



LESLIE MILLER

Dear Carl,

I am so very appreciative that I am among those chosen to receive a Generosity Capitalism Award. It makes me feel wonderful to have friends who think enough of me to nominate me, and I am grateful to them for their thoughtfulness.

Barbara Stemke told me that you would like a short bio from me. I was born in Iowa and after graduating from Drake University with a BFA in Graphic Design in 1978, I spent a year each in Boston and NYC. I moved to the Hudson Valley in 1982 and was co-owner of a pottery studio in Saugerties for several years. In 1986 I went off on my own and created a ceramics business, making porcelain wall pieces with my original designs painted on them (with glazes). I enjoyed a modest amount of recognition with my work, showing it at The American Craft Museum in NYC and other museum gift shops across the country. 1993 was a horrible economic year for craftspeople and I could not survive it. Exhausted, I shut down my ceramics business (I had moved to Kingston in 1992) and began working with the developmentally disabled in our community as a resident counselor and holding my own art classes at A.I.R. Studio in Kingston. I also began to paint my designs on paper and canvas.

In 2001 I was diagnosed with breast cancer, went through treatments and continued to work. After talking with my surgeon, I realized part of the exhaustion I felt in 1993 was my cancer, since he told me "it had been growing for at least 10 years." In October 2004, metastasized breast cancer was discovered in my spine. My oncologist told me: "You have two years to live, three with therapy." I was devastated. And I fired that oncologist.

Because of my fragile spine, I had to leave my workplace. I began reading about others who had become well from late-stage or end-stage cancer (either from traditional or alternative means) and I vowed to give it the old college try. Having metastatic disease is different from primary breast cancer. There are fewer conventional drugs to try and they ultimately cannot destroy the cancer, they can only deter it, although there are rare cases of remission. People with metastatic disease are most primary breast cancer peoples' worst nightmare. It is a world of isolation and despairing ... so I wrote a letter in Benedictine Oncology Support Programs' "Celebrate Life" newsletter and asked anyone who had recovered from metastatic cancer to please contact me and I asked the OSP if I could start a metastatic support group and they gave their permission. I heard from people from Albany to Poughkeepsie! I was overwhelmed with their brave stories of endurance, their strength of will! They had had to fight hard to become well, oftentimes discovering through their research that their doctors were given them incorrect treatments, and so had



to change their doctors. They were not docile patients, but activists for their own health.

I am proud to say that the first ever metastatic support group in the Hudson Valley started last summer with 10 people attending (most were not in remission). There are two metastatic support groups at Benedictine now, run by the Oncology Support Program. In addition, a small group of people with metastatic disease will be meeting informally in the near future outside of Benedictine to specifically discuss alternative treatments. If anyone is interested, they can contact me via [feedback@campbel@mybizz.net](mailto:campbel@mybizz.net). It is vitally important for those with metastatic disease to reach out to others, to end their isolation and to replace that with hope-for there is still hope.

In addition, Jeff Bartfield, an amazing generous person, has been teaching QiGong classes to people with cancer and other illnesses at Benedictine for over two years. Initially, he was to teach only two months of Qi Gong, but I was persistent and he agreed to continue to teach and OSP agreed to allow this to happen, so over 20 people now benefit from his excellent teaching. If there were an award for outstanding citizens, I would nominate Jeff Bartfield-he is helping so many with cancer and other illnesses by his skilled teaching of QiGong. I consider QiGong practice essential in my attempt to become well.

I also consider taking nutraceuticals essential to becoming well by building up my immune system. I take these under the guidance of Dr. Belanger, a naturopath from Lexington, MA. Dr. Belanger works with my oncologist who says to me, "Stay on your naturopathic medicines, if you can manage it." This is a remarkable statement from an oncologist, who used to fight against such things as nutraceutical supplements. They are very expensive and my significant other, Todd Samara, and I struggle mightily each month to afford them, and often we come up short.

Todd is an excellent local painter who has not had much luck selling his work this past year, to our despair. I created "The Bird Project" which Barbara sent to you- a series of 4"x5" acrylic painting of birds, to help raise funds for my naturopathic meds. For each bird sold, \$5 will be given to the Oncology Support Program at Benedictine and \$5 will be given to Breast Cancer Options, run by Hope Nemiroff. BCO is an information and advocacy organization and Hope Nemiroff is also an Amazing Citizen... I have said of my Bird Project: *Using my artwork to take creative action against my cancer is a perfect therapeutic circle which allows me to continue to concentrate on a positive outcome and a continuation of hope.*"

I chose birds as my subject matter for my project because I love birds. That they are symbolic in many cultures of spiritual rebirth, love and freedom mirrors my own struggle to become well from my cancer. Each bird is a meditation on keeping the mind clear and the heart open.

The healing circle that I speak of also includes community-giving back. Both Breast Cancer Options and the Oncology Support Program have helped me so much. They do important



work and it is so pleasing to me to support them in this way. The Bird Project paintings, which are \$55.00, are available through Todd Samara at the Dolce Cafe, 27 Broadway, Kingston NY.

I will put my award toward creating a website that will sell my work, on board, canvas and I intend to create cards to sell also. Unfortunately, money has so much to do with any alternative treatment and also promising experimental traditional medicine treatments ... so I must try and create more income, since I am quite unemployable at this time, so must attempt to do this with my artwork. With money that I earn, I intend to attend "The Way To Health" at the Kushi Institute in Bethel, MA (macrobiotic). They do not claim to cure cancer, but rather, they bring the body back into balance with macrobiotic food. I have spoken to several people who have become well from their cancer after attending Kushi and read "My Beautiful Life" by Milenka Mina Dobic, a woman who had two months to live, attended Kushi, and is still alive 20 years later, teaching macrobiotics in California.

Well, I don't expect you to print all of this, take what you need from all of this, leave out the rest. I will end with some advice from Norman Cousins that has helped me, and might help someone else out there, suffering with cancer in isolation: "Believe the diagnosis, not the prognosis." And I am going to send you one of my poems (I have written 40 poems dealing with my illness and hope to someday get them published ... another goal (goals are good for everyone, especially people with illness), so here goes:

<i>Note To Myself

Create a love circle -
a family of curious explorers;
those who are fearless,
undaunted by the future.
Surround yourself with those
who live in the realm of possibilities;
the land of inner wisdom, intuition
and positive imagination.
Heal from the inside out.
Manifest a love circle -
allow it to envelope your world.</i>

Thanks for listening, Leslie Miller

PS. Also thought I might mention that Todd Samara and I will have an art show at Inspired Bookstore on N. Front St. from September-October, 2007.