become part of the remedy; that's one thing I will not let go of. I realize more each day how much power and control I still have.

It is ironic that spring is here and I am closing in on treatment. My hair, eyelashes and eyebrows are growing back. I am taking care of my body. I am starting to feel a new enthusiasm, because I know I am almost free. That is very exciting because there's so much living I want to do.

All the pieces are falling into place so magically. I had two speeches on the weekend. The first was in Toronto. I spoke on "Finding Wealth without Sacrificing your Health." As always, I started with my notes, and then went on autopilot. I have never felt so comfortable and at home. I made them laugh, think, and contemplate their lives. At the end they gathered around me to buy my

The Pink Notes

products and give me wonderful comments. As a speaker, this is what it's all about. They listened and embraced the message. It got even better when this young woman came to me and said, "Jackie, can I ask you a personal question?" I said of course, because we all know I have no shame. She began to ask me about my surgery and timeline and I knew exactly where she was going. She told me she was having surgery in two weeks, and her eyes welled up. I smiled and grabbed her arm and said, "You'll be just fine." She mentioned the timing of my story was so important to her, because her mother, who is a survivor, was very closed about her own experience, and this young woman was feeling emotional and out of control. She wanted to talk about it. I encouraged her to seek out her community support and surround herself with it. We talked a bit more and I wished her well.

As I rode the train home, I felt elated, proud, and so satisfied. It had been a perfect day. Right down to my change in disguise in the bathroom. I walked in wearing jeans and a bandanna and walked out in a suit, tall boots, and with my wig on. It was comical! I arrived home at 11:30 p.m. and stayed up to share the day with Jay knowing I needed to get to bed, because I had to do it all again the next morning. My topic now was "Empowering Yourself when Life sends Trauma or Change." This one would be about my story. There were roughly two hundred women in the audience. It was my first real opportunity to share the lessons I had learned and express them through some of

the ideas in these *Notes*. Once again, success. People gathered, shared their comments, and bought my products. I was so happy I thought I was going to explode. The jewel of the day was a conversation I had with a woman whose sister went through breast cancer treatment. She told me her sister handled it well and was very strong throughout the process. She went on to say she really didn't have a sense of what it was like for her sister, but hearing my speech gave her such a clear understanding of what it was like. Another piece of the puzzle just fell into place. I sincerely thanked her, and in my head I was thinking *just wait*. If she thought that was good, she hadn't seen anything yet. The *Pink Notes* have a purpose.

The unfortunate part about having such an awesome adrenaline rush is the crash that comes after it. I was exhausted. It took me a couple of days to get back to normal. It didn't bother me that much, because I felt so excited and joyful. I was determined to keep the momentum going. Things are so clear I can't contain myself. I feel so blessed. The intensity of emotions that I feel daily is truly spectacular. Feeling love, joy, fulfillment, exhilaration in its purest form, is truly a gift. I feel sad for those who don't experience this and hope that maybe one day they will have the opportunity.

I found out Lloyd, from our *Lifestyles Changes*, group had just died. Jay saw it in the paper. I have mixed emotions. I feel sad for Lloyd's wife and family, because they have to

The Pink Notes

begin a whole new healing process. I am happy for Lloyd, because his spirit is free and he left the world closer to his loved ones and at peace with his life. He is no longer in physical pain. On another level I am humbled. I think when a cancer patient dies a tiny piece of all survivors goes with them. We are all connected by that common thread. When one leaves, it reminds us that survival is not always guaranteed, and we need to be part of the remedy.

I was reminded of a powerful story about Dick Hoyt and his son Rick (www.teamhoyt.com). It was perfect timing. I watched a video clip of him racing with his son and sobbed with hope and joy. Here was an average man who realized the power of his own perception. The love and dedication to his son was enough to fuel him to accomplish amazing things. They completed race after race like heroes disguised in average looking people. I can't get the image of him swimming while pulling his son in a dingy behind him out of my head. His strength and determination embraced me. As Susan says, "He reached into my heart and squeezed it." I'm going to watch that clip often to lift me. It reminds me of what is possible. We all have the power to swim and pull someone, something, a cause, etc., along with us. When I swim, I pull hope, opportunity, and a voice for those who haven't found their own power yet.

To live on in the minds and hearts of the generations who will follow you is to cheat death. To make such a difference through the way you lead and show up is to find immortality.

Robin Sharma

These are powerful words when your mortality is being threatened by illness. How we impact generations happens every day based on the choices we make. Every person we interact with daily is impacted by us no matter how small it may seem. I feel blessed to have such a clear perspective of the mark I want to leave behind. Through the love and support that surrounds me, I am able to focus and share. The unfortunate reality is that not everyone is as blessed as I am. Therefore I am truly grateful for this and know that I owe it to others to show them what is possible and help them find their own power of perception. They can sit in my boat for a while until they can find their own strength to start swimming. That is our responsibility as human beings. The same way Jay and my family and friends took turns pulling me, now it's my turn. The beauty of this process is Jay and the others will continue to swim the same way I will. The more we swim, the more hope and joy we spread. I feel so privileged to be part of such a powerful movement. This is what life is about. My spirits soar as I feel so fulfilled.

The Pink Notes

Note # 28: The road is long...

I am realizing more and more how long the road of treatment is. Radiation was busy and time consuming, but I was motivated to get through it. I felt the end coming. I kept my spirits up and made sure to be a responsible patient. I was looking forward to closing the door of treatment and putting it behind me. There wasn't a huge difference the day of my last "zap."

It was the same routine. Check in, put my robe on, and so on. I had a comforting meeting with Doctor Schneider, which put my mind at ease about a lot of things. He assured me that I was entitled to be optimistic about living cancer free. There was really no reason to think otherwise. I needed that, because I find I do struggle with that every now and then.

I am starting to realize I am moving into a new phase of this process, and I want to set myself up to do it with as many tools for my mind that I could find. Hearing Doctor Schneider's thoughts was the first step.

As I walked through the hospital that day after that last treatment was completed, I was giddy inside. I was having my own internal private celebration. The hustle and bustle of people was no different than any other day, but I was different. I felt like an inmate being released from prison. The first sets of shackles, the heaviest ones, were off. It

felt good. I felt free. The colors were just a bit brighter and the air was a bit fresher. That's all I really needed.

The road ahead unfortunately is not as smooth as I would like it to be. A few bumps presented themselves. My heart scan showed my heart output was below fifty percent—forty-seven percent to be exact. This means the Herceptin is damaging my heart. I now have to take heart medication in order to prevent any further damage. This was a blow I did not anticipate. Just as I felt I had some momentum working with me this news slapped me backward. Once again the body I thought was so strong was being beaten down. The next nuclear bomb came in the form of my monthly cycle. I thought I was done with that too. My ovaries are not giving in. I knew this was a possibility, but again I didn't think it would happen. This means yet more medication. I now have to get a monthly injection, which will put them to sleep once and for all. Not having a period and moving past the hot flashes was one of the few perks of this process.

Doctor Yoshida couldn't give me any concrete answers to any of my questions, largely because using heart medication in combination with Herceptin is a new procedure. In other words I am a guinea pig. You think I would have learned by now. There are so many variables with cancer; it's all relative to the individual patient. There are positives and negatives to that statement. The negative is that I don't get the reassurance I so desperately seek. The

The Pink Notes

positive is because of the many variables, there is no reason why I can't believe I will become the answers I am after. I am confident that I can develop a fitness regime that will work around my heart and fear of lymphodema issues. I am confident I will have the mental and physical stamina to finish the Herceptin treatment. December is still a long way away, but I am confident I will be one of those women who survive and don't have a recurrence. Why can't it be me?

Most often my spirit and protective shell are strong. I can block the negative thoughts, people, and information out. But when they stack like they did this week, I can feel them breaking in. I try desperately not to give in, but it's so hard. My other obstacle to overcome is my new look. My hair is long enough to dye so I am no longer wearing my wig. It's difficult to ignore the double takes. I know my hair is still horrible, but I have to get on with it. Sooner or later I have to accept this is the way I'm going to look for a while.

People are sweet. I get a lot of "you have a great face for short hair." It's not the same. Some days I still miss my hair, especially when I see a woman with great hair. I feel sad. The lesson here, as I do my best to live it, is that my beauty, confidence, and identity go much deeper than my hair. As difficult as it gets, I owe it to myself, my children, and other women to steam ahead. I refuse to hide. The last few weeks have been interesting. I'm feeling the

fatigue of the radiation and heart issues. Out of nowhere my mind goes blank, my body feels weak, and I want to cry, because I know exactly what is happening. I have to stop comparing myself to the past. I had the energy of ten men and now, I still have to sit down occasionally. It really sucks. It gets hard not to dwell on it. I try to be optimistic and think that once the radiation side effects have passed, I will feel a bit better.

I know I am in a different place, because as I sit in a chemo suite to get my Herceptin, I watch other women as they begin treatment. They have that initial charge. They're ready to fight. I hear them talk about how "It hasn't been too bad; I still have my hair." I know in some ways they don't think it will get them. As I sit in the suite today, ironically, one of those women is here. Her hair is gone now. As one of us leaves, another one enters. I don't know why. All I can do is send them my thoughts of strength and perseverance. I hope their journey can be the best it is capable of.

As for me, I think I am ready to move beyond being a patient. It's time to move personally, professionally and spiritually. I know for some patients this is one of the hardest parts. I've come to realize that for me, I have surrounded myself with people, events, thoughts and energy that make me feel that I am moving forward. As Jay reminded me while I had my breakdown, no one can take that away from me. Other people's thoughts and

The Pink Notes

perspectives do not have to interfere with my own. Overall I am back on the upswing. I have closed one door and am walking through the next one. This is the corridor that leads to putting cancer behind me. As I have learned though, sometimes you have to let your issues with cancer creep up the sides of that corridor for a moment and acknowledge them. Then they will willingly go back down once again. I can't force that process.

A lighter, more humorous episode happened yesterday in the schoolyard. The mother of one of Emma's friends commented on how she liked my new haircut. Emma quickly jumped in and said, "No, she has cancer." I could see the woman was taken aback. Emma continued, "No, really she does." I did my best to put this woman at ease, but it was obvious she was mortified and there was no saving the moment. It was like asking an overweight woman when the baby was due. At some point I didn't even care anymore.

Based on the roller coaster of emotions and silly events lately, I'm guessing I should be prepared and open to a few more. I can't pretend this gruesome year didn't happen. Instead, I continue to focus on the joys and gifts that have come from it. As long as I continue to believe in possibility; anything is possible.

Note #29: Finding my new place ...

Putting the pieces of the puzzle together means finding my new place. I feel like I am slowly finding a rhythm that is working. My energy is increasing. I have also realized I can't abuse myself like I did before. My body is letting me know I'm mistreating it, and that's a good thing. It's forcing me to grow up a bit. My hair has grown some more so I blend in the crowd now. A part of me still hates the idea that people think I would intentionally cut my hair like this.

I have come to a few realizations that have helped me frame some of my feelings. I have to remind myself that life is always changing. So I now ask myself, "Am I feeling this way because I have cancer or because I am turning forty?" I suspect some of the insecurities I am having with my body would have been happening regardless of the illness. The fact that recovering from a disfiguring treatment is just part of my present reality, I have to continually reframe my thoughts; the insecurities go deeper than the physical. I think this is part of the next phase as well.

Because I had such an intense, life altering year, I sometimes struggle with falling back into some of my old routines. I sometimes feel like I don't belong anymore. My first thought is to turn down invites to social functions, because I either get anxious or simply have no interest.

The Pink Notes

Things have become trivial. I feel such a huge gap with some people. Again I think this is all part of the process as well as a reality of life. We are all constantly changing. It's just more vivid for me right now. There are days where I wish I was anonymous. Then I wouldn't have to answer the ever popular, "How are you feeling?" or hear, "You look great." I get sick of justifying my appearance and behaviors after a while. I feel guilty, because my kids are draining and I don't want to be around them. They are at such a needy age that after a few hours of constant demands I just want to get in the car and drive off screaming. I know that moms feel that anyway, but it's just part of the "finding my new place."

This year has on one hand strengthened my self esteem and on the other battered it. As an educator, I feel enlightened and excited to share my knowledge. As a thirty-nine-year-old married woman, I struggle. I find myself holding back. I catch myself in destructive thoughts. I can be out, feeling great and confident, then I catch a glimpse of my reflection. I retreat. How dare I feel beautiful and sexy? Look at me. My logical brain knows this is absurd and yells, but there is a fragile side of me that struggles and still sees the bald, bloated, alien-like freak staring back at me in the mirror after all these months. It is comparable to the emotional struggle people who have lost large amounts of weight go through. Even though they appear to be thin on the outside, they still have the mindset of an overweight person. It is a tug of war, but I keep trying to

win the battle. I had to laugh at myself. While in the grocery store, one of the employees gave me a cat call. I would normally have given him the “What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” look, but instead I smile to myself. I smiled, because it meant I didn’t look sick anymore. I wasn’t getting a look of pity.

I also had a great sense of moving forward at Emma’s annual end-of-year recital. As I watched her dance, I was overwhelmed with pride and joy. Her recital last year was the day after my biopsy. I remember sitting in the audience fighting tears. I was scared and unsure then. A year later, I was watching her fearless and truly focused. It was brilliant. She was so beautiful—a true performer. That’s when it came to me: The beauty and strength that I nurture in Emma is also my beauty. My beauty shines through her. She is part of the imprint I will leave on the earth. Not only does that give me longevity, but it makes me immortal. Once again, I felt blessed. Nothing or no one could take that away from me. It was another sign that I would be okay. I couldn’t guarantee there wouldn’t be more tears and frustration, but I knew I could get through this part too. I mourn less for the past, because I know with every fiber of my being this is just the beginning of the gift for the future.

The Pink Notes

Note #30: The new rhythm...

I can finally feel the new rhythm settling in. I am always in awe of our ability to adapt as humans—not just me, everyone. I have become much more aware of the obstacles people face and overcome every day. It's inspiring to witness that type of strength. This last year has been extraordinary in so many ways. I still have to shake my head every now and then to remind myself that this has really happened to me.

Our summer family trip to Croatia was about as surreal as it gets. I never thought in a million years we would all be together there. My parents have been asking us to go for years, but I avoided it like the plague. I vacationed to get away from everyone not hangout 24/7. With everything that had happened this past year, I knew it meant a lot to my parents. We all needed this connection as part of everyone's healing. I went with no expectations and was pleasantly surprised on many levels.

Spending all that time at the Adriatic Sea was both relaxing and inspiring. I had the sea in front of me and the mountains behind me. I loved being anonymous on my long walks by the sea. I felt healthy again. Seeing all my relatives and their genuine concern for me was nice; we were all grownups now with our grown up issues. As we drove through the small towns, the countryside became intoxicating. It reminded me how vast the world was, as

was our potential in it. There was so much history there. On one of our walks we stumbled onto this tiny ancient looking church that even had a stone altar. It was over eight-hundred-years-old. The church was no longer used so we could go in freely. As we were checking it out, I felt completely overwhelmed. I had to fight back this need to cry. While watching the children exploring this historic church and hearing the sea, I could feel energy moving through me. It was intense and a bit scary at first; then it felt like this energy was intentionally trying to communicate to me. I knew this was another sign. I don't know how, but I knew this energy, this feeling, was telling me it was safe to believe that I was going to be all right.

I had earned that.

It was one of those beautiful moments where you have a connection with the world/universe (however you would like to look at it) that goes beyond the physical body. That feeling confirmed everything I had learned this year, a taste of an elevated state of living. It was powerful and I wanted more. I felt so alive and appreciative I didn't want the moment to end. I go back to that moment often, because I know I have the power to recreate it. I am steadily getting better at it. My goal is to stay consistently on that level.

We went to visit my Grandfather's grave. I remember visiting it twenty years ago, and even then I thought the

The Pink Notes

backdrop that surrounded it was beautiful. It was a tiny cemetery nestled in one of the most peaceful, picturesque places you can imagine. Because it was such a small town, many of my relatives were buried there. It was weird seeing my maiden name on so many headstones. The cool thing was it didn't scare me. Instead, I was comforted by my past lineage. I felt their strength and their peace in death. It's the cycle of life and one day it would be my turn. It just wasn't my time yet. Once again I flashed through the course of my life—those layers of prep that brought me to this moment. I felt proud and strong. I was filled with a great sense of purpose and was thankful for that. I know if I kept looking and continued to be open, that purpose would become clearer. As human beings, our intention goes far beyond the physical body. That was evident by the connection I felt in that cemetery.

I also realized that as much as I was growing mentally and spiritually, I still had to deal with some insecurities. Watching the young twenty-something women on the beach at the Adriatic Sea, with their perfectly tanned skin and long flowing hair, would get to me now and again. The reality of what I looked like slapped me in the face one afternoon in particular when I noticed Jay glance over at a passing Mediterranean goddess. I knew I looked great for a woman undergoing treatment, but at that moment I ached for my long hair and fit body I once had. I had to use all my strength to not burst out into tears. It never bothered me if I saw Jay looking. We all look for God's

sake. I love the guilty pleasure of admiring a younger man's athletic body. I think what was hard this time was I didn't really blame Jay for looking. His wife had been a freak show for the last year. I could feel my inner dialogue growing harsher and more self defeating.

Later on that day, Jay and I talked about it because he could sense something was wrong. I was trying to be logical and not overreact, but it was hard. He did remind me of a valid point. It was my insecure, self-defeating attitude that was unattractive. He reminded me of where my sex appeal comes from. It also reminded me that I hadn't fully committed to getting back into shape yet, and if it was really bothering me; maybe it was time to be proactive in solving that issue. My energy was coming back so there was nothing physically holding me back.

We all need to acknowledge what is most important to us in our healing from any trauma, and physical fitness was important to me. It was part of getting my control back so I knew it had to be done. I don't expect to look like a twenty-year-old, because I am going to be forty this year. I do, however, believe I can fine tune myself to where I am comfortable and confident.

This wonderful vacation was part of the closure of this year. I am sensing that it is time to move in to the next phase of the journey. I should be done with my Herceptin in a few months. I think about it less and less. My ideas

The Pink Notes

and plans for the future don't include thoughts of doctor's appointments and treatment sessions. It's a great feeling. The anticipation and excitement of my new life; my new normal is wonderful. I am thankful to have those feelings.

Note #31: Reflections of the journey...

I find myself bouncing back to past events of this year often. It's just so crazy. As the kids get ready to go back to school, I realize how much better this upcoming year will be. Last September I was gearing up for my first chemo treatment. The fear of the unknown was looming. That's all behind me now. Now that fear is replaced with strength and wisdom. I think about the growth we have all experienced this year.

I have connected with my parents in an unspoken way. I think this year was in some ways harder for them than it was for me. As a parent, the thought of losing a child is your worst nightmare. As a mom, I can only imagine this gut-wrenching fear. It's just not supposed to happen at any age. They did their best to be strong and I am proud of them.

Entering this school year I will be fully present to support my kids. I will blend in with the rest of the moms. I know it was hard for the kids, especially Owen. Even though cancer has stripped some of my children's innocence, they have gained wisdom that will help them as adults. They

had the opportunity to go to a Hospice camp for three days and were away from us for the first time. I was comfortable sending them given the nature of the trip. All the kids attending had been touched by cancer in some way and the whole trip was about them and having fun. The volunteers were wonderful. Owen and Emma were both understandably nervous, but I promised them they would have fun and if they wanted to come home, I would be right there to pick them up. I never received a phone call. This to me was another gift. They recognized their fear and saw that it was normal. In looking past their fear, they experienced a wonderful trip and bonded with others kids their own age. It's a great feeling when complete strangers can bond and share experiences they will remember forever. I am so pleased they could experience this at such a young age. This will shape them and their future relationships; they found the gifts on the other side of their own fears.

I see now that cancer is part of the fabric of their lives. Owen made a bandana at camp and painted pink ribbons all over it and wrote "my mom is the best" on it. As we talked about the trip, he stated that the mom of one of the boys in his group was a survivor, because of her really short new hair. He had accepted his new normal and I was proud of him. Emma was excited as we talked about the upcoming *Run for the Cure*. It was obvious we were becoming a survivor family. Little Mya, my niece, is eighteen months now. She won't remember this and I am glad.

The Pink Notes

It made me sad that I couldn't be the hands-on aunt her first year. I see now there is plenty of time ahead of us. Watching her grow with that fresh innocence shows me it is safe to believe that I can move ahead and look to the future. The many gifts my family has received this year will be passed on to her by default. She will become a better woman because of this. Again this gives me a sense of purpose and a sense of immortality. My heart is full of gratitude.

From: Joe Tedesco

Sent: Saturday, March 24, 2007

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Darlene Szecsei-Albano; Jay Cannon; 'Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: RE: One More

Hi All!

This time of year is by far the most beautiful here in Atlanta. The trees and the flowers are all showing their stuff! You are right on Jay; I don't think it's a coincidence!

Jak, I feel you from here! Talking to you the other day was a treat; I felt your energy, your hope, the joy in your voice. There is change a foot—a good, positive,

Notes 26 ~ 31

and loving change. I am excited. It is a joy to watch you grow in your Notes. The beauty around me reminds me of the possibilities and your experiences make me grateful! Your attitude, your courage, and your struggle strengthen my resolve to live now and move forward as my own life unfolds and challenges arise. Your gift has been felt far away!

By the way, I want to be in your video; I have my tights picked out and everything! Ah yikes! Hahahahahaha! So cool! Can't wait to see you at the end of April!

Love - Joe aka Dr. Joe, aka borderline genius /madness/delusions of grandeur complex supporter!

And let's not forget F@CK CANCER!

From: Darlene Szecsei-Albano

Sent: Friday, September 07, 2007

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Jay Cannon; Joe Tedesco; Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: RE: New Notes

I was a wondering when the notes were a coming! I am able to sigh and smile as I read your thoughts. I smile because you did

The Pink Notes

the hard work of the inner self along with the treatment and all that cancer brings, and all the while regular life goes on too. You didn't plummet; you didn't retreat. I know it wasn't easy, but you got through it and found your way out and here you are, Beautiful. Bravo.

Congrats on all the wonderful things you are able to "see" and feel. I can only say how happy I am for you that your journey has exceeded expectations you didn't even have...

Oh, and F*ck those twenty-year-olds... and tell them to stay the hell in the Mediterranean where they belong! HMMMMMMmf! Pay no mind; they can only *hope* they were as good looking and *smart* as we were in our 20's! And I emphasize *smart*! Remember? I am so glad we repeated mistakes and conversations in your mom's basement so we don't have to do it in our forties! Whew!

LOLOLOLOL.

My sister always says that although she loves to donate, she hates donating toys, clothes and stuff in *good* condition. She likes to be able to throw stuff right out

Notes 26 ~ 31

from overuse, as she felt it was used well and to its fullest this way. We have used our bodies well and lived fully, and if they saw our brains they would gasp—all the damn thinking we keep doing. There is a lot more to come too, we are not ready to be thrown out just yet.

Happy Friday,
Love you,
Dar
xo

From: Jay Cannon

Sent: Thursday, March 22, 2007

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon; Darlene Szecsei-Albano; Joe Tedesco; Maria Meret; Susan Duxter

Subject: RE: One More

Teapots,
It's kind of ironic that the dullness and dankness of winter and treatment are subsiding to the joys of spring, and the rejuvenation at the end of chemotherapy for Jackie. Jak, the playground is open, the swings are dusted off, the merry go round has been oiled. It's yours to enjoy. If you need a push now and then or someone to

The Pink Notes

share the seesaw (teeter totter) with you, then that's what we're here for. I see only a bright future ahead in your recovery and in your postings to help others through their ordeal of cancer. I am so proud of you.

You are a woman to love.

Jay xxxx

and as always F*CK CANCER.

From: Maria Meret

Sent: Saturday, September 08, 2007

To: Jackie Savi-Cannon

Subject: Re: New Notes

Good Day to you too!

Have you bothered to check out your first *Pink Notes*? Have you compared them to what you're writing now? Girl, you are flyin' It reminds me of when I was set free a few years ago. I was singing at the top of my lungs for months! I know this may sound terrible, but I'm still singing. I wish this for you, Jak. Just go cruising in your car with the radio blaring and you just belt it out loud. It feels great!
Love, Maria.

Notes 26 ~ 31

1. Written by band guitarist Noel Gallagher; performed by the band Oasis on their album *Standing on the Shoulder of Giants*; produced by Mark Stent; released February 28, 2000.

Chapter 10

Bliss has no sense of time or space. When we release the boundaries, we have the opportunity to experience it exponentially with those around us.

Note #32: Working toward mindfulness...

I watch Emma as she dances in our living room to the *High School Musical* soundtrack. She was so mature and really performing. The music was really in her. I let myself go to fully experience and feel her movement. I enjoyed every volt of energy running through her little body. I felt honored that I was part of making her. The more she danced the deeper and further I would look in. I saw the pure, untapped strength, wisdom, and love that were waiting for the right circumstances to be released. As she continued to dance, I pictured her as a young woman. I was so proud and excited to meet this amazing person I knew she would become. This was one of those moments where I was mastering being mindful. I was fully present,

filled with joy and nothing else. It was beautiful. It was intoxicating to be so fully aware of so many sensations. Then it happened.

As I pictured her as a young woman, I imagined her without me. I was only a memory. I had become pictures and stories. I cursed my brain and said “No!” I wasn’t going to spoil this moment. I used every distraction to fight the tears. I was sick of the possibility of my death interrupting and tainting my purest of moments. The future can not change this moment. The only thing that has impact here and now is the course of my thoughts. Like everyone else, that is all I have. This moment in time is the only absolute. So I made a promise to myself there that I would continually try to keep all moments pure and in the present. It was very liberating. I changed the perception of my visual of the future Emma. I viewed it as an opportunity to see the future.

The message was to see what I had to live for, and know that it was me who was going to unlock Emma’s potential. The only way I was going to do that was to believe in my own future. I had moved into a realm of opportunity that I never thought possible. I never thought I could ever experience such bliss in the midst of such challenge. I felt like this was another bridge I had crossed on my own path. I have gone beyond the boundaries that hindered me from experiencing and savoring the fullness of life. I am truly sensing what it means to live in balance and

The Pink Notes

harmony. I keep getting little bits of it. My goal now is to explore it. I find myself continually expressing gratitude.

Note #33: Time to just “be” and explore my spiritual connection...

This last month has been really weird. I think the anti-climax of the whole experience is kicking in now that my Herceptin treatment is over. I should be so happy it is done and the removal of my port has been scheduled. I am ecstatic really, but I don't feel I have the energy to express it fully. My first instinct was to throw myself into the approaching holidays by decorating and wrapping presents. My head was spinning with ideas for future projects. In the same way I realized I was letting unproductive thoughts interrupt my blissful moments, I was also trying to rush through the process again.

I am tired and I just want to relax and enjoy my family, friends, food and drinks, and staying up to all weird hours. I earned this hiatus. I was putting pressure on myself, because I have been eating crappy again and not exercising as much as I wanted to. So I decided to give myself permission to enjoy this time of indulgence. If I gave myself this time to recharge, I could let myself go and move on. I needed to heal from my healing process. As I said, this has been another turning point for me. People have often asked me if my experience with cancer has changed me spiritually. I have always explored spirituality on some

level. I was raised Roman Catholic by an ethnic mother who has blind faith. She prays with the utmost sincerity combined with a bit of fear of the wrath of God. As a young artist at that age where you question everything, I sometimes struggled with that blind faith I saw in so many people. I never really felt the need to find a new religion, but I was intrigued by Eastern philosophies. As a young artist finding myself, these ancient philosophies and beliefs seemed so much cooler than those I was raised with.

As I have matured and continued to explore, I think I am at a place where I am comfortable with my spirituality. I continue to go to church with the children and am raising them Catholic. I like the sense of community and support I feel when we are there. The Ten Commandments are good rules to live by. I believe Jesus Christ—and other religious figures—discovered his own gifts and connection in the universe and set out to share these with those around him. I can honestly say that I do not have the same blind faith my mother does, because that is too hard given my analytical nature. However, I do feel I have embraced the most important parts of the faith that makes me a better human being.

As I have explored yoga, meditation and visualization over the years, I find myself once again intrigued much like I was as a young student. I think we are typically faced with questions at various points and phases in our lives. We are given pinnacle moments so we can choose

The Pink Notes

the path and quality of our life experience. Sometimes it will initially appear that we have no say and things are beyond our control, but in the end we always have a choice in how we will interpret and interact with these life changing moments.

Cancer has been my most recent. When your life is on the line you try and cover all the bases in order to increase the odds in your favor. My first line of defense was choosing the most current scientific medicine to heal my physical body. As gruesome as the treatment is, it does work. Growing up in North America, western medicine is what we turn to. Next you pray. You pray to many forces for strength and courage to get through this and most importantly to live.

North Americans really fear death. That is what we continue to teach each other. Cancer has taught me many things about my connection to God, the universe, and my own death. During treatment I went to receive the *Sacrament of the Sick*. A chaplain I spoke with regularly after my yoga classes suggested it to me. I enjoyed talking with her, because she was an example of having one type of strong faith, but also embracing other practices to allow for a greater life experience. After mass one day, I saw the priest so he could administer this sacrament for me. I wasn't sure what was involved, but I was eager to have it done. The four of us sat in the front pew as the priest said the appropriate prayers and placed oils on me. I cried the

entire time he did this. I have no idea why. I couldn't control myself. I stayed somewhat composed for the sake of the children, but the tears streamed down my cheeks. My heart felt huge and full. I don't know how else to describe it. I think the tears came out of relief. I felt like I was handing myself over. I was accepting the fact that I was a fragile human, but when willing I could connect with a larger force, power, energy, God. With this connection comes a great sense of peace, comfort and stillness. A part of me was so afraid of the future, but my full heart reassured me. The whole process took all of fifteen minutes. I had never met the priest before. I felt no bond with him in particular, but the feeling from that experience has lingered with me. My body was tingling.

There is a great, ongoing discussion on the notion of energy and its constant presence and transformation. Basically when we break things down, including ourselves, we are all energy. Scholars and philosophers have continued this discussion for thousands of years and it creates roots for many belief systems. The concept of a greater power or force that unites us, which we should honor, is part of many religions. The image of this force or God is represented in various forms, but in the end is a reflection of one's own God whether literal or otherwise.

I have been exploring this connection a lot lately for my work as well as my own healing. Any practice you choose will continually evolve. This was a perfect time to

The Pink Notes

accelerate that evolution; it was also pleasant information to fill my thoughts with. Cancer forced me to let go of my physical body. This was so hard for me. I still battle with the image I see in the mirror. Letting go of my body was my first step in letting go of my ego. Letting go of the fact that no matter how smart or physically strong I think I am, there is something so much bigger than my little ego out there. If I decided to leave my ego outside the door, I could slowly enter this place and take part in its abundance. A kind of abundance that has no form, but comes to you in sensations that are exponentially greater than anything you have ever felt before.

The overwhelming feelings I had during my *Sacrament of the Sick* was a taste of that. I think some of the tears came from a bit of fear. Even though I wanted this deeper connection within myself and my role in the universe, it scared me, because I knew there was no going back. Cancer forced me to leave my old self behind. It was now time to find my place in my new self. I was excited, but scared.

The more I read and learn about meditation and yoga, the more I see that it can be integrated in many forms. Traditional prayer is a form of meditation. So as I progress I am becoming more confident in the ways I have adapted spirituality into my life. I am finding a spiritual balance. I continue to let go of my ego. The loss of control I experienced through cancer treatment has helped me tremendously with that. The more I let go, the more full I feel.

I am continuing to explore the many fears that our egos keep us occupied with.

Jay and I attended the funeral of a friend's husband who passed away after following a much more difficult road with ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis). We both attended the prayers that were offered the night before the funeral. Jay and I both cried as we spoke with our friend, Lou-Anne and consoled her for her loss. I knew we were experiencing the same emotions. We weren't saying it, but we both knew that this could have been us. It could have been Jay standing there greeting our friends as they wished him condolences for his loss. Because it was so close for us, I felt a much deeper, heartfelt sympathy. As we sat and watched the beautiful video that was playing, I was happy that Wayne was no longer in such physical pain. ALS is such a difficult illness to cope with. I admired them both for what they had been through. I must admit though, I was a bit envious of Wayne. He had the opportunity to live his final years to the fullest with the love of his life and now he was free. His energy had transformed and is part of something much greater that our human minds can conceive. Although I am envious on some level, I am not ready to go there. I have too much to explore here and now.

The Pink Notes

Note # 34: Discovering the spiritual bridge...

I am learning that everyday we make ourselves accessible, the messages come. I had this experience in Croatia. I felt it in that small, old church on the Adriatic. This tiny eight-hundred-year-old church was another setting for another universal connection. I had that same overwhelming sensation where my heart was so full and every cell in my body was vibrating. Again I tried not to cry, but tears flow from my eyes so freely now I have given up trying to fight it. Whatever this intense force was, it was telling me I was going to be okay. I needed to believe in the choices I had made and to continue to follow my inner voice. My path was evolving exactly how it was meant to. The challenges were part of the path.

This moment moved me to another level in the exploration. I have realized there was a small gap between my mind and heart. That is where the feeling that something was missing came from, and I was searching for the missing elements to close that gap. In doing so, I have created a bridge that allows me to travel to that place which fills my heart and ignites every cell in my body. I can use this bridge to continually feel this rich, peaceful abundance. I completely trust my inner voice to guide me now. I have released the need to control the outcome of days to come, because I know if I live fully present and mindful of each current moment, my future outcome will be exactly what it is meant to be. I may not be able to control the future.

However, I can control my reaction and interaction to it. I have also learned to release the boundaries of my physical body and connect with the energy of others. It's not as hoaky as it sounds. What I mean by this is as I watch others experience monumental moments, I try and submerge myself into it and experience their exhilaration. In watching others being acknowledged for their success and efforts, I imagine how they are feeling at that moment. They are sharing a piece of themselves that is life changing. I find myself feeling pure joy for them and hope they are fully present to the moment. In doing this I also focus on the universal force that connects us all. I realize we all crave the same things and thrive in the same way. Most importantly, I realize I am entitled to that same euphoria. Most often we are the one's that create the boundaries that prevent us from experiencing it.

Once again our perception can dramatically impact our life experience. I am getting better at really staying in the moment and not sabotaging it with defeating inner dialogue. I can identify it sooner and diffuse it. This is crucial in moving forward. I can't fully let go of the fear unless I learn to use this tool to deflect it. The ugly dialogue creeps in when I am not paying attention. I must concentrate on keeping it out and not letting it tarnish the beauty of the moment.

Emma was dancing beautifully for me as she often does. She was making up a routine on the spot so I could see

The Pink Notes

she was moving freely to the music. She wasn't over thinking it or over reacting to the dance. She was just moving in a way that felt right. It was brilliant. As she floated from the kitchen to the family room, I imagined here older, still floating freely as a strong beautiful woman. It was another moment where my heart was overflowing and my cells were vibrating. There was no sense of time, because I saw and felt a glimpse of the future again. I had the opportunity to watch Emma's spirit dance. As cute as she is, her physical body wasn't the focus. My first reaction was to see this as a reward. I had the privilege of experiencing life at this level. I felt exhilarated. I was able to stay with it and not fall into the trap of worrying if I would be there or not. This was definitely progress in moving forward into a stronger, brilliant future.

Note #35: New year, new freedom...

Last year at this time I was in the heat of treatment. Moving into the New Year goes beyond resolutions for me. I am moving into the next year equipped with new strength and vision. As I continue to walk away from the past and worry less about the future, I release the sense of urgency. This urgency causes us to over react and uses our energy inefficiently. I am excited to take this new wisdom and cultivate it into the New Year. I can only expect that I will fine tune it and continue to learn and grow. Sacrifice and hardship is a matter of interpretation. We are all entitled to live happy full lives. What I have given up doesn't

compare to what I have gained, and I'm looking forward to experiencing the future with this new vision. I have been given a glimpse of what is possible. But there is so much for me to still feel and learn, and most of me is no longer afraid.

It is very common for people to have reoccurring dreams. There are often common themes to these dreams as well. A few of my regular ones included getting to my car, because I really needed to get somewhere or escape. As I got in and started to drive away, the floor would suddenly be gone and I would have to peddle, leaving me struggling and moving slow. I would also have the usual "trying to scream and nothing would come out." Sometimes in that dream, I would find my mouth so full of bubble gum that it would go down my throat, gagging me. In the dream, I would desperately try to scoop the gum out with my hands, but it was a losing battle.

I think these silly scenarios depict the usual insecurities and self doubt we all carry somewhere within us. It occurred to me the other day that I haven't really had those dreams lately. I realized it after I had two new ones. Without going into detail, the dream took place at an upscale retirement living complex. I have no idea why. This complex was taken over by mad gunmen who are on a rampage. I gather up people who don't realize what is going on and find a safe place to hide. I hid in a shower stall, scared out of my mind. The interesting part is as I sat

The Pink Notes

there, I realized I am going to be okay. I made it. The other dream that had a different ending had no story line. I just remember calling for Jay in the dream. I was screaming so loud that I woke up hearing myself calling his name. I quickly checked to see if I woke anybody up, because I wasn't sure exactly how loud I had said it. As I sat there a bit dazed, I realized something very important. The scream finally came out!

Upon reflecting on these new dreams, I have come to understand these new story lines are my inner voice and strength immersing. The more I listen, the louder the message becomes. Cancer has released that for me. Life has a way of giving us what we want. As I previously said, it is just not so obvious sometimes.

I had another revelation while driving. Every day, new insight comes upon me. I don't know if I can contain all the wonderful emotions that go along with them. I recalled a time as a young woman, where I was completely submerged in a toxic relationship with a former boyfriend. I was the typical young woman who was so in love I was willing to tolerate a lot of "stuff," stuff that I have worked very hard to forgive myself and him for creating. I was so embarrassed by this history for the longest time. We were young and not equipped to handle such a relationship. I must admit though I had some of the best times of my young life with him and he pushed me to explore my creative potential. I also experienced some of the worst

emotional pain of my life. In hindsight, these were layers of prep.

In those younger immature years, I would often fantasize that I would be in some type of serious accident that would leave me in a hospital bed, unconscious or on a life support system. I would imagine my former boyfriend sitting by my bedside professing his love to me and that if I just woke up, we would be together forever—just like the soap operas show. The bad boy finally turns a new leaf for his true love. My revelation? I was living that fantasy now, but it wasn't a car accident; it was cancer. And I didn't need my former boyfriend; I needed Jay. He was at my side professing his love through his constant nurturing support. I have the fairy tale love that I was desperately seeking.

Cancer has let me make peace with that desperation. I can leave that search behind now and focus on what is ahead with this beautiful human being that has helped me create my amazing life that I lead today.

Note# 36: Exponential love...

I had the opportunity for great closure recently with a woman I had a negative history with from high school. We were each others' Achilles heel. We had both found wonderful new lives, but we still had embarrassing details that connected and haunted us. Our paths began crossing

The Pink Notes

more frequently lately to the point our daughters were in the same bloody jazz class. It was comical. I can't even begin to describe how insanely awkward that was. It was evident that we both were intelligent enough to realize this history was so long ago and we were both genuinely passed it. But there was always this splinter in my spine preventing me from standing tall in a complete, absolute way. I knew she felt the same way. It was stupid and we both knew we were better than that. Yet that splinter, which represented our hurt and wounded high school selves, held us back from doing this obvious thing.

One day our paths crossed again. This time it was right next to each other in yoga class. I promise you I am not making it up. It was cliché to the point of the yoga teacher closing the practice with words about getting along and accepting each other's differences. Half way through the class, I promised myself I would not leave without talking with her. I knew I had to make peace if I was going to continue growing and enhancing my life experience.

Once everyone started rolling their mats up I walked over and sat on the floor next to her and said, "Without being too awkward, I just wanted to say I am happy to see you have a beautiful family and that you are doing well. You deserve it." It was effortless. She just busted open, accepted the olive branch and reciprocated. I could feel her relief wash over me like a warm blanket of sunshine. It felt great and I was delighted for both of us. We

laughed, because we both agreed that we were the only people on the planet we each felt uncomfortable with. We were young and naïve then and it was obvious we had both grown into better women because of our past. We both deserved this closure. We had earned it.

I didn't realize how heavy a weight I was carrying with those memories until I experienced this undeniable euphoria I am now feeling. In taking action, I have been able to release that weight. I am truly carving the path I wish to follow.

I used to analyze things to death. I would weigh the pros and cons, flipping from confidence to self doubt. I had a constant back and forth dialogue going on in the back of my mind. Nevertheless, I still felt happy and fulfilled despite this internal conversation that never stopped. Now when I look at the world around me, I only see the pro column. I have no purpose or use for the "con" side anymore. In eliminating it, I spend less time and energy deliberating and more attention to the obvious signs around me. I have experienced a whole other level of focus. Just when I think it can't possibly get any better, it does. In creating this efficiency in my thinking process, I am able to experience sensations so purely they are mind blowing. My dream life is just beginning.

Finding closure with my past has also allowed me to experience a whole new level of passion with Jay. It was as

The Pink Notes

if all the love and affection I had craved yet not completely received in every single past relationship came flooding into me at the same moment in time. Everything that I ached for through all those layers of prep had led me to this very moment. As my physical body was electric with pleasure, my heart was so full it felt like it had exploded and sprinkled magic dust through out my body. It was that perfect love that has been written about for decades. My mind gave me the gift of seeing my future so vividly it felt like I was watching two movies at the same time. I was observing the present and future in the same instant. There was no sense of time or space and I wasn't really sure where I was watching these movies from. It was my witness watching. This was a monumental mind, body and spirit connection for me. This was the elevated living I've been talking about.

The focus and clarity that I am able to see in the world around me with is so intense that it allows me to sense the signs and to intuitively say or do the right thing to help move everyone involved one step closer to their best life. I am not afraid anymore. I am able to leave my ego aside and see the bigger picture. The stronger I get the harder I swim pulling that imaginary dingy. I want to bring as many people with me so they can also experience this amazing way to perceive life. That is the beauty in how the world works. When you truly let yourself, you can have everything you desire and feel like you are connected to a greater sense of purpose to help those around you.

Instead of trying to smother people with my passion, I now know to leave my own ego aside and wait and watch to let them cue me as to how I can create more joy and satisfaction for them. Now that I am getting more efficient at it, I can do more of it throughout my days.

Every now and again I struggle. I snap at the kids or fall asleep on Jay, but I am getting better at sensing when I need to stop and recharge without judgment. I deserve to rest so I do. Then I am able to perform exponentially once again. This practice is totally worth it, because I come out ahead in the end.

I can't express how excited I am with this new breakthrough I feel I have made. I can't even begin to imagine what the actual path to my goals really entails, but I have learned there is no need wasting energy in trying to figure it out. Instead, I just see the end result I want and make sure each day brings me a little closer to it. The day doesn't always have to be perfect. I just need to move a little closer to my desired destination. If I do that I believe the life I want will be mine. How do I know I have found my passion for living? The work I have chosen to do is an opportunity for many to come and swim. I want to pass on the gift that I found in my life. My wish is that everyone experience life to this intensity regardless of their age, gender or address. I want them to erase their cons list from their internal dialogue. The exquisite harmonious and peaceful balance I now have is extraordinary. The more I

The Pink Notes

try to help others find it, the more extraordinary my life becomes. It is like magic dust unites us. What more needs to be said.

Note #37: Final note...

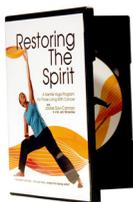
Throughout the last two years I kept asking myself if this really was my life. The context I would ask that question in would be one of shock and fear of the unknown. Now I can ask that question and reply “Yes this is my life and I would not change it.” I have walked through a door that scared me at first. Now I don’t want to go back. The space that lies in front of me is so vast with opportunity; I don’t know where to begin. I feel the best is yet ahead of me. I don’t know exactly what it is, but cancer has taught me not to fixate on the questions that can’t be answered. Instead of asking why, I now ask what? I no longer need to know *why* things occur. I am more interested in *what* I am meant to do in any particular occurrence. What is this next layer of prep? I just know to believe and have faith in the vision I have created for what my new normal will be. I like the way I perceive my world. I look forward to the path that is about to unfold for me in its absolute perfect form, the way it is meant to be. Blissful.

My wish is for those who are facing challenges to discover the same good fortune. My gratitude and focus are probably the strongest feelings that I have at the moment. I am grateful for all I have and the life I have led. I am

Notes 32 ~ 37

content with who I am and grateful for the opportunity to have learned what I know. I will continue to cross this new bridge to live my best life and share it with others. The potential I have seen is intoxicating.

YOGA and MEDITATION are excellent tools to compliment your Cancer recovery.



Restoring The Spirit is a DVD production which illustrates two gentle yoga programs which are suitable for use for those individuals living with cancer.

Meditations for Restoring the Spirit Audio CD.

These meditations have been created to compliment the choices you and your health care provider have made.

Products available at
www.jackiesavicannon.com

KEYNOTES & SEMINARS WITH JACKIE SAVI-CANNON



Jackie Savi-Cannon is a leading speaker in the area of corporate wellness. Her ability to educate and motivate creates a profound connection with the audience. Those who attend her workshops and seminars leave empowered and inspired to make life impacting changes!

Jackie will encourage audiences to take the next step further towards realizing their goals by motivating them with knowledge and strategies in developing a balanced approach to living well. She engages people with her natural speaking ability and integrity, causing them to listen and want to hear more. Her workshops bring energy that inspires and leaves a lasting impression.

Jackie's lectures and workshops have stirred individuals across North America to make proactive changes, dramatically impacting the quality of both their professional and personal lives.

To book Jackie for your next conference or in-house seminar, visit www.jackiesavicannon.com

EDITORS:

Simon Presland is a professional writer with almost 200 articles published in a variety of genres including travel, informational, inspirational, Christian, home repair, personality profile, interview, and teaching. As a writer and editor of books, he has ghostwritten and/or edited more than 20 books, working with first-time authors, pastors, business leaders, and professional speakers. For more information contact Simon at www.simonpresland.com or www.thewritechoice.org.

Lisa Rene-de-Cotret is a professional writer who has well over 500 published articles in the areas of business, travel, fine art, food, and personality profiles. Currently Lisa is a columnist for business publications, and newspapers. She is also a publicist for notable Canadians. She is a community activist and volunteer within the breast cancer community. For more information contact her at lisa@jackiesavicannon.com