

PREFACE

On a cold January day you open an email from your zany, full-of-life friend. Just days ago you sent your friend off to get her annual routine physical in Phoenix. This friend, a feisty, “only 35-year-old,” Internet-based speech pathologist is always telling everyone over 50 that they need to hire a trainer...that they need to eat good food... and that they need to make memories and a live life to the max....all so as to **never** need doctors and hospitals....and now you read your friend’s subject line:

SUBJECT: At this point, I have been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer

After recovering from the initial shock of this dread diagnosis, so unexpected, so out of the blue and asking WHAT NOW?, you and your friend begin a journey, not knowing which of two possible destinations will be reached. And you are each faced with two possible choices in dealing with the disease: to be overcome with fear and negativity...or to stay positive, overcome, and FIGHT BACK.

Such a journey best made with good doctors, good medical facilities, good insurance, but most of all with good friends who make the choice with you to FIGHT.

In the case of La Rita Mason, she was wise to have accumulated a lifetime of friends from diverse backgrounds, all of whom she kept in touch with her and with each other through her periodic “Groupie” e-mails in which she joyfully detailed and photographically illustrated what she ate at the best gourmet restaurants, what she saw where, and who she visited at the latest stop in her constant peregrinations around the nation and world. The “Groupies,” shared back. It might seem old-fashioned, but the shared e-mails were a lot more personal than Facebook. When cancer struck at Invincible La Rita, she shared the details of her journey with the Groupies, and the Groupies helped her strike back...pouring forth their expertise, their encouragement, their prayers, and their humor via e-mail.

La Rita has now compiled these e-mail exchanges, some slightly sanitized to protect the “guilty” or shelter those who might be embarrassed or otherwise ostracized, criticized, excessively praised, or prosecuted. For those who are, she offers condolences.

Everyone can gain something from sharing La Rita’s journey. “You have to advocate for yourself,” she stresses. She relates the details she extracted from her doctors and specialists about diagnosing and treating a variety of pancreatic cancers. She tells how she demanded and ultimately got quality health care attention. She writes, **“I'm gonna get 'em trained that they'd better TALK to me and that they'd better LISTEN to me!!!”**

She will have you laughing along with her as she shakes up the medical establishment and wages war on her condition, which turns out not to be regular pancreatic cancer but a weird form of pancreatic lymphoma. She will make everyone who is facing surgery or who has had surgery wonder if the doctors got the diagnosis right. And she demonstrates how she asked enough questions to be sure that her doctors were on the right course. Medicine, after all, is practice. She shares the tips about the nutrition regimen that she adopted, gives suggestions about how to stay mentally uplifted, and she has an opinion on just about everything, including where to buy street appropriate lounging pajamas. You will also be privy to the meaning of the new catch phrase, **"I'VE TAKEN CARE OF BUSINESS!"** and she will want to know that you have done so.

Written with Love,
A "Groupie" Friend
(Saundra Nix Lapsley)