



TEN FRIENDS **JULES DIBIASE**

Just after my second 37th birthday, I got a phone call. My mother had started speaking unintelligible gibberish at the drug store where she worked. She lived for two more months after that; but she never came back. She left four adult children behind, some of whom never knew how much they loved her until she was gone.

A year later, I got a text message. My friend Holli hadn't been feeling well for months. Most of her doctors felt that the cause of the pain in her chest was in her head. They finally arrived at a diagnosis when the tumors on her heart and lungs got so big that they broke a rib. She's 38 years old, two seven year-old sons.

Six months ago, I got an e-mail. Thanks to some disastrous genetic probabilities, another friend and her sister have both chosen to have prophylactic ovariectomies and double mastectomies. They are 33 and 35. Four toddlers between them: all girls.

That same day I had a conversation with a career hospice worker who told me that despite the fact that people are living longer, the average age of hospice patients is getting younger and younger. She said that ten years ago, it would have been unheard of for her to have three 20-something patients under her care, as she does now. You might have already guessed: over 44% of hospice patients are suffering from cancer.

Something isn't right.

There have been other times in the history of this country when things have not seemed right. Studying the women's movement in college, I learned the now hackneyed mantra "the personal is political." In the 1960s, women showed up at their consciousness raising groups, and discovered something very important: they were not alone. Their suffering was not isolated, but universal.

Slavery. Women's suffrage. Polio. The war in Vietnam. We, the American people, have a long history of taking notice when something isn't right. We carried signs. We took arms. We put down our arms. We got politically active. We checked our partisanship at the door. We marched on Washington. We lay in the streets. We burned our bras. We burned our draft cards. People got mad. They stood up. And they did something.

Cancer is an enemy against which we can all bear arms. It wasn't until cancer took away someone that I loved that I woke up. I realized that cancer doesn't have to be something that "just happens"; we can all stand together - in the face of this unfortunate unifier - and make a change.

So what now? Storm the Pentagon? Block the entryway of the NIH with our naked bodies? Picket local radiation clinics with handmade signboards? Burn our HMO cards in Times Square?

Back in the 60s, huge rallies helped get the politicians, the press, and the people to pay attention. In 2008, the call to action is vastly evolved from that of 1968. The Internet is a place where young and old, rich and poor, sick and healthy can be heard. The opportunity to get involved isn't something we have to go looking for; it's coming to us, our living rooms, our offices, our TVs. Everyone has the opportunity to act in this important moment. It is my hope that Standup2cancer.org is 2008's means for discovering - just as the women of the 60s discovered when they crafted their movement - that no one is alone in this fight against cancer.

So what should you do? Stand Up To Cancer is about raising money for innovative cancer research. But if you ask me, "Should I give \$10 or should I tell 10 friends?" I say tell ten friends. This is a new kind of rally cry. Launch a star for your mom (I did). Send an article to your son. Call your office mates over to the water cooler to watch an SUTV video on your cell phone. Put your face on The Stand. Start a team with your college friends - even if you've been out of school for 10 years. Make your vendetta against this disease personal, and insist that the institutions around you - government, big business, non-profit - make this cause political.

If you're not convinced, as maybe I wasn't before my second 37th birthday, that you should be involved, look around. If you are not already affected by cancer, you will be. But not everybody has to be: I want our grandkids to learn about cancer in their history books. To achieve that, we can't delay this revolution for even a moment longer.

Cancer is the cause of great and unnecessary suffering. Let's do something about cancer before it has a chance to take anything else away. The fight against cancer is complex. But our job is simple: join together. It is within your power to choose the effect that you will have on our future.

Jules DiBiase is a screenwriter and Editor-In-Chief of StandUp2Cancer.org. She recently finished her MFA at USC's School of Cinematic Arts, where she was the recipient of the 2007 Jack Oakie Comedy Writing Award and the 2006 Broccoli Foundation Scholarship. She earned her undergraduate degree from Smith College and her Ph.D. from the University of Colorado, Boulder. In her spare time, Jules competes in triathlons for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's Team in Training, in honor of her friend Holli and in memory of her mom, Marion.

***** www.standup2cancer.org/magazine