

If Joan of Arc Had Cancer: Courage, Faith and Healing from History's Most Inspired Woman Writer, Q and A with Author

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1. It is interesting you chose Joan of Arc as the symbol for your book, can you tell me more about why you chose her?

Certainly. Actually, Joan chose me. After my mother passed away, I had a very difficult time adjusting to just how I would live in the world without her and to be honest, I still struggle with the answers to that question. The truth is all I wanted and all that anyone who has suffered a tragic loss in their lives is to find the connection again. I spent long sleepless nights thinking about the amazing courage that she has during her ten year battle with cancer and I also thought about the many, many women I have worked with as a integrative medicine practitioner who also had extraordinary courage. My mother's journey was filled with unimaginable suffering and I thought about her amazing courage-it was humbling. I didn't like the mythology that people with cancer were somehow to be pitied and were weak which is often the prevailing wisdom, which in my experience was not true. My mother possessed enviable courage and it took my breath away just how strong she was. One day after she had passed, I tried to distract myself and visited a consignment store, something we had enjoyed doing together. I asked my mom to show me a "sign" that she was with me. Literally at my feet, there was a large painting face down on the floor and when I picked it up, there was a vintage painting depicting Joan on her horse with her head held high carrying a staff. I knew in that moment it was my mother's sign to me. I read all things Joan, deeply knowing that she would be the symbol to honor my mom and all the other women I have loved and lost.

2. What do you think that Joan conveys to the reader?

Joan of Arc is the ultimate symbol of courage, of strength and absolute certainty about how she wanted to live her life. I decided after reading about her that she would be the perfect choice for readers to guide them on their journey, a symbol that they could align themselves when they were seeking inspiration or just too tired to carry their burdens on their own. Joan can be their ally, an ally they can count on during a diagnosis with cancer, or any difficult life challenge.

3. What impressed you the most about Joan of Arc?

That's a difficult question to answer, to identify any one particular attribute. She was smart, unyielding, intuitive and most of all she trusted her experiences with the Divine no matter what. Even during her trial, she refused to alter one word of her testimony and she stood up to all authority who tried to discredit and embarrass her. This teenage girl answered only to her own authority, and the authority of her voices who she believed in and sustained her throughout her trial and ultimately even during her death. The ability to fight for what you believe in at all costs, even when it meant a death sentence is not only inspirational for women who are traveling a journey with cancer, but for all women struggling to listen to their own internal wisdom. It's a beautiful and honorable lesson for everyone and is desperately

needed, especially in this time when many people are not willing to fight for what they believe in.

4. Some people think that the story of Joan of Arc isn't real—that she is only a myth.

Well, when you read any biography about Joan, it is easy to dismiss her life as something of legend and not really real. She led an army of men in a century when women didn't venture out of the house, never mind lead armies. She wore men's clothing, crowned the rightful King of France, the Dauphin, and earned the respect of thousands of people during her time. And, we have to remember that Joan of Arc did live, and she was not just legend. When you think about a teenager dressed in men's armor, leading an army of thousands of men to victory, and defying every notion about what a young woman "should do", her life was extraordinary. One can only imagine what accomplishments she would have offered the world if she was not burned at the stake.

5. Your book, is very different than the biographies of Joan of Arc, can you explain a little bit how it is different and why you didn't choose to write a biography?

When I write, I have to pay attention and listen to my inner promptings, and not only that, I have to honor the information that presents itself to be written. Any writer will tell you that although you may think your book needs to be written in a particular way in the beginning, the truth is that the book tells you, you are not in charge, it's not the other way around. That process of writing, at least for me is magical and I wanted to craft a book that would help women and give them actual tools during their illness. I have read many of the biographies of Joan of Arc and they are all terrific, especially, Mark Twain's book on her life, however, I knew that my book had to offer the women reading it, a guide so they too, could possess the qualities that Joan possessed and I had to offer the form that felt right to me during the writing process. The book includes passages from Joan's trial using her actual words and specific attributes that I selected that literally just spoke to me while I was reading those trial records. I also include an active meditation and a message from Joan in the first part of the book. The second part of the book explored each of those attributes in depth and includes arts based techniques to help women discover their internal courage.

6. Can you tell me more about Joan's Messages in the book?

Sure. I am an intuitive and have always received messages when I am working with clients so I am quite comfortable with the listening process. When I wrote this section of the book, the words just came to me as I was able to intuitively connect with her. It was a lovely process and I am grateful for that opportunity.

7. You write a compelling essay at the end of the book which includes specific directives for women to demand during their healthcare journey, can you tell me more about that?

After taking care of my mom, I was very disheartened by the lack of kindness, compassion and heart that I observed during her many

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stays in hospitals across the country. This is not to say there were not exceptions, but it is and continues to be disturbing to me that it is an accepted part of healthcare that physicians can be without proper bedside manner, or their bad behavior is excused. I don't know of any other profession especially a profession that is sacred and involved connection with other people's hearts, mind and bodies that would allow such lack of compassion. Studies prove that physicians who show compassion and empathy not only have better connections with their patients, but they are in the privileged position to offer hope, to offer kindness, to help their patients during their journeys, and showing one's heart does not mean collapsing into tears. Clinical competence is a given, however, if you are not able to show yourself as a human being and treat the whole person in front of you, you aren't practicing truly practicing medicine. The other interesting thing is that physicians actually yearn for this connection, but many are not trained to be attentive to whole person interactions and they lose the very heart of the practice of medicine as a sacred profession.

8. Do you think that is changing?

It will change when healthcare professionals recognize that that the humanistic aspects of their practice are just as important as the diagnosis and treatment plan, in fact, asking your patient about their whole life, not just their disease is not only important, it is foundational. For me this is the ethical foundation of medicine to treat mind, body and spirit. That triumvirate cannot be ignored. I created the Sidney Project in Spirituality and Medicine and Compassionate Care™, a hospital based training program for physicians in spirituality and medicine in an attempt to change the medical culture a little bit so physicians can be mindful of the beauty and sanctity of their profession. After experiencing many tragedies in my life, I know I needed to do something.

9. What would you like your readers to know most of all?

That they aren't alone, even though it may feel that way, or even if it is literally true. I know many women who have gone through their treatments without any support and it breaks my heart. I wanted every woman to be reminded she has a strong voice, and that her needs have to be addressed not only during treatments but that every woman sick or not, has the right to listen to herself and to honor her internal voice. Joan can be that companion during the most difficult of times. Her story is a story of triumph, and that is what I want women to identify with, whether they are struggling with cancer or struggling through their own life. Healing can mean many things and I hope that this book offers women readers an opportunity to create and identify exactly what they need without trying to please others, and to put themselves first.

10. Can healthcare workers use this book with their clients or patients?

Of course. When my mother was sick, we used to attend support meetings at several different hospitals and my mother hated them, and after attending these meetings with her, I understand why. Although, I am sure the therapist leading the program was well educated, that doesn't necessarily mean that he or she had the tools to provide hope to the group; that was what was missing. I offer training sessions with healthcare professionals, particularly social work oncologists and therapists who work with patients who are sick to teach them how they can use the book on on one or in a group setting. I am sure that there are some groups that are helpful, but these women, or anyone with a serious illness needs tools to not be victimized, and often they are by their providers who dictate treatments that may or may not be the best answer for their patients. I am not suggesting that people with cancer should not see their physicians, that is not what I am saying, but I would urge them to really take the time to see what is best for their situation; physically, emotionally and spirituality. I would also urge those in the medical profession to truly listen to the stories of their patients-to not only hear what they are saying with

their ears, but with their hearts. I am trained as a expressive therapist so I know the power of meditations, art, and writing as a vehicle for healing regardless of any particular stage of one's disease. Healing has many faces.

CULTIVATING COURAGE WITH JOAN OF ARC

When someone travels the journey of cancer, resilience, integrity and courage are required on that healing path. Your journey will be different than someone else's because we all possess our unique signature. I choose Joan of Arc as the symbol for my book because her achievements were extraordinary not only for her time, but for any time. She defied convention and was committed to her quest to restore the deposed King of France no matter what and was successful in convincing him that she, the *Maid of Orleans* as she liked to call herself, would lead his army into victory to defeat the Burgundian armies and she did. Her story is extraordinary.

When you consider that Joan of Arc, was only a teenager when she commanded thousands of men in battle during the fourteenth century, faced the Inquisition and died proudly refusing to alter one word of story, even when it would have saved her life- you really can't believe that she existed but she did. She is the quintessential icon of feminine courage and faith. These are the attributes most needed by women facing a diagnosis of cancer or any life-threatening disease. Drawing directly from the words Joan spoke at her trial, I chose thirty-one Flames of Courage and thirty-one Gateways of Courage to be used over the course of a month or a year to resurrect inner fortitude and create an environment for women's healing. The root of the word, Heal, is haelen and it means to be whole without regard for where someone may be on their experience with cancer. Finding one's wholeness in the midst of a serious health crisis is formidable however I believe that when you utilize the triad of healing-mind, body and spirit, that it can help women access and reclaim their personal power to find your own brand of healing and peace.

Emblematic of Joan of Arc's extraordinary journey is the fact that she was chosen as the symbol for the women's suffragette movement and the image that was used during that time was of Joan riding her horse with the words; "Forward into Light" beneath her. That imagery speaks to me personally because not only do I work with light healing, but light has always symbolized connection with the Divine and who better than Joan to illustrate that connection. Her 'voices' that served for her divine guides were legendary as well as her insistence on dressing in men's clothing and both factors were the root of her problem during her trial. It made sense that she would want to dress in men's clothing particularly because she was surrounded by men and a long, flowing gown when she was leading an army would have been ridiculous. What I love so much about Joan is that she refused to back down on anything-and fiercely defended herself with dignity, nobility and often humor. During the trial, when asked in her visions which she also had, if they had clothes on, she replied; "don't you think that God would have the where withal to clothe them?" This was a young woman afraid of nothing.

I have always hated the accepted mythology that people with cancer are to be pitied and are weak because I never saw that. My mother had a ten year battle with cancer and she had enviable courage, and I am sure I would not have had the courage to go through the countless surgeries, treatments and hospital stays across the country that she did. This book was written to honor her first and foremost and I would give anything not to have this book and to have her back in my life. She was my teacher, my best friend, and I loved and love her dearly. I chose various attributes from Joan's trial that seemed to be lit up in neon when I read them—attributes such as valor, and surrendering, and courage---and that is why the book is a combination of Joan's actual words spoken at her trial, as well as a message from Joan that I received in alignment with her. The reader also has the chance to experience a meditation as well that reflects that particular theme. The second part of the book

asks the reader to delve deeper into their own internal landscape to explore these Flames of Courage in an effort to recapture, restore and reframe their experiences in empowerment. Every woman will have their own story and experience and I hope that this book can rekindle their hope when they are in most need of it. Joan is a companion that one can count on and it's ok not to have enough courage, or faith or hope—that is why she is there as friend and ally.

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