



Courageous Living

Leslie Ferris Yerger is an author, speaker, and disruptor of the status quo in breast cancer screening.

Dear Women Everywhere,

As I think about the concept of fearless living, the role that fear plays in our lives first comes to mind. Fear is something we all have; we are born with it to keep us safe from whatever dangers are lurking out there. To me, fearless living is not so much living without any fear, but rather recognizing fear, facing it, and then having the courage to move forward anyway.

When I received my diagnosis of metastatic (Stage 4) breast cancer, I felt fears I had never experienced before. The fear of not understanding how I could have late stage breast cancer two months after an “all clear” mammogram and ultrasound led me to take a deep dive into learning about our current breast cancer screening standards, which then led to my startling discovery of the inherent inadequacies therein. Subsequent to this initial fact-finding work, I then carefully studied the statistics of each breast cancer screening modality, the pros and cons of each, and have rightly concluded that we have a big problem with our current standard practices. We can do better. But we aren't. By working through this fear and

seeking to understand all I could, a new passion came to life, and I started a new journey.

While walking for 40 days across Northern Spain on the Camino de Santiago, I vowed to change several things about how I would live the rest of my days. First, I will say what needs to be said and not be silenced. Second, I will unapologetically do more of what I want to do even when others prefer me to do otherwise. And finally, I will use the circumstances of my unfortunate diagnosis to help others, so that my story does not become their story, and so more women with breast cancer become survivors. For me, that is a courageous life.

Putting my new vows into practice, let me boldly and clearly say: Our current standard of breast cancer screening is simply not good enough, and we can do better—so let's break down the barriers to progress and start saving more women's lives. No more excuses allowed. I will actively challenge the status quo in breast cancer screening in every way I can think of, and I will all the while keep the faith that I will make a difference for our mothers, daughters, sisters, and friends. I want to live this mission out to the fullest, doing all I possibly can

with no regrets.

One in eight women will get breast cancer at some point in her lifetime. Should you be among the unfortunate one in eight, my wish for you is that you will have the very best breast cancer screening in existence available to you so that your cancer is more likely to be found at an earlier stage while still curable. The world needs you! May you live a long, healthy, and vibrant life full of love and lots of fearless living. May you state your truth boldly, may you take decisive action, and may you courageously use your gifts to make a difference to the world in a way that matters most to you. U

Leslie Ferris Yerger is a speaker and author of “Probably Benign” with a laser-focused mission of disrupting the status quo in breast cancer screening. She is determined to advance the next generation of breast cancer screening technologies, so that her story doesn't become your story, and so that more women with breast cancer become survivors. She is a past Junior and Senior Warden at St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Barrington. Visit leslieferrisyerger.com for more information or email: leslie@leslieferrisyerger.com.