

Journaling with Angela Padilla

Stefanie: I was given an opportunity to share a very personal journey with an amazing woman named Angela Padilla and in a way.

Angela, I feel like I went on this journey together with you and I was reminded of something very important which is standing with another grounds us and helps us heal.

My first question to you is, why did you journal your journey?

Angela: I wanted to create a memory that it had happened because I was afraid that if I didn't photograph it, it would be forgotten. I felt that other young woman needed to see what this breast cancer journey was, they needed to see the ups and downs, they needed to see the strengths and weaknesses, the high points and the low points.

I wanted to model survival but I also wanted the world to see that breast cancer was not just pink ribbons and pink hats and pink feathers. It was, it is a battle, it's a war.

It's really gruesome and really painful and difficult and I wanted all of that to be exposed but mainly,

I was afraid that it would happen, and then I would forget and, it would be like it hadn't happened.

It was really important to create a visual tangible memory of it to prove that it had happened.

Stefanie: And at the time we really only heard about older women.

Angela: That's right- there was very little out there at the time about young women getting breast cancer, especially moms- young moms with a six month old baby.

Stefanie: What was the role of affirmations in the process of your journey?

Angela: I was always looking for affirmations and I would cut them out and tape them to my computer or other important places in my house. The role was to keep me grounded

and to allow me to put the horror of breast cancer into perspective, to inspire me, to keep me positive and to remind me that I was safe. The present moment was all that mattered as opposed to regretting the past and worrying about the future. There was something very powerful and calming about just staying in the present moment and knowing that I was safe in that present moment. Affirmations really helped me to remember those things.

Stefanie: Did you use affirmations before?

I did use affirmations before but I really started to use them in cancer.

Stefanie: But you were already using them and you were already very successful.

Yes, right

Stefanie: Did you ever write your own?

Angela: I didn't write my own with cancer but I did write my own previously in 1991. I wrote a treasure map when I first came to San Francisco. It was one page and it was a series of 5 –10 affirmations that I posted in the bathroom at my Apartment. I would look at it every day remember those important affirmations.

Stefanie: And it was a treasure map?

I called it a treasure map. It was really a map of my heart or a map of my soul –

Stefanie: like nuggets of treasures, important things –

Angela: Right and it worked very well for me when I moved to San Francisco so I thought it would work for cancer too and it did. Here I am 8 years later.

Stefanie: And like you said, the affirmations kept you grounded on the journey of the process.

What do you feel about the image Prayer then and now? The image has been in a lot of places – it was on the cover of the American Journal of nursing – it was exhibited and part of events. Just wondering how it makes you feel or what you remember about how it made you feel.

Angela: I was just really glad that you captured that moment.

It showed Amy's arm around me and Bella in my arms. I felt so surrounded by love. I felt fearful and it shows. My great fear was that my little baby daughter would be without a mother. My fear was that I would die while she was still a young child and she wouldn't know me. It just shows the poignancy of a new mom holding a baby bald and struggling. It really shows a lot of strength. It shows me surrounded by love, strength commitment and stability.

Stefanie: *My perception is you went full face on into this journey— Does that ring true to you?*

Angela: Absolutely – YES I was completely ready to face the cancer and to wrestle with it. I was ready for battle- I was.

I felt up to the challenge and I wanted to win. I don't know what winning means- I think in cancer you can be healed but not be cured. Some people die but it doesn't mean that they have lost their battle.

You can win the battle in the sense of cancer helping you resolve issues in your life. Helping one see life in a more learning full way so in a way you've won, you've been healed- even if you haven't been cured of the cancer.

The cancer journey can heal many parts of your life that are broken or hurting even if at the end of the day the disease itself is not cured and you die.

There are many breast cancer warriors and some are cured

of the disease and others are not. We can all be healed in the heart. Healed as a spiritual emotional and mental process.

I really believe that to be true.

Stefanie: Tell me about starting Bays.

Angela: I started Bays because there were no support resources available for young women with breast cancer in the Bay area.

Bay area Young Survivors is a support action group for women in their 20's 30's and early 40's diagnosed with breast cancer. Most of us are moms with young children or are people who are newly partnered, people just starting off in careers, people at the start of life who are facing a really devastating disease.

Stefanie: I know that the women who are part of Bays – well, for them you created a family. For people who are in it, it can really be a lifeline.

Angela: Yes, and we are now in our seventh year of Bays and the work goes on. We have newly diagnosed women every week calling us. We have newly metastatic people calling on us.

It's a huge group and we don't forget about our dead. We honor our dead. We look to the future and support each other and share. There is so much wisdom and love. It's really amazing. We have created a non-judgmental environment with so much wisdom and good will.

Stefanie: So now we are here at VMware, this great hi tech company where you now work - we just had lunch in a very eco-friendly environment – we are very lucky to live in the Bay Area which really supports that. I just want to hear - how has life changed for you since cancer and are there things that you are doing that have changed as a result of your experience.

Angela: I wish I could say that I was perfect and that I ate a macrobiotic diet, that I was a vegan, I exercise religiously, 7 days a week, that I abstain from alcohol... but I am very imperfect.

So, what has changed is that I try to eat organic fruits and vegetables, meat and dairy. I have reduced or eliminated red meat and try to eat only wild sustainable farmed fish-cruelty free chicken and eggs.

I use minimal cosmetics and other kinds of products. I look for only organic products, try to use green products for house cleaning. I really believe that there are strong environmental factors in breast cancer. I don't think it's exclusively environmental but I think it's a strong factor. I wish I could say I never drank alcohol because alcohol is a factor in breast cancer. It's the one thing that they have determined is a cause.

Stefanie: Do you dry clean your clothes?

Angela: I still do dry clean my clothes. I try to dry clean them less frequently and I air them out, take the plastic

bags off.

I used to store them in plastic bags and I don't anymore.

Stefanie: Are you familiar with some green dry cleaners?

Angela: I am although I haven't found any in my neighborhood-I'd love to.

*Stefanie: I have just the place for you and Guess what?
They deliver*

Angela: Oh my god, really??

*Stefanie: That's right, Pacific Heights Cleaners
Sign me up*

Here's the info

Pacific Heights Cleaners, SF & Sausalito, your Non-Toxic alternative.

<http://www.eco-drycleaners.com>

The Best Certified Green Dry Cleaner in the Bay Area.

* Tell Karl I say hello.

<http://www.stefanieatkinson.com>