

The Southampton Press

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CANCER JOURNEYS

A Twice-a-month column from
Fighting Chance

A Patient's Story



Diagnosis

Emotional Impact

Treatment/Side Effects

Survivorship

Patient Stories

My name is Michele Shenfield. I live on the East End. This is a story about my cancer journey.

In October 2018, at age 71, I was diagnosed with Stage II lung cancer. I guess no one expects a cancer diagnosis . . . but I was shocked.

I am a retired hospital administrator, having worked at NYU Bellevue. I was in good health, or so I thought . . . conscientiously committed to preventive care, seeing all appropriate doctors on a scheduled basis.

Then I got this cough that wouldn't go away. Within 60 days I had x-rays, scans, numerous tests and meetings with specialists, and a lobectomy that removed half of my left lung. Then I started on chemo. After a three month course of treatment, I was told I was cancer-free, and with routine check-ups, a bit of faith and luck, I would be okay. But not really.

The anger, the heightened emotions, the quick fuse that could ignite in a New York second, the crying. Something was going on.

Being someone who prided herself on a certain level of awareness,

I reasoned that it was the fear of the cancer returning that was troubling me; but, since I had identified the cause of my fear, I thought I could move on.

However, I couldn't; I felt stuck. My partner and I talked; and I realized I needed to speak to someone -- a professional who understood and who could help me navigate my emotional distress.

"Cancer can be a devastating diagnosis and navigating the emotional waters, was, for me . . . more difficult than navigating the disease itself."

Luckily I heard about Fighting Chance around this time, and learned that they provide free-of-charge counseling from licensed oncology social workers.

When I called for an appointment I found out that Fighting Chance has offices in Sag Harbor and at the Phillips Family Cancer Center in Southampton. I selected the Sag Harbor office and was referred to a staff counselor, Amy Zachary, LCSW.

Amy turned out to be my lifeline and continues to be a lifesaver.

I learned not only that my fear is normal, but also how to deal with it.

Amy suggested what she called "coping strategies." For example, I talk with Amy on a weekly basis; my partner and I joined a yoga class; and I talked much more about how my life had changed. I felt engaged in living again.

Cancer can be a devastating diagnosis and navigating the emotional waters was more frightening and difficult than navigating the disease itself. But then I found, in Fighting Chance an organization that understood my challenges and had the ability to help me. And all of it was free of charge.

I am, and continue to be eternally grateful.

Fighting Chance has offices in Sag Harbor and at the Phillips Family Cancer Center in Southampton.

For more details, or information please call **631 725 4646**.

Visit our website at www.fightingchance.org