

Interview: Mrs. Betsy Orman, cancer survivor

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Betsy Orman with her children, Sam and Virginia

Mrs. Betsy Orman's involvement with Women's Federation for World Peace began in 1992. She has helped coordinate programs in North Dakota, Washington DC, Japan, and Connecticut, where she currently resides with her husband and 23-year-old twins. After returning to college and finishing her master's degree, in 2014 she was diagnosed with Her2 (hormone positive) breast cancer, just as her teaching career was about to begin. I interviewed Mrs. Orman and this is what I found out.

Q: How important was practicing spirituality for you in your time of fighting breast cancer?

My spirituality was like a wheel on a ship which guided me to find the ways I would need to fight this disease. When I met with my doctor at Yale, she insisted I do all sorts of extreme treatments immediately. However, I was more concerned about the quality of my life, not the length. I remembered a quote on my daughter's bedroom mirror that said, "Don't let fear decide your fate," and that became my modus operandi. I began praying for guidance, my sister organized prayer for me, and many people supported my health journey, financially, spiritually and emotionally.

I started doing lots of research, finding out what all my options were, moving forward as naturally as possible, and then integrating the best practices into my life. We don't get cancer overnight, and we cannot heal from cancer overnight. Because everyone's diagnosis is different, and cancer is caused by many variables, we each have to find out what are the sources of our cancer. Everyone has cancer cells. It is our immune system's inability to fight their growth that causes them to take over. I learned that getting well was not the doctor's responsibility, but my own.

Q: What were some challenges, and how were you able to overcome them?

Cancer is a very scary word. Every day you wonder, "Will I survive this?" So it is critical to really plug into words of faith each day. I listened to testimonies of those who had overcome cancer on YouTube, read books, talked to doctors, found Facebook support, and so on. Jody Osteen's testimony and Suzanne Summers book "Knockout" were instrumental. I visited the Optimum Health Institute in Austin for three weeks of educational training. I found holistic practitioners who I felt comfortable to guide me in my cancer journey.



Mr. and Mrs. Orman

Q: Did you take up some new spiritual habits or routines? (i.e., meditation, reading certain texts) What do you feel you gained from that?

Cancer is 80% stress-related so dealing with stress was imperative. By implementing meditation, yoga, and deep breathing into my daily routine, I learned how to get into an alpha state (a state of deep relaxation). I also learned how to let go of anger, resentment, frustration, and the desire to control the outcome of things. This was the way I could find peace and calm every day.

Q: Was there a single routine or exercise that you stuck to on a daily basis? (i.e., 4 to 5 times a week)?

A trainer I met said we need three kinds of exercise, stretching for elasticity and balance, weights for bone strength and cardio for oxygenation of the blood and heart. I tried to incorporate those things into my life: swimming, yoga, stretching, using the treadmill, riding a bike. Taking all sorts of different exercise classes at the YMCA helped me prevent boredom. The return rate of cancer is reduced by 50% percent through daily exercise and maintaining a healthy weight. Cancer cells are stored in fat, so losing fat is critical for those who are overweight. Also, cancer patients all lack vitamin D. We need sunshine. I prayed or meditated outside whenever possible.

Q: What were some foods or drinks that you had to cut out from your diet? And how did it affect you?

I did six months of a very strict detoxification diet, mostly raw vegetables, seeds and sprouts, green juices, and wheatgrass enemas every day. I cut out sugar, wheat, dairy, and meat (all found to feed cancer or create inflammation). I began using alkaline water daily to increase the PH of my body, remembering that cancer cannot live in an alkaline system. Live foods create a live body, with a lot more energy. Your skin shines! Dead foods destroy the cells and create illness. Microwave and high heat cooking kills enzymes and nutrients in food. Eating raw greens as much as possible is your best medicine.

Q: What were some foods or drinks that you will recommend?

Raw organic vegetables (grow them or find an organic farm or co-op near you as they can be expensive). Wheatgrass juice daily; I use freeze-dried now, but drank fresh for 6 months as it helps to rebuild every cell in the body. Food combining is critical; don't mix foods that don't digest well together. Wild-caught fish and spouted legumes are a great source of protein.

Q: And lastly, what was the most significant thing that you learned about fighting breast cancer?

My cancer was a health opportunity. It taught me how I needed to live in order to get well and stay well for the rest of my life. When I first started to do Yoga, a woman in my class came over to me and said, "Don't worry if you can't do it now, just keep practicing." She had finished her second yoga class of the day and was 85 years old! I realized, it's never too late to change and get healthier; and you're never too young or too old to begin!