

Q and A with Carrie Host

Author of

BETWEEN ME and the RIVER: Living Beyond Cancer

1. Q: What inspired you to write such an intimate book?

CH: *Both the isolation of deep suffering and knowing that later in life my children might never really know what happened to me. I thought at the very least my three children would be better off having answers to their own questions in relation to this period of time. I thought with what seemed a very short future, I should write about the unspoken aspects of living with an incurable disease, as honestly as I could. Ultimately, I wanted my words to illuminate the very dark halls of cancer for others.*

2. Q: What words of wisdom or encouragement would you offer those diagnosed with cancer?

CH: *Believe in yourself. You are so much stronger than you might have previously imagined possible. Also, it is so much more productive to try to choose to focus on the outcome you want, rather than the trouble you're in.*

3. Q: In the book you worried about what impact cancer will have on your children, do you still have that worry?

CH: *Yes, I do. But I try to be gentle on myself there; knowing that I truly have done my best to nurture them and to insulate them from as much as I can while still being honest. It is a real balancing act for sure. Now though, five years into it, it is easier to see that they are stronger and more capable because of this unfortunate experience.*

4. Q: Was writing a cathartic in dealing with your illness?

CH: *Yes, without a doubt. I experienced this kind of "purification" of my own emotions as I would have to magnify and revisit them in order to capture them on paper. But I had no idea when I began writing the book that it would end up serving me in so many unexpected ways.*

5. Q: What are some of the most ridiculous and memorable things that happened to you on your journey from diagnosis through treatment to recovery?

Well, becoming a skeleton was interesting for sure. I weighed 97 lbs at my lowest point and I was very weak. We have huge winds out at our house, I mean up to 80 miles per hour. So one morning, it was howling but I wanted the newspaper. My husband had already left with the kids and I was alone. So I walked out to get it and as I fought my way down the driveway, this gust just knocked me down! I was so stunned I just sat there laughing. The best part was trying to figure out how to get back into the house. I did crawl for about 10 feet and that's when I spotted a rabbit, looking directly at me from under a bush where he was tucked in nicely. I would swear he was shaking his head and saying, "Silly human!" So yeah, that was humiliating to say the least. But since it was only me and the rabbit I've kept that a secret, until now at least...but since you asked.

6. Q: How does your book differ from, say, the recent spate of popular cancer-oriented books, such as *The Middle Place*? Why should people read your book and hear your story?

CH: *Well first of all, *The Middle Place* is an exceptional book in my opinion. Both books are intimate portraits of women that love being mothers. Both talk about life and family in a humorous way. I'd say that my book is different in that I go delving into some intense terrain emotionally and spiritually. Actually, I think the two books complement each other, as they help the reader connect the dots on the many, many issues that come up for cancer patients and their families. I think that people should read my book to discover their own strength and depth of courage. I hope to inspire others through my story.*

7. Q: What would you say to someone who is reluctant to read another cancer memoir? Or a book about cancer in general?

CH: *"I don't blame you."(laughing) But seriously, I'd invite them to take my book for a whirl because I would say it might be more aptly described as a love story, full of inspiration than as a cancer story; and who doesn't want to take a peek at love?*

8. Q: Following the diagnosis, what helped you cope the most, and gave you strength?

CH: *Amory, my husband, and my deep love for my children. I really derived strength from the idea that I could live "right now" rather than allowing myself to focus on death. Also, I have always been a very spiritual person since I was a child. By that I mean that I was constantly intrigued by the mysteries of faith and of God. What did those ideas mean? I always found my answers in nature, and still do. I took solace in falling snow, a rainbow or a thunder storm. But most often, I go to the river whenever I'm feeling sad.*

9. How has cancer changed your outlook on life?

CH: *Well I can say it has done me a few favors; not the least of which was helping me find my voice. I am so much clearer in all of my choices now. I don't waste time the way I used to; now I make sure that if I am wasting time, I don't take it for granted. I make sure I'm completely enjoying myself doing it!*

10. Q: What is going through your mind as your book hits the bookshelves? Do you worry about exposing yourself? Your family? Your friends?

CH: *Having been humbled many times over by this whole "cancer experience," I think that my main thought around my book hitting the bookshelves is about what I can finally give to others, that I hope will make a difference in their lives.*

I do expose so much, and that is a vulnerable place to be, but this was the most genuine way that I could really give something of myself to help others. I wanted to be of service to others who were suffering, rather than to concern myself with how I might look. I asked myself the question, "How can I make a difference with what time I have left?" Then I wrote the book very much in that spirit.

As far as exposing my family and friends; I hope they'll keep me. Anyway, I'm the one with the cancer, so I think they'll agree that I've got the short end of the stick there. (laughing)

11. Q: What are some of your inspirations as a writer, and how do you think this comes across in your own writing?

CH: *Nature has always been my primary inspiration. Nature runs through everything, at least the way I see it. I draw many metaphors from nature that inform my thoughts, and in that very direct way, my writing. I like the details that I see in things every day; patterns, light, scents and textures. Life is so wonderfully full of opportunities to observe things that I think most folks rush past.*

12. Q: Though this book is based on your experience with carcinoid cancer, there is an underlying theme of self-acceptance. Can you tell us a bit about that?

CH: *Yes, I think that self-acceptance is the basic key to knowing peace. Mainly because you can't ever truly be interested in others if you are busy comparing yourself to what you are not. My father always said, "Strive to be interested, not to be interesting." I'd have to say that advice continues to serve me well.*

13. Q: Did you consciously write this book with a particular audience in mind?

CH: *Not at first. I was writing in response to a question I had posed to myself but as I progressed, I began to recognize that I was writing it for any individual living behind that invisible barrier that cancer creates. I was writing to each one of those people so that they would not feel so alone. Later still I realized that our family, friends and caregivers might also benefit from taking a look behind the curtain cancer draws, or the unspoken part of the cancer experience.*

14. Q: Describe how you found your cancer, were you on 'watch' or did it sneak up on you?

CH: *Oddly, I was never "on watch." I saw myself as the healthiest person ever! Carcinoid Tumor is a very tricky cancer to diagnose as it masks itself with some very common symptoms, such as irritable bowels, wheezing, and flushing of the face which looks and acts a lot like a hot flash. I discovered it after 10 months of running to any doctor that would listen to me about my symptoms and pain. Finally it was first discovered during a laparoscopic procedure to remove an ovarian cyst.*

15. Q: How has being a member of the Caring for Carcinoid Foundation been helpful to you?

CH: *Well I began as a patient looking for support and information and I definitely got both there on their web site: www.caringforcarcinoid.org Then I became a member of the Board of Directors because I believe that I can help them to raise awareness of carcinoid cancer through my book. Also, I bring the perspective of the patient which I think is useful to the further development of the CFCF.*

16. Q: What do you think all cancer patients should know?

CH: *That the blackest night cannot shroud the light of a single candle. I see that "candle" as a person's hope. All cancer patients should know that they deserve to have at least the illumination of hope, no matter how dark their prognosis. Protect the glow of your own candle!*

17. Q: What advice would you give to someone who is newly diagnosed with cancer?

CH: *I would implore them to do their homework, (or have a close friend help them with this) and get involved in their treatment options because, ultimately it will make you feel so much more in control. No one will guide the path of your own situation the way you can.*

18. Q: You use the image of your life as a boat and your journey as a river. What inspired that choice of imagery?

CH: *It was not so much an inspiration as a choice of container for the unfathomable emotion I felt when I heard that I had cancer for the first time. Both were the natural image for my raw emotions as I wrote about them. I have a deep connection to rivers, so it was a natural way to wind through both the story of my journey and the book itself. I really just love rivers.*

19. Q: Have your children read your book? If so, what are their thoughts? If not, why?

CH: Not yet. They each have their own copy with a note inside from mom. I trust that they'll read it when the time is right for each of them, which in William's case may be 15 years from now as he's only six. I do think it might be a tall order for them to read about my deepest feelings, and about their lives through my eyes, at least at this point. This will no doubt be something they can look into later in their own lives.

20. Q: Are there any significant events or current news relating to the subject matter of your book?

CH: Yes. There are several large scale fundraisers for Carcinoid Awareness that will be put on by the Caring for Carcinoid Foundation. I'll be speaking at several events: Open the NEWS or EVENTS link on my author web site to view the current specifics on each at: www.carriehost.com Or see this link for a complete list relating to Carcinoid Awareness!

<http://www.caringforcarcinoid.org/fundraising/fundraisingevents.asp>