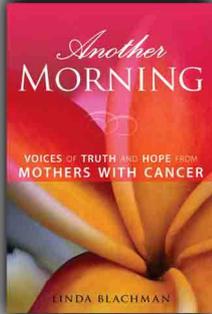


Author's Message Gives Hope to Ill Mothers

—By Noelle Robbins

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Another Morning: Voices of Truth and Hope from Mother's with Cancer

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Linda Blachman has written a scary book. It is also a heart-filling book most of us would read hoping we never have to embark upon the journey so intensely described within its pages. But we are deeply grateful she is taking us there. Particularly if we are mothers, or still our mothers' children.

For the past 10 years, Blachman, who has a masters in counseling and in public health, has been engaged in working with mothers diagnosed with cancer. Her new book, *Another Morning: Voices of Truth and Hope from Mothers with Cancer*, is a love letter from critically ill women to the most important people in their lives, their children. And, according to Blachman, although this work, "focused on creating a legacy for kids, it also provided a healing process for the mothers."

Another Morning is the culmination of experiences and feelings shared through the Mothers' Living Stories Project. Blachman founded this nonprofit organization as a natural melding of her longtime involvement in the Association of Personal Historians, and her extensive career as a public health consultant specializing in life transitions and child and maternal health. Blachman's own ordeal with a disabling illness unexpectedly provided the space and time to ponder the effect that the diagnosis of a serious, perhaps terminal, medical condition might have on a mother's life and on the ability to raise her children.

Blachman launched her project as the result of a disturbing discovery. Although there were numerous studies and support groups to assist women diagnosed with cancer, there was a dearth of comparable resources geared specifically for mothers and their childrearing needs. She became determined to change an environment filled with the sounds of "the silence of mothers' voices."

The Necessity of Being Prepared

"Having cancer changed my conception of what being a mother means. I had always thought that a mother was forever." The personal stories in *Another Morning* echo this mother's words upon learning her diagnosis. Most mothers share this perception. A mother is forever. And yet, even healthy mothers fear the possibility of their own deaths. They fear leaving their children. One of the most crucial lessons Blachman knows her work can convey is the absolute necessity "for all parents to be aware of mortality and to be prepared."

Through her background as a personal historian, Blachman knew that the process of recording the life stories of mothers facing serious illness could be comfortably accomplished in a safe relationship. One of the first goals of the Mothers' Living Stories Project was recruiting and training the sensitive "listeners" who would form the solid base of this story-sharing relationship. And although most of the original volunteer listeners signed on for a year, many stayed for at least seven, discovering a remarkable healing gift for themselves in their work with the mothers, recording intimate revelations, joys and sorrows.

Harvesting Wisdom

Blachman wants all parents to know that the process of documenting life stories is difficult when facing devastating health news, but creating a living legacy for children can happen throughout time. And it may be easier for mothers, healthy or ill, to have a personal historian record two key aspects of their stories: the theme of their lives and what Blachman calls an "ethical will." Ethical wills, in contrast to personal biographies, bequeath life lessons and values. Blachman says that "harvesting wisdom" for the next generation is steeped in Hebrew tradition and is a profound means of conveying moral teachings, spiritual beliefs and emotional philosophy.

Blachman feels that it may be easier for mothers to pass along their wisdom if they consider recording their thoughts and feelings at significant junctures or milestones in their lives. She believes that pausing to reflect can play an ongoing role in how we raise our children. "Parents think about life and what they are modeling for their children." She hopes mothers — and fathers — don't wait until illness strikes, or death looms on the horizon, to communicate their deepest held convictions to the next generation.

Another facet of the battle mothers facing cancer reveal in the profiles is the challenge, following the diagnosis of a life-threatening illness, to muster (while dealing with debilitating side-effects from symptoms and treatments) the empathy to see the situation through their children's eyes. Fighting disease, like giving birth, requires acute self-concentration. But children in the household, regardless of age, can readily sense the shadow stretching across the normal landscape of their lives.

Some women in the pages of Blachman's book feel guilt and remorse at the prospect of leaving their children, abandoning their offspring before the promise of adulthood is reached. The physical struggles these mothers confront demand energy and time that many would rather devote to their families, and they regret the suffering they are imposing on their youngsters.

Ultimately, however, these mothers come to appreciate that one of their biggest jobs may be to protect their children from too much protection. Life entails suffering, and these mothers share how they have learned to emotionally support their children meet suffering head-on, building a resiliency and strength that can be a lifelong gift.

As in all life cycles, The Mothers Living Project is itself at a turning point, transitioning from one-on-one listening and recording life histories, to a consulting practice geared to training other nonprofit groups in the techniques of creating personal histories and ethical wills. Blachman is both sad and hopeful about the prospects: sad because the project of the last 10 years has come to an end, for now, when she knows that so many more mothers and children could benefit from these services; and hopeful that Another Morning will inspire others to take up the cause of providing these services.

The silence has been broken. Mothers' voices, strong and terrified, speaking of love and loss, are heard, teaching us all how to share, and how to listen.

Linda Blachman will launch her book, *Another Morning: Voices of Truth and Hope from Mothers with Cancer* at the Women's Cancer Resource Center, 5741 Telegraph Avenue, with Cody's Books on February 15 at 7pm. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to WCRC. For more information, call (510) 601-4040 or see <http://www.lindablachman.com>.

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