



THE WARRIORS OF HOPE

By Heidi Himmelfarb
Photographs by Amalshah Levy

These words, "I'm sorry, but you have cancer" can never be erased once they have been chiseled into your memory. Doreen Khatib, Nermeen Maral Garfick and Randa Sady Shalan would know.

Instead of getting beaten down by cancer, the warriors inside them rose up with a spirit of hopeful defiance.

After the initial flood of emotions, from fear and panic to guilt and anger, Doreen, Nermeen and Randa, all cancer survivors, share an unexpected turn in their cancer story. A cancer diagnosis is never a death sentence, asserts Nermeen, a stage 1 breast cancer survivor.

For Randa, a stage 2 breast cancer survivor, "I redefined my own strength, and I never knew I had," she confides. She considers her cancer diagnosis a blessing rather than a curse. "I'm still here, and I'm still here to live life to the fullest." For Doreen, the Everest Base Camp experience was a life-changing event. She took part in a 14-day trek out on a mountain range, and she says the adventure was the best thing she's ever done.



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3 BRAVE WOMEN OPEN UP ABOUT THEIR CANCER EXPERIENCES IN JORDAN

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THE WARRIORS OF HOPE

By Rawad Halawan/
Photography by Anastasia Casey

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For Randa, a stage 2 breast cancer survivor, "It revealed my own strength, one I never knew I had," she confides. She considers her cancer diagnosis of eight years ago a "blessing rather than a misfortune". For the first time, she began to live life fearlessly, even trekking to Mount Everest Base Camp and hiking since. Every time she sets out on a motorcycle with her husband, she is living the adventure.





“I gained weight. I got scars. But I appreciate the strength of my body and I am comfortable in it”
 Nermeen

Yet Randa, President of Friends of Jordan Society, believes that humans are “born fighters”. She told herself, when diagnosed with cancer, “Why stop fighting now?”. “Positivity is a deliberate choice,” she asserts, elaborating, “I had two choices: to feel sorry for myself or to accept it, face it and fight it.”

While Dareen was diagnosed with cancer at an advanced stage, she believes that “nothing is impossible”. She says the mind-body connection is so powerful and invests a lot in her mental health by practicing gratitude and meditation. She even refers to her chemotherapy sessions as “cleansing sessions” to purify her mind and body. She would also ask her family members to advise her on what she should let go of in her “cleansing” sessions. “They once told me to get rid of chronic worrying”.



“Cancer revealed a strength I never knew I had”
 Randa

Nermeen, Chief of Party of The Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Project (TAKAMOL), says she always understood the reality and severity of a cancer diagnosis and that her positive spirit is a fighting spirit. She describes her breast reduction surgery as “a beautifying rather than a damaging operation”. Her advice to fellow cancer survivors is to “stay busy” and “understand it [cancer] but don’t go overboard googling everything”.

As October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Randa encourages all women to get tested: “Cancer testing may seem annoying and intrusive but it could save your life,” she says. “No matter the outcome, you can beat it”.

Win or lose, Dareen, Nermeen and Randa are our warriors of hope, inspiring us all to live our best lives yet.

Can positive thinking help beat cancer?

Positive Psychologist Ibrahim Mango says it’s tempting to conclude that a positive and optimistic attitude can help beat cancer. Several studies suggest a link between a positive attitude and improved medical outcomes but he says that such “evidence” is mostly anecdotal and mentions “obscure sources”. He adds, “A ‘fighting spirit’ and trying to ‘find the good in the disease’ have not demonstrated an increased rate of recovery of cancer patients.” Dareen, Nermeen and Randa don’t make grandiose claims either but they do assert that positive thinking does matter – it might not save you from cancer but with it, you can find meaning, peace and happiness for every day that you live. Mango agrees and concludes, “Being optimistic generally has a favourable impact on a person’s mental and physical health.”