

## **HOW DOES ONE FEEL WHEN THEY ARE TOLD THEY HAVE CANCER...**

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How does one feel when they are told they have cancer. And what is one thinking. No, I'm not illiterate and I know there should be a question mark – or “chudenka”, the old Bulgarian word, meaning “wonder sign”. But I no longer wonder, because it happened to me. Now I will tell you.

I must have expected it subconsciously, for it is not possible to have pain in your leg for seven months, with all signs of sciatica, to go see heaven knows how many neurologists, to take drugs, to get all sort of infusions and get no relief.

Until I came across a stern and at the same time empathetic young doctor, from whom, after a thorough neurological examination, I heard the expression “reflected pain.” This is when you feel the pain at a certain spot, but the problem is coming from elsewhere. Well, my problem came from the lungs.

I have been smoking for about 40 years. I won't seek excuses in a difficult life, stress, and all that stuff. I have chosen it consciously, and probably with kind of silly girl's thought – “it won't happen to me”. Well, it did.

The first night, after I learned, I wanted to cry my eyes out. There was no place for that. I was in the hospital, in a room with five other women, each with a pain of her own. It was the same in the hallway. It was late in the evening, the doors were locked. I asked the doctor to let me go for a smoke and she let me out. I squeezed out some tears, but it was not the way I wanted. My kids were waiting for my phone call, so I called them, pushing back the tears. Some of you know that I have wonderful kids – we told each other that we will fight against this together and there is no way we won't overcome it. All three of us believe in that. I went back into the room, the women felt that something had happened, so I told them. No tears. These women, so different from one another, supported me with no artificial cheering up. I didn't dare

to tell my husband, I wanted to do so in person. I slept through the night.

I know that the first phase after such a diagnosis is denial. I was wondering if this was what I felt. No, that wasn't it. Somehow, at 65 years of age, you are both ready to fight and you're curious to see who wins, you also have the power – not the physical, but the mental power. And you have someone to live for. Your nerves may be worn out, but you know that the will to live is at the heart of this battle. I won't try to hide the fact that I'm afraid, but I'll go through whatever it takes.

I still don't know what treatment the doctors would select and what I would choose. I am at the beginning of the fight. I am sharing this with you, because I'll need all the good thoughts I can get. And because, as my FB friend Margarita Petkova says, "Cancer is not a shameful disease, that we dare not talk about it".

I have wonderful supportive children, husband and great friends, and I have all of you.

I'm at home today and will cry my eyes out, and tomorrow I will put on my war paint and go to battle. Wish me good luck!