



## Cancer can be positive turning point in life

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She is 'Miss Jackie' today, sharing the excitement each time a preschooler manages to pour a cup of milk without spilling it.

But nearly six years ago doctors found cancer in her right lung during a routine X-ray after a car accident. And Jackie Weddington was so angry and afraid she took to her bed and hid beneath the covers. Then, she says, something changed.



Cancer survivor Jackie Weddington works with students from left, Jonathan Shelor, 3, J.R. Roberts, 4, and Joshua Moore, 3, as a Montessori teacher at the UU World of Children(OWEN RILEY JR/Staff)

"I said, OK. I've got a year anyway. I can sit around and feel sorry for myself or I can get off my butt and do something," says the 63-year-old Greenville woman who now is an intern in the Montessori teaching method. "I want to live as fully as I can now."

Cancer strikes one in three people. And thanks to medical advances, it's often more of a chronic disease than a fatal one. But it's still frightening. So it may seem hard to understand when Sandra Bullock, mission delivery manager for the American Cancer Society in Anderson, Greenville and Laurens counties, says it can be a positive turning point in a person's life.

"You can curl up in fetal position or move on with your life, and more and more people are doing that," she says. "They do things they always wanted to do but never took the time to do, like starting a new career, getting a hobby or traveling."

That's the message of an upcoming event at Furman University — "Cancer as a Turning Point—From Surviving to Thriving." The two-day event gathers medical experts, nutritionists, entertainers and survivors to share stories of celebrating life after a diagnosis of cancer, like comedian and survivor Scott Burton.

"I felt, and still do," he says, "that each moment laughing is a moment you are if only for a second in love with life."

Other presenters include psychologist and author Lawrence LeShan, who teaches cancer patients how they can enrich their lives, Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, who helps physicians develop more empathy and compassion for their patients, and nutritionist Jeanne Wallace, who espouses dietary changes as an adjunct to cancer treatment.

Among the survivors are David M. Bailey, who eschewed corporate life nine years ago to become a singer-songwriter after he was given six months to live when he was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and inspirational humorist Terri Tate, a nurse who fought back from tongue cancer to become a motivational speaker.

The conference provides a blueprint for what life can be after a diagnosis of cancer, says Robin Davenport, who is credited with starting the movement to bring the event, which has only been held on the West Coast up to now, to the Upstate.

"When you have a life-altering illness, oftentimes you feel as if you've totally lost control," says Davenport, who has a rare form of cancer that spread to her lungs. "This conference helps people realize there are many things they can do on their own that will enhance their quality of life."

Davenport, 62, was watching a public television special when she was introduced to LeShan's approach. Following his suggestion, she made two lists — one of things that made her feel alive and another of things that sapped her. It helped her eliminate the negative and incorporate more life-affirming activities, like painting and reading.

"It redefined my life," she says, "and shows the powerful thing about the mind-body connection."

Afterward, she attended a 2003 Healing Journey conference in Seattle and was so moved she decided to rally friends to help raise the \$120,000 needed to ensure the event could be offered for free. So far, she says, registrations have come in from 19 states and Canada.

"There's a quote from Maya Angelou: 'People won't remember what you did or what you said, but nobody will ever forget how you made them feel,' " she says. "It's how this conference makes you feel. You are still valued. This illness can enhance your life. It doesn't have to diminish you. It gave me a great feeling of hope."

Lessons from the conference can also help health care providers view their patients as more than just bodies and illnesses, says Dr. Jeffrey Giguere, an oncologist with CancerCenters of the Carolinas, a sponsor of the event.

"Some of these concepts are a little more integrative, complementary, and humanistic," he says. "You want to take care of the person, not just the cancer cells that have gone bad."

Tuning into that mind-body connection has helped Greenville lawyer Martha Miller survive and thrive despite the diagnosis of cancer she got 10 years ago.

"It can go either way with cancer, and I'm no more special than anyone else," says Miller, a member of the conference steering committee.

"But if your immune system is weakened by the stress of fearing death and all the other adverse things that happen to you when you have cancer, it can pull you down," she says. "And if you can learn to let go of the fear and the dread, you can be happy and productive in ways that you could not be, and I feel that is helpful to your immune system to fight the cancer."

Weddington was terrified when she learned that more people die from lung cancer than any other cancer, and that few survive five years. Both her parents had died of lung cancer.

But she was afraid of the pain, too. She wondered whether she'd be courageous throughout it all and handle herself with dignity. She feared that her grown children would have to care for her. Dealing with all that, as well as the meningitis that her 4-year-old granddaughter was not expected to survive around the same time, caused her to re-examine her life.

"The way I like to look at it knowing that life is finite, is that for the privilege of being alive, and all this beauty and wonder, and love and kindness and friendship, you have to accept the fact that it will end some day," she says. "And it makes you more aware. You have to be alive now."

She learned to prioritize, too.

"I'd lay in bed at night and worry did I do this or did I do that? Or I should have said this or that. What a waste of precious time," she says. "I could be going for a walk, reading a book, having a conversation."

Miller, 51, was a self-described control freak who fretted over every little thing as she tried to be super mom to her kids, then 10 and 13. Cancer was "a real wake-up call," she says, helping her to slow down, enjoy time with her family, and with herself.

"It really taught me what's most important in life, and to appreciate every moment I have, that it is a transient thing and not worry about tomorrow, because you realize it's not in our power," she says. "I'm just very happy to be here."

The conference lessons are offered through music, drama, inspirational talks and humor as an empowering celebration of what the human experience can be, says Gene Covington, another member of the steering committee.

After her husband, Greenville businessman Champ Covington, was diagnosed with throat cancer in 1999, they both discovered strength they didn't realize they had. They were enriched by, and grateful for, the people they met along the way. And they relish every day.

"Champ often says if he had to do it over again, to go through it or not, he would go through it because our lives and our relationship were so enhanced," Gene Covington says. "And we have both really been grateful for the opportunity to share with other people who are going through the same thing."

Weddington now enjoys life so much she wishes she'd started her Montessori training earlier.

"Working with children, there's always so much joy and wonder, because everything is so new for them," she says. "Sometimes when I see life through them, it's like I'm seeing it for the first time."

Giguere says an attitude like Weddington's is the point of the conference. There are people who focus on the thorns and those who focus on the roses. And while science may not be able to prove that those who focus on the roses live longer, they certainly live better, he says.

"There are the Tiggers and the Eeyores," he says of the optimistic and pessimistic Winnie the Pooh characters. "And this conference is about taking some of those Eeyores and making them into Tiggers."



## Conference offers cancer victims tips on coping

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A diagnosis of cancer can mark the beginning of a new life for many, and a conference that helps show people the way is in the Upstate this weekend.

The two-day event — "Cancer as a Turning Point -- From Surviving to Thriving" — gathers medical experts, nutritionists, entertainers and survivors at Furman University to share their stories and their guidance.

Featured are psychologist and author Lawrence LeShan, who counsels patients on how they can enrich their lives; Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, who helps health-care providers tune into the mind-body connection with her message of empathy and compassion; and nutritionist Jeanne Wallace.

Survivors include David M. Bailey, who gave up the corporate life years ago and became a singer-songwriter after he was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and motivational speaker Terri Tate, who fought back from tongue cancer.

Also featured are comedian Scott Burton, actor Annan Paterson and singer Bukeka Newby-Shoals.

Cancer survivor Robin Davenport of Greenville says the conference provides a blueprint for what life can be after a diagnosis.

"When you have a life-altering illness, oftentimes you feel as if you've totally lost control," she says. "This conference helps people realize there are many things they can do on their own."

The conference is free and will be held at McAlister Auditorium today and Sunday, beginning at 9 a.m.



## Cancer conference brings hope to victims

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When Terri Tate learned she had tongue cancer, she wondered if she'd ever speak again.

Twelve years later, she's not just speaking, she's bringing down the house.

"When I was diagnosed, I decided to focus on the bright side of cancer," she told cancer survivors and others gathered at Furman University Sunday. "I got a lot of time off from work. . . and there were some mellow moments on liquid morphine."

The audience roared at her irreverence.

Tate was among the speakers at the two-day "Cancer as a Turning Point" conference, designed to help people get the most they can out of life after a diagnosis of cancer.

"There's nothing like seeing somebody who was supposed to die and didn't to make people who think they're going to die feel a whole lot better," says Tate. "I had a 2 percent chance of survival. I wish I could have talked to somebody who was 12 years out from a 2 percent chance of survival back then."

More than 900 registered for the event, which attracted people from all over the country. William Thompson and his wife, Sylvia, a cancer survivor, drove nearly 1,500 miles from El Paso, Texas, to see what they could get from it.

"It's like a coaching clinic," he said. "You take ideas from other coaches and incorporate them into your team, which is what we're doing."

"The way people make the best of a bad situation is pretty inspiring," his wife added.

"It's been very uplifting," said Jan Byrd, a survivor who drove four hours from Tennessee. "And my husband has gotten as much out of it as I have."

Also among the speakers was clinical psychologist Lawrence LeShan, who encouraged listeners with his messages of the power of the mind and living life to the fullest.

Years ago, he said, while on rounds in a New York Hospital, he came upon a young gang member diagnosed with a fatal form of cancer. He'd lost most of his comrades and life had little meaning for him.

As they talked, LeShan discovered he was excited by the idea of becoming a firefighter even though treatments weren't promising and few people survived his cancer. But the more he talked, the stronger he got. He achieved his goal and lived beyond retirement, says LeShan, who credits his attitude with his ability to beat the odds.



Cancer survivor and comedian Scott Burton used humor, juggling and a mouth full of ping pong balls during the 'Cancer as a Turning Point' conference held Sunday at Furman's McAlister Auditorium.

"None of us is a statistic," said LeShan, encouraging people to ignore the numbers. "And statistics have nothing to do with any individual."

Helena Ess of Greer took the story to heart.

"I had a stem cell transplant for multiple myeloma in November 2003 and six months later I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Both are in remission," said the 57-year-old personal chef. "The mantra really becomes everyone is different."

Pedrick Lowery, marking her one-year anniversary as a cancer survivor, said LeShan motivated her to make a list of things she wants to do in the future.

"It makes you think about how to live the rest of your life," said the 50-year-old Greenville woman, "and that applies to all of us, not just cancer survivors."

And Warren Arseneaux, manager of the Poinsett Club in Greenville and esophageal cancer survivor, said he was moved to help others who've been recently diagnosed.

"When I first went into remission a year and a half ago, I had a strong urge to help other people and I've kind of deviated from that," he said. "This put me back in touch with that."

Other presenters included holistic physician Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen, nutritionist Jeanne Wallace, and comedian and cancer survivor Scott Burton. Also featured were David M. Bailey, who quit corporate life to become a singer-songwriter after he was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and actress Annan Paterson, who performed her own play, *Deep Canyon*, about her experience with ovarian cancer 15 years ago.

Response to the first East Coast Healing Journeys conference was so positive, said Greenville oncologist Dr. Jeffrey Giguere, that organizers are already thinking about another conference in 2007.

The event's holistic message helps people discover how much their attitudes can influence survival and quality of life, says Tate.

"I believe there's a lot more to it and we're now beginning to see that with the studies on prayer and attitude and intangibles that you just can't measure. There's no way of knowing what role those factors are going to play in any individual's survival," she says. "I'm alive and chewing 12 years after cancer. I don't have to know why. I'm just grateful that I am."



## Cancer patients put body, soul into healing

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Struck by cancer two years ago, survivor Michael Titus and his wife Patricia, of Durham, N.C., say the disease has drawn them closer than they've ever been.

"It was a turning point," Patricia Titus said. "It has not only improved our relationship, but impacted our lives."

Michael Titus said the couple's trip from North Carolina to attend the "Cancer as a Turning Point" conference at Furman University this weekend is a significant outing for him.

"This is farthest I've been in two years," he said. "I haven't gone into remission."

Titus repeated a theme touched on by each speaker Saturday: The medical community can do only so much to help patients recover from cancer. Each person has to "recognize the will to live," Dr. Rachel Remen, one of several speakers at the conference, which continues today.

"I've had to heal the whole person," Titus said. "I'm not the same person I was. I wouldn't want to be that person again."

Titus said he had to revamp everything — his thinking, his relationship with his wife, his diet, and his views on life and death — to survive cancer.

"You can't help but turn to God when you're overwhelmed," said Patricia Titus, a nurse.

The Tituses joined almost 800 people from almost 20 states and Canada for the conference, said Jan Adrian, an organizer.

Richard Riley, a former South Carolina governor and cancer survivor, welcomed guests.

Adrian said this is the 19th year of the conference and the first on the East Coast. The major sponsors were Bon Secours St. Francis Health System and Cancer Centers of the Carolinas.

Giving the introductory address, Adrian asked those in the audience who had been diagnosed with cancer to stand up; more than half of those in McAlister Auditorium stood.

Some have been diagnosed with months to live and spoke of how they've used a variety of therapies, from alternative medicines to changes in diet, exercise and yoga, to survive.

Russ Burns said he survived a prognosis in 1998 that gave him just months to live.

"The danger in accepting all of this can be a self-fulfilling prognosis," he said. "My response to my doctor's prognosis

is that it was unacceptable."

So, Burns said he began to fight and struggle back, with chemo, with music, with anything he could think of.

"I came to realize that cancer treatment is more than what's FDA approved," he said. "You're never so alive as when you face your death."

Remen, a motivational speaker giving a keynote address, said even her medical training must be augmented with mental and spiritual remedies to help cancer survivors.

"The doctors can't tell you what they don't know," she said in a hour-long speech.

Remen, who has had eight surgeries in 50 years, recounted a story from when she was a teen living in New York City about mystery's role in illness. She said she and a friend were walking down a Manhattan street when they looked down and spotted "two blades of grass" growing through the pavement. She said the incident has always been an "ah-ha" moment for her.

"There is a will to live in all of us," Remen said. "All it needs is a faithfulness. Following your deepest wisdom may be the best way to live."

Remen, a best-selling author, said surviving cancer frequently takes skills most people don't realize they have, and developing a viewpoint they never dreamed they could have.

"There's very little to help us recognize the mysteries in life," she said. "Sometimes the more somebody knows, they less likely they would be open to mystery."

Mary Bernau-Eigen of Milwaukee, Wis., a nurse practitioner of 23 years diagnosed with cancer, said Remen's advice resonated with her.

"In our society, you hear death when cancer pops up," Bernau-Eigen said. "Cancer doesn't necessarily mean death."

Eva Dew Danner of Charlotte, twice diagnosed with cancer, said she was familiar with Remen and had heard her tapes but wasn't aware of her whole story.

"I think the most inspiring thing is that she has lived with a disease her whole life," she said. She said whoever hopes to win a battle with cancer must learn how combine medical assistance with "something bigger than what we can touch and see."

"I'm still trying to sort that out," Dew Danner said.

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