

Women's Health

A special supplement of
 Colorado Community Media



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What advice would you give to women currently fighting cancer?

‘Find a purpose that you know you can embrace when you are done with cancer.’

Diane Simard,
survivor

‘A joyous life’

Cancer survivor creates program aimed at helping patients with the psychological impacts of cancer

Tabatha Deans/CCM

The only time in 10 months that I felt good is the first five seconds of the day,” said cancer survivor Diane Simard.

Yet despite her year-long battle with breast cancer, she said she has become a better person than she was before her harrowing ordeal started.

The entrepreneur, angel investor, and now survivor advocate said she was a very private person when she was diagnosed, and had some unresolved issues that were hindering her life. After facing the possibility of death, that all changed.

“It was my first day back at work after my first chemo treatment. I felt lousy, and everything seemed to bother me,” Simard said. “The color of my office walls made me nauseous, my panty hose were too tight, and the smells were intolerable. So I decided to make a list of everything that was making me mad. Then I decided I could either be miserable every moment, or I could live and be happy. So I let it all go. I let go of past relationships that I had held onto, as well as past failures. I was going to live a joyous life.”

Simard was diagnosed with Stage III infiltrating ductile carcinoma in January 2015. The disease was discovered after a routine mammogram. It had spread to her lymph nodes, and she received what she called the “nuclear bomb” treatment. Determined to face her disease with courage and strength, she continued working throughout her treatment.

While the treatments seemed to be working, Simard was disappointed in the lack of psychological support offered to cancer fighters.

“I was referred to support groups, but I’m a very private person so that really wasn’t for me,” she added.

She began keeping a journal, which, she said, helped ease her anxieties and brought meaning to

her battle. Still determined to find mental support, she found Dr. Nicole Taylor, whom she refers to as an Oncologist Psychiatrist. Taylor had spent years working with cancer survivors, and her help inspired Simard to create the Center for Oncology Psychology Excellence (COPE).

“I knew we had to do something to get more help for women like me,” said Simard. “I seed-funded COPE, which is a 12-credit specialty offered through the University of Denver. It teaches health-care professionals, and caregivers, specifically how to work with people as they deal with cancer.”

Simard never considered defeat as an option, but said the closest she came to giving up was when she suffered a terrible bout of vertigo, which is not deadly.

“I laid there, and thought this is it. I’m dying. I’m done.”

The episode passed, and Simard said she realized then that she needed to share her story, and vowed to publish her journal for others to read. Her book, ‘Champagne with You’ is expected to be available for sale next year.

Simard is currently cancer free and in what she calls the “close monitoring” stage of her journey, and considers her ordeal a literal physical and spiritual cleansing.

To learn more about the COPE clinic, visit the website at <https://www.du.edu/gspp/services/cope/ppc.html>.