



GIVE AWAY YOUR ICE CREAM

WORDS BY

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In the summer of 2003, when I was still living in my hometown of New York City, there was a major, city-wide blackout. For those of us who commuted from Brooklyn to our Manhattan offices, this meant a long walk home in the heat of the afternoon.

As we walked in sweaty droves, I started noticing that the ice cream shops and pizzerias were handing out free ice cream and ices. They knew their icy confections would melt during the outage, and rather than keep them, they handed them out to us.

Though this was over 20 years ago, I vividly remember the smiles of the employees and the general feeling of community and gracious sharing. This was certainly not what these small businesses were hoping or planning for as they put out their products earlier that day—the ice cream was to make a profit, not to be handed out to sweaty commuters walking home in a blackout. And yet, here they all were, giving it all away. Smiling.

Fast forward 20 years.

In February of 2023, at the age of 43, I was diagnosed with triple positive intraductal carcinoma. What followed was a litany of tests, doctors' appointments, decisions, six rounds of chemotherapy, a double mastectomy, five weeks of radiation, 12 months of targeted chemotherapy shots, and beginning a 10-year regimen of hormone therapy medication.

Under the wreckage of this

devastation, I searched for myself. And what I found truly surprised me.

I discovered my worth, my value, was tied to what I could give of myself, not to what I could become.

Certainly, throughout my life, I have had aspirations to become many things—executive, philanthropist, wife, dancer, world traveler, chef, homeowner. But the single most critical part of my vision for the future was to be a healthy, strong older woman, someone who would age naturally and gracefully, remaining vibrant and impactful in my community into old age. Throughout my adulthood, I committed countless hours and dollars into an ultra-healthy lifestyle of all-organic produce and products, yoga, meditation, and regular exercise.

But I got cancer anyway, and getting cancer, and undergoing its subsequent treatment, demolished

the vision of that vibrant older woman and handed me premature menopause and constant exhaustion instead. Cancer took away the illusion of control, the idea that I could craft a fate for myself based on what I wanted or worked towards. At the same time, cancer reminded me that the future is not a given, that the clock is ticking away for all of us.

Where could I go from there? I soon found myself laser-focused on giving away what was within me: skills I had learned throughout my career, natural abilities like discipline and organization, an interest in the arts, and inherent qualities like my desire to problem-solve and to care for others. All of these aspects of myself are my “ice cream,” and I realized I didn’t want them to melt away without offering them to the world, just because I could no longer give them in the way I had imagined I would. Giving away your ice cream means the transaction is no longer on your terms.

So, how am I giving away my

ice cream?

I have harnessed my lifelong love of the arts and started Lit Night, a series of literature appreciation events which I curate, research, and present each month in my town. It’s my way of bringing value to my community by creating a space for curious, open individuals who love to hear literature read aloud and discussed.

I took my professional background in marketing and project management and started The Flat Society to address the gap in the market for people who have had breast cancer and undergone a double mastectomy without reconstruction. We’re working to develop garments that are designed to address the unique needs of “flatties,” so that we can stop trying to figure out how to get dressed and start focusing on what’s important to us.

The last thing I discovered that is important to all this is that I am unattached to the outcomes of these efforts. Whether Lit Night lives on

for decades or whether The Flat Society ultimately goes to market—while those scenarios would be wonderful—I am not attached to a vision of how they will play out. The worth in these experiences has been in the act of giving of myself.

And that’s my new approach. Give away what I have, what I have made, what I have learned, what I have done, what I have experienced. Put aside the visions I had for my life, put aside profit or specific outcomes. Give away that ice cream. Smiling. A little sad, but smiling. ♡

Photo by GG LeMere.

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