
THE PATIENT'S VOICE

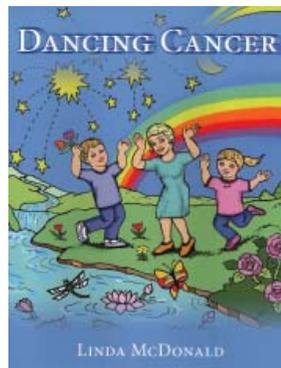
Dancing Cancer

Linda McDonald



I am a three-time cancer survivor. I had my first cancer, a Wilms' tumor, at age 3 years, during a time when people seldom said the word *cancer*. I had my second cancer 30 years later, and my third developed 30 years after that. When I realized there was a shortage of books for children whose lives have been affected by cancer, I decided to tell my survivorship story in a way that children could understand. I wrote *Dancing Cancer*, a book that offers hope and support to all those touched by cancer. It can be used in a discussion with children about a loved one who may be afflicted with the disease while inspiring them to follow their own hopes and dreams.

Dancing Cancer begins when Alex and Michaela come home from school to find that their grandmother, Nana, has breast cancer. They ask their mother, "What is cancer?" They are told that cancer is a serious illness—one that you cannot catch and that does not result from behaving badly, but one that will cause Nana to endure chemotherapy treatments and lose her hair. Alex wants to know more, and he asks Nana to describe her life growing up. Nana tells her grandchildren about when she was first diagnosed with cancer at a very young age and how she survived, went to school, and was active as a student, dancer, and cheerleader. Nana tells them how she loved to dance. Thirty years later, while pursuing her love of dance, she got



her second cancer. She was healed and continued to follow her dancing dreams, traveling and teaching others about her love of movement. Thirty more years passed, and now Nana has just been told she has breast cancer. Nana is not scared because she has faith that there is good in every situation. She encourages her grandchildren to follow their hopes and dreams and turn their scares into stars. Great medical help, the support of family and friends, living a well-balanced life, eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, getting plenty of exercise, having a positive attitude and faith—all these lead to Nana's healing.

As a three-time cancer survivor, I am interested in survivor self-care skills and integrative cancer care. I have attended meetings of the Society for Integrative Oncology (www.integrativeonc.org/) and the Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Cancer Therapies conferences (<http://annieappleseedproject.org/4thevoalcac.html>). I have taught movement and dance at all levels, from preschool through college, and worked with the mentally and physically disabled, senior adults, and cancer survivors. I have conducted workshops for the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, the National Arthritis Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Parish Nurse Association, the YMCA, the Moffitt Cancer Center, The Wellness Community, and AARP. I am a certified trainer for the medically-based therapeutic exercise Healthy-Steps/Lebed program that is used in more than 800 hospitals and centers in the United States and worldwide. In these ways and others, I have explored what survivors can do to make their cancer journey a more positive experience. ■

Linda McDonald lives in Sarasota, Florida.