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Breast cancer survivor Hollye Jacobs shares personal experience and professional expertise in a new guidebook for patients

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SHARING Her SILVER LINING

By Diana Price



When Hollye Jacobs was diagnosed with breast cancer at 39, her first thought was, *This could be so much worse. My form of cancer is treatable.* Hollye's reaction speaks volumes about her approach to life and her cancer journey. A self-described optimist, Hollye, a palliative care nurse and a social worker, knew that she had the power to choose how she would move forward through the challenges ahead. She chose to see the silver lining in the cloud that was a breast cancer diagnosis.

As she progressed through treatment, which included a double mastectomy, chemotherapy, radiation, and hormone therapy, Hollye shared her experiences through a blog, *The Silver Pen* (thesilverpen.com), telling her story in a voice that was at once funny, compassionate, and articulate. As she honestly described the challenges she encountered along the way, she also pointed to the many silver linings—discoveries, joys, inspiration born of the tragedy of the diagnosis—that appeared, creating glimmers of light in the darkness.

The positive response Hollye received from the unique meeting of personal experience and professional expertise on *The Silver Pen* ultimately inspired her to write *The Silver Lining: A Supportive and Insightful Guide to Breast Cancer* (Atria Books, 2014).

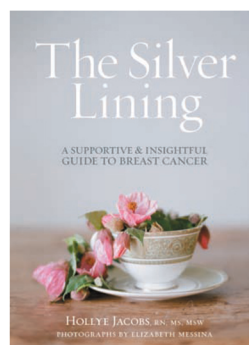
The Silver Lining offers women both inspiring personal stories from Hollye's journey and insightful, empowering information to help guide decisions about the many aspects of treatment and recovery. Hollye's text is interspersed with beautiful photographs by Elizabeth Messina that illustrate the honest, uplifting tone of the book and reflect Hollye's own graceful aesthetic sensibility. The result is a visual, emotional, and intellectual experience for the reader, providing a foundation of sound clinical expertise and the essential, intangible gift of hope.

Photos by Elizabeth Messina





with HOLLYE JACOBS, RN, MS, MSW
Author, *The Silver Lining*



Q: Your blog, *The Silver Pen*, offers readers insight into your cancer journey and valuable information about managing a cancer diagnosis; what inspired you to also write a book?

A: Thank you so much! *The Silver Lining* is the book that I desperately sought, but could not find, after my breast cancer diagnosis. What I needed was a lifeline, a point of reference, a source of encouragement that was simultaneously honest and informative, practical and supportive, hopeful and serious, clinically credible and visually beautiful. No such book existed. Well, until now.

Q: How did the idea of “silver linings” evolve through your own cancer journey, and how do you continue to embrace this philosophy today?

A: From the time of my diagnosis, I realized that I had two choices about how I was going to handle my situation: from a place of fear or a place of hopefulness. I chose—and it was indeed a very active choice for me—hopefulness—in the form of finding silver linings.

When I think about silver linings, it is not Pollyanna-ish as in, “If you just look for silver linings, then everything will be fine.” The truth is that silver linings—unfortunately!—do not take away the nausea, vomiting, pain, and fatigue that can come with a cancer diagnosis and treatment. However, what they *do* do is provide balance and perspective to buoy you through the darkest of days. During my side-effect-filled treatment, silver linings came in the form of watching a hummingbird outside of my window because I was too sick to stand or a warm cup of tea that eased the nausea or a get-well drawing that my daughter brought home from school. It was the little things that made all the difference in the world.

This silver-lining philosophy transcends illness. It applies to any difficulties and even tragedies that are inevitable in this life. What I know for sure is that silver linings are always present. All we have to do is look for them.

Q: Your professional background as a palliative care nurse and a social worker provides readers with valuable expertise across a truly comprehensive range of topics in

The Silver Lining. How did your professional background affect your own experience with cancer?

A: As a nurse and social worker turned patient, I found myself in a very unique position, moving from the side of the hospital bed into it. Becoming a patient gave me a whole new and unexpected conscious sensitivity to the physical and emotional aspects of being a patient, from becoming a human pincushion (because you are stuck with needles seemingly every other day) to contending with the very common feelings of sadness, fear, and anxiety.

From the moment of the diagnosis, my clinical experience was my compensatory mechanism. For example, when the radiologist told me that he found seven tumors in my breasts, I reminded myself that patients typically forget virtually everything that comes after hearing the dreaded words, “You have a tumor.” So, I instinctively knew that I would more than likely forget what I was hearing and needed to start taking notes.

Throughout treatment I consistently reassured myself that as a nurse and social worker with experi-



ence in an intensive care unit and both pediatric and adult hospice, I knew that there was no one better prepared to handle what I was facing. I knew what questions to ask. I knew how to assemble my healthcare team. I knew how to contend with insurance issues. These were silver linings during my experience.

Q: For women newly diagnosed with breast cancer who may be picking up *The Silver Lining*, the idea of all the challenges ahead is no doubt daunting; what tips or words of wisdom would you offer women just beginning the journey?

A: There are four things that I tell everyone diagnosed with breast

cancer. These things also helped me immensely!

First, *breathe*. It sounds easy, I know, but after you hear the words, "You have cancer," breathing takes a whole lot of work.

Second, though the diagnosis feels like an emergency, the majority of time it is not. You have time to understand the meaning and process the emotions stemming from the diagnosis.

Third, learn everything you can about the diagnosis and then become actively involved in the development and the revision of your plan of care!

Fourth, build your team of caregivers—both personal as well as professional. What I learned for sure is that it takes a village to go through breast cancer.

Q: *The Silver Lining* is stylish. It looks different from most cancer guides. It is filled with evocative, beautiful photographs that convey a distinct mood. Can you describe the role that photographer Elizabeth Messina's images played on your journey and what you wanted to offer through the visual element of the photos?

A: The photographic collaboration with Elizabeth was an unanticipated silver lining of my illness. Shortly after surgery, in a gesture of friendship, Elizabeth offered to photograph me. Her vision was one of the brightest and most insightful lights in this dark period. When I looked in the mirror, the reflection that I saw was of illness, scarring, and mutilation. However, Elizabeth's imagery showed my true reflection and reminded me that below the disease I was still me. This book is a combination of my voice and her vision that provides hope, information, and support during the cancer experience.

Q: What do you hope that readers will take away from *The Silver Lining*?

A: It is my hope that this book will be a companion and guide that will support, inform, and inspire everyone whose life is touched by breast cancer. ✨