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## Meet a Miracle Doctor

It's a very little thing, I will admit. But I did it. I faced the fear. And I will take space here to cheer for myself. And to publicly thank my amazing doctor. OK, so a couple of weeks ago, I had my first blood test in three years.

What's the big deal, you ask? The big deal is that I have been, until now, absolutely terrified to have anyone come near me with a needle. Two rounds of chemotherapy, six and five summers ago, did a number on my veins, i.e., it is real tricky to get blood out of me. But the chemo did a worse number on my brain. I came out of treatment, thankful to be alive, but traumatized to the core: terrified of doctors and medicine and bloodwork and IVs and CT scans and MRI's and Pet scans.

In 2005, I said goodbye to my oncologist. Every time I would go in for a follow-up visit, I would tell him that I was doing daily yoga and meditation. I would tell him that I was eating meticulously (all kinds of organics, tons of greens, etc.) and that I was relying on herbals (including green barley powder) to boost my immune system. Most of all, I would say that I was focusing on keeping an optimistic point of view.

He would kind of chuckle, as if all this alternative, mind-body stuff didn't mean much.

Then he would examine my lymph nodes (I had been treated for lymphoma). He would touch my neck, looking for lumps. He would feel under my armpits. He would check my abdomen. And then he would put his stethoscope to my lungs. Finally, he would step away and look at me and say (these are his exact words), "You are disgustingly healthy."

Oh, and then he'd send me on my way to get the dreaded blood test.

I was traumatized by having cancer, but honestly, I was even more traumatized by most of the doctors who treated me. I could tell you horror story after horror story. I could

tell you about the cocky doctor at Sloan Kettering who, as I was about to start chemo in July of 2002, prescribed Bactrim, an antibiotic, to prevent infection.

"But I'm allergic to Bactrim," I told him. "I throw up when I take it."

"Prove it," he said. And yes, THOSE were his exact words.

Instead of challenging him, as I should have, I took the Bactrim. And the chemo.

A day later, after throwing up non-stop for hours and hours and hours, I landed in the emergency room, sick as a dog.

The cocky doctor called the next day to say he was sorry he hadn't listened to me.

Well, so, that was just the beginning. In a previous post, I wrote about this same doctor INSISTING that I needed a stem cell transplant in 2003. Fortunately, by that time, I had learned something. I had learned to listen to my body. AND to my intuition. I resisted the stem cell, and insisted on a second opinion (he said there was no need for one, since he was the "national expert" on my disease.) Finally, I sought the opinion of another, older (kinder) and more experienced doctor at Dana Farber who also happened to be a specialist in my disease.

This second doctor agreed with me, that I did NOT need the stem cell. This same kind-hearted man also clued me in as to why the doctor at Sloan was so keen on doing a stem cell transplant on me: it was, in part, because I would have fit in so very nicely with a research project he had going at Sloan, one that looked at how stem cell transplants "helped" patients who had "failed" treatments for lymphoma.

The doctor at Dana Farber told me (his words) this: "you know, Claudia, when you are a hammer, you look at the rest of world as if it is filled with nails. I'm afraid the doctor at Sloan is a hammer. And you were his nail."

Nice, huh?

Well, so, you can see maybe why I got so skittish about doctors.

But in 2005, I found a new doctor, one I trust completely. He is smart, skilled, caring, sensitive and insightful. The kind of practitioner everyone should have.

Ron Stram, originally trained to practise emergency room medicine, decided a few years back that many of the people who landed in the ER wouldn't be there if they'd had better preventative medicine. He also started to take a good hard look at so-called "alternative" therapies. That led him to do a residency in integrative medicine at the University of Arizona, under the direction of Dr. Andrew Weill.

When he finished, he set up the Center for Integrative Health and Healing, in Delmar, New York.

The first time I visited Ron, three years ago this month, I spent most of my time in his office crying. I explained all the horror that had been inflicted on me by the doctor at Sloan, and by another oncologist locally.

Ron, accompanied by the naturopathic physician in the office, sat there. He nodded, and he listened, and he listened, and he listened some more. He examined me, very calmly, and he told me that I appeared to be very healthy. He asked me how he could help me to move forward, to heal. He asked how he could support my efforts to stay healthy. He put absolutely no pressure on me. At the time, I was about to leave for a long trip. I was headed to Spain, to Andalucia, to explore a region that is close to my heart (and my love for flamenco guitar!) I told him I wanted to go on that trip, and I did not want to think about cancer, or blood tests, or treatments. I wanted to spend time with my family, and enjoy life to the fullest. I told him I would come back and see him again, and when I did, we would talk about a plan for "treatment."

Well, so, I did go back to see Ron, several times, but every time the subject of blood tests came up, I froze. I just couldn't face it. I just couldn't handle the idea of anything the least bit invasive or scary.

Ron gave me space. He let me take the lead. He told me he was there for me in any way I needed him to be. He told me to trust what I was doing to stay healthy (he also made many suggestions too.)

I should say that in the last four years, I have had maybe one or two colds. Period. I've been totally energetic, and healthy.

About a month ago, I woke up one morning and thought to myself, you really ought to get your cholesterol level checked. And your thyroid levels, too. And so, without much fanfare, I made an appointment at a hospital lab. I fasted, and early the next morning, I went to the lab and had the blood test. It took two technicians to get my blood. And I had a bit of panic waiting for the results.

But it all worked out fine.

Yesterday, I made an appointment to see Ron. To begin to talk about what else I might do or need to ensure I stay healthy.

To Ronald Stram, I say, thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for standing by me. Thank you for being such an extraordinarily caring and talented practitioner. Thank you for starting the Center for Integrative Health and Healing. Thank you for giving me the space I needed. And for encouraging me to trust myself in the journey to stay healthy. You are one very special doctor. And I am one very, very lucky patient.

Visit website: [The Center for Integrative Health and Healing near Albany New York](#)