

CHRYSA LIS

CANCER AND HEALING
STORYBOOK

Annamieka Hopps Davidson

ARTIST. LET'S BRING YOUR WORLD TO LIFE.

CHRYSALIS – CANCER & HEALING STORYBOOK

Over a decade ago, at age 20, I was rocking a bright bald head around town while fighting off a cancer that had grown in my chest. I experienced the power of community, the humility of illness, and a passion for living like a fire in my heart. Cancer brought a radical sense of purpose to my life, one that has driven me to choose many extraordinary experiences over the past ten years: adventures in social work, community art, international volunteer trips, surfing, loving people so big, and just a whole-hearted hunger for life. At times the long-term side effects of radiation and chemotherapy have gotten me down, and I struggled with frustrating fatigue and body parts that quit doing their job for me. I've had the "welcome to the club" chat with more new cancer patients than I can count now, and I imagine I'll always be a resource in some way for people with cancer in my community.

I was an art major in my sophomore year at the University of Oregon when I found out I had cancer. The assignment in my art class the week of my diagnosis was to illustrate a one-page comic about a life experience. Tucked into my hospital bed, receiving my first dose of chemotherapy, I drew the first page of this story book: "The Saga of my Swollen Neck." It became such an effective way to tell people what was going on, we made dozens of copies of it to distribute to friends, family, even the nurses at the hospital. Throughout my treatment I continued to illustrate new pages, and eventually named the story "Chrysalis" to describe the transformative time in life, where everything you thought you knew to be true dissolves, and something new and beautiful emerges out of it. Also, having written and illustrated this story, I've had permission to move on. I don't have to re-hash every detail of a rather traumatic time in life, every time the subject comes up. I have permission to hand people my story book, and then move on with my life. I offer this story to you, to anyone and everyone who needs it.

I feel deeply called to contribute my truth, beauty and my hope to this world. We need to share our stories. It is healing to write that story down and then let it go do its work in the world. It is healing to discover someone else's story that has just the pieces of truth and recognition you needed at that time in life. So go, darlings, tell your stories, share your truths, let's lift each other up.

With love,
~Annamieka



For my family,
and all families touched
by cancer.

The Saga of my Swollen Neck



February 4th. I woke up swollen. What is going on?

Then I spent 8 days in the hospital getting all kinds of tests...

It's not that cool when several doctors are scratching their heads trying to diagnose your condition.

For two weeks I got stuck with a bunch of labels...



WHAT A BLUR!

"We'll know tomorrow"

(Which Tomorrow?)

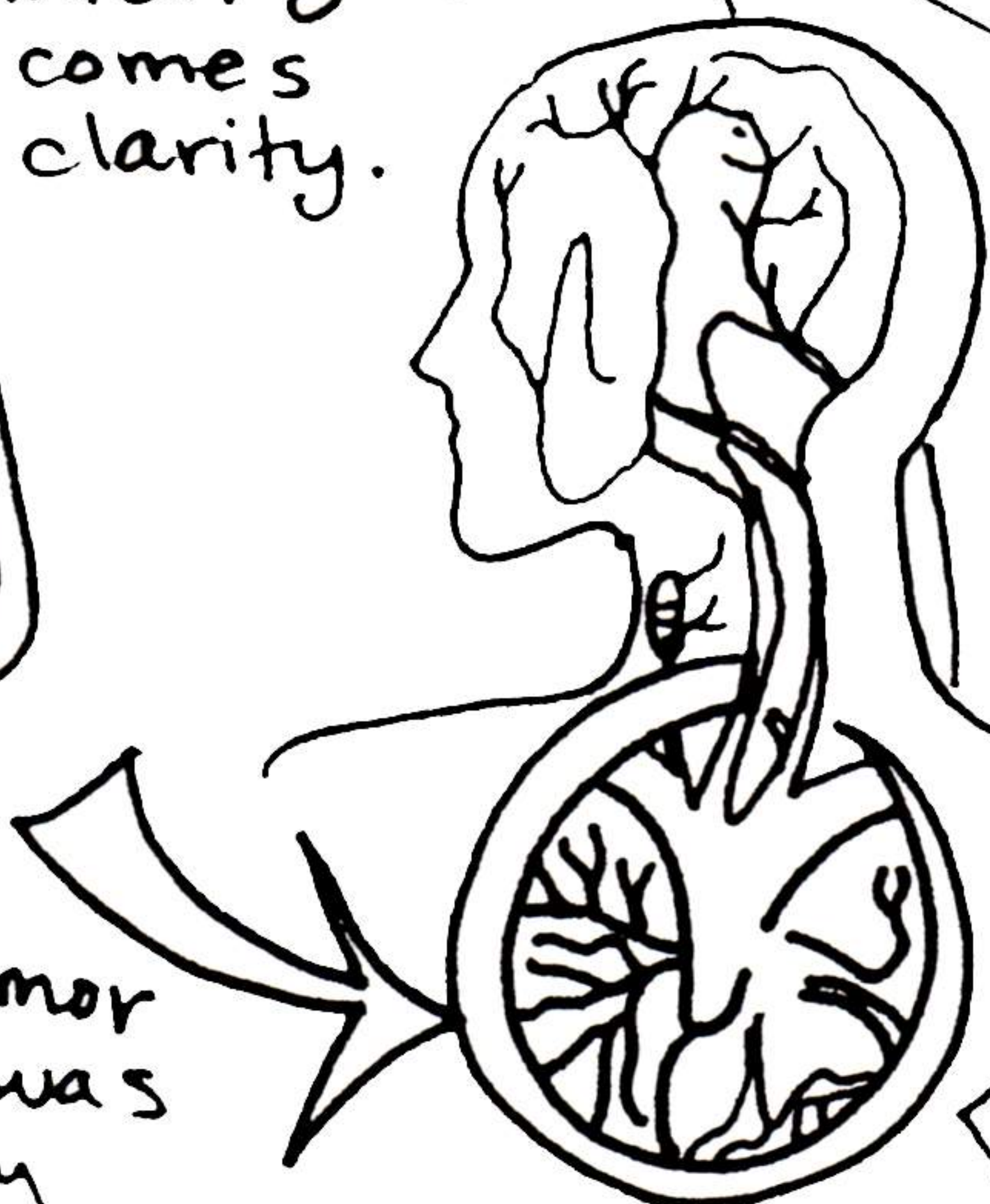


5 Biopsies and who knows the # of blood tests later...

Diagnosis... March 8th
Finally, a label we could work with!

Hi My Name Is ...
Nodular Sclerosing Hodgkins Lymphoma (AKA CANCER)

A bulky tumor in my chest was cutting off my Superior vena cava, causing the swelling.



Finally, we can begin treatment!

COMING SOON:
Adventures in
CHEMOTHERAPY

By
Annamieka
Hopps

March 9th, 2005

Adventures in

CHEMOTHERAPY

...the saga continues

Every two weeks for four months (that's four cycles) I was injected w/ a "cocktail" of chemotherapeutic drugs collectively known as ABVD

Cheers!

To protect my veins from the harsh drugs, I had a port catheter implanted under the skin of my chest

I liked to re-label my chemo drugs, and imagine them eating my cancer cells, like Pac-Man

This is frustrating.

chemotherapy made me feel **SICK, weak and NAUSEOUS...**

then I would regain my strength day by day...

only to be knocked down again by the next cycle.

But I wasn't completely debilitated. Neupogen shots (**OUCH**) between each cycle kept my white blood cell counts high, decreasing my risk of infection.

I even went surfing halfway through chemo, on my 20th birthday.

Soul Medicine

My hospital room served as a gathering place for friends + family during the long treatments. Aside from the nasty drugs, needles, and nausea, some days felt like a party. We even had a Hawaiian theme at my last chemo treatment...

ALOHA, CHEMO!

The incredible staff of floor 6, oncology, crowded in to sing a farewell song!

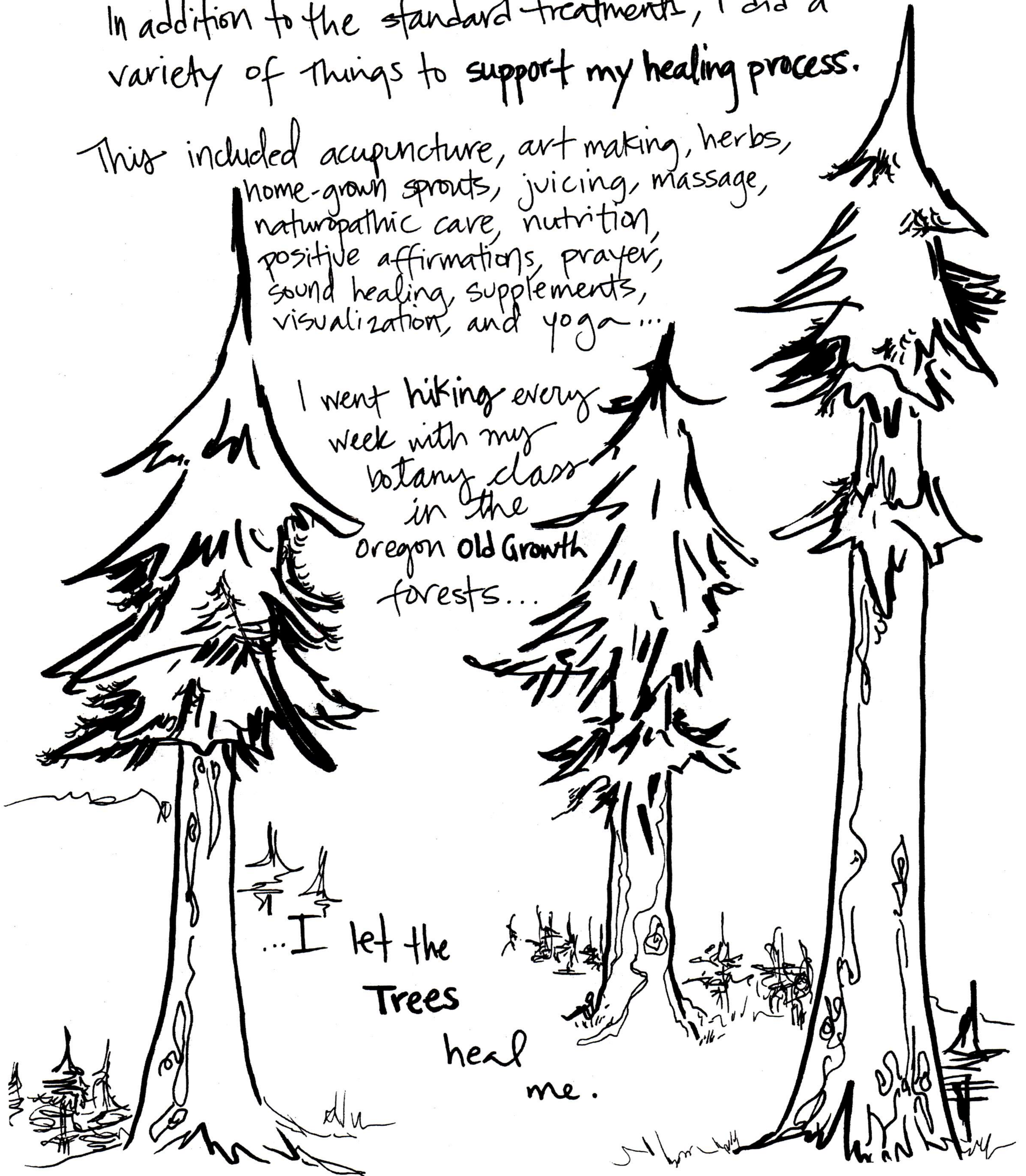
Complementary Care

In addition to the standard treatments, I did a variety of things to support my healing process.

This included acupuncture, art making, herbs, home-grown sprouts, juicing, massage, naturopathic care, nutrition, positive affirmations, prayer, sound healing, supplements, visualization, and yoga...

I went hiking every week with my botany class in the Oregon Old Growth forests...

...I let the
Trees
heal
me.



LOSING my HAIR

3 weeks after the first dose of chemo, my hair began to fall out.

shedding was surreal.

In solidarity, dear friends of mine got short haircuts, & donated ponytails to "Locks of Love" ☆



GUESS WHAT? on a whim, I had chopped off my own ponytail and donated it, two months prior to finding out that I had cancer. CRAZY, HUH?

☆ Locks of Love is a nonprofit that makes wigs for children with cancer + other illness. check them out at: www.locksoflove.org

Fed up with clogging the shower drain, I decided to

shave my head-

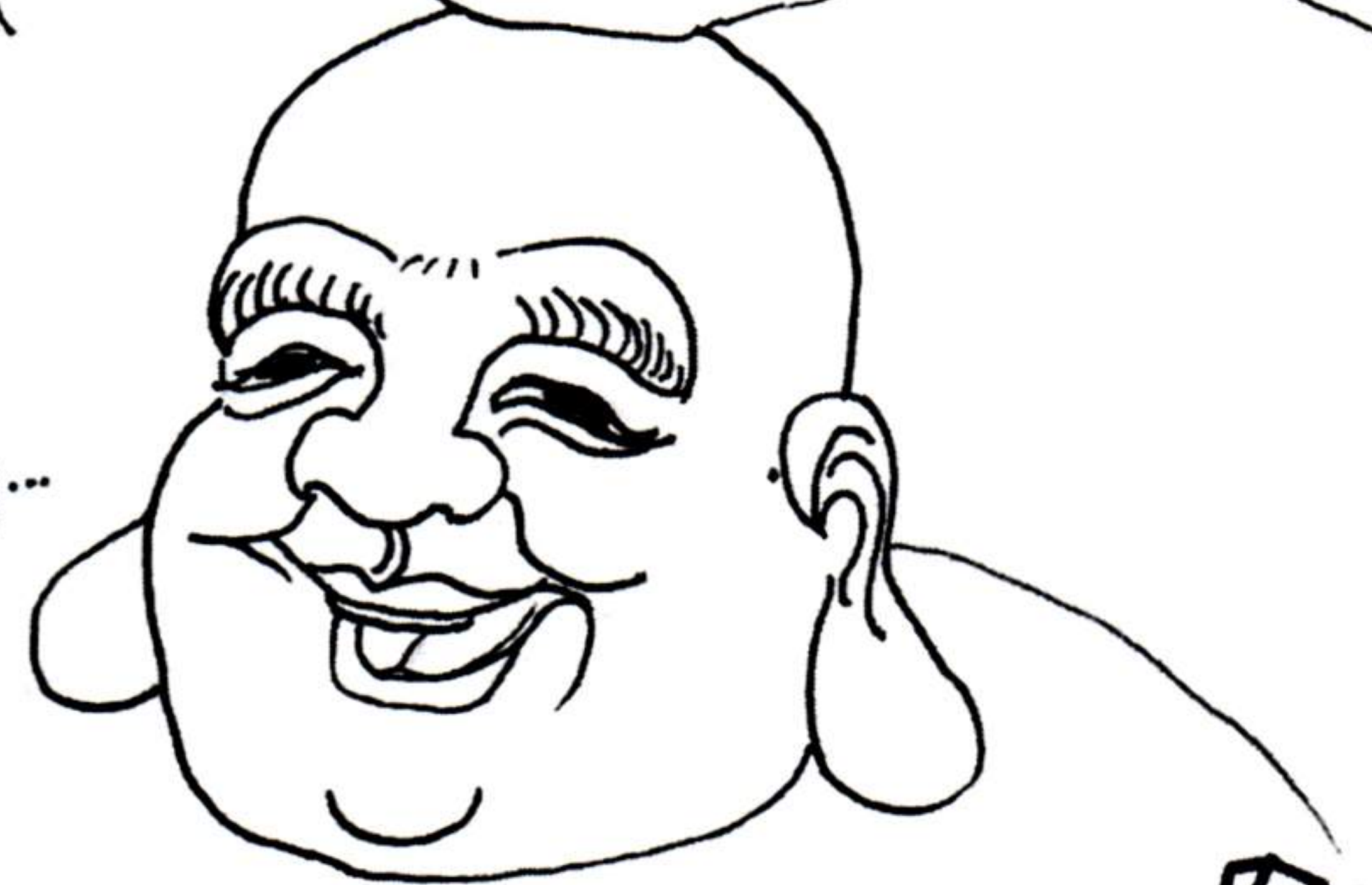
-my family helped.



What a change! My head was ultra-sensitive... brrr! I wore hats + scarves, tried wigs + even the classic terry cloth "chemo turban," but my favorite attire was a Henna tattoo



Some days, I felt weird, or shy... but at some point I realized that I had nothing to hide. In fact, I decided that



(F.Y.I. my hair disappeared everywhere ELSE, too!)

BALD IS BUDDHAFUL! ✨

FEELINGS

I was **Pissed off** and **Grateful** with no one to blame for the experience.



climbing up here gave me some perspective

Conventional treatments **Cut, Burn, and Poison** cancer cells...

...this seemed counter-intuitive to what I knew about healing...

I added complimentary therapies that helped support my body's recovery.

I questioned... do I **deserve** all of this love, assistance, sympathy, and support?

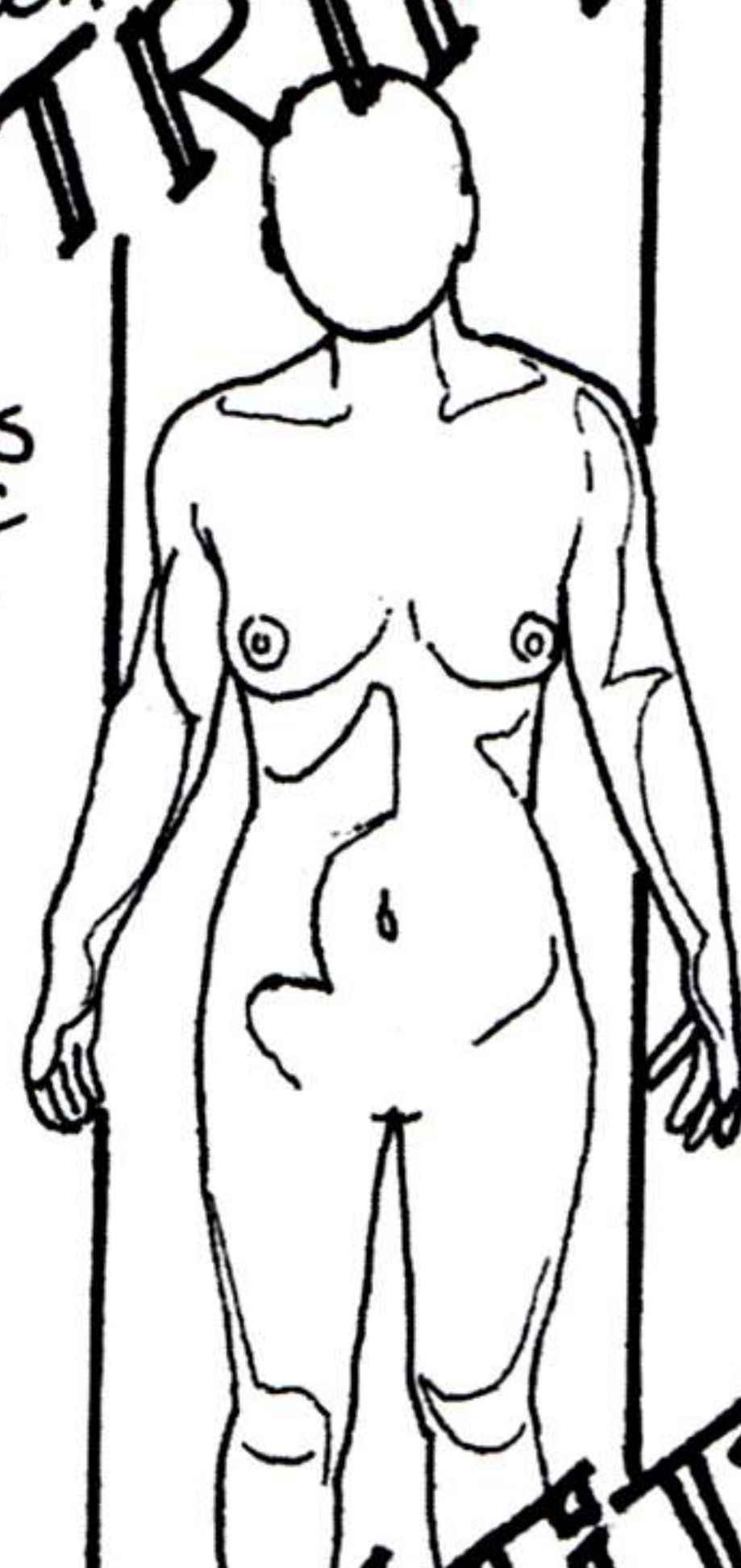


At the same time, I was honored to witness so many **hearts opening**

I felt **STRIPPED**

Cancer and Doctors vied for control of **My body**

while illness + treatments limited what I could **do...**



and **who am I** if not a(n)

- independent university student
- surfer
- waitress
- gardener
- backpacker
- rock climber
- snowboarder
- world traveler
- batik artist
- duola
- social worker
- fire dancer
- skater
- active goes

of my **IDENTITY**

Thankfully, who I am goes beyond appearances and interests!

That's DEEP, sister!



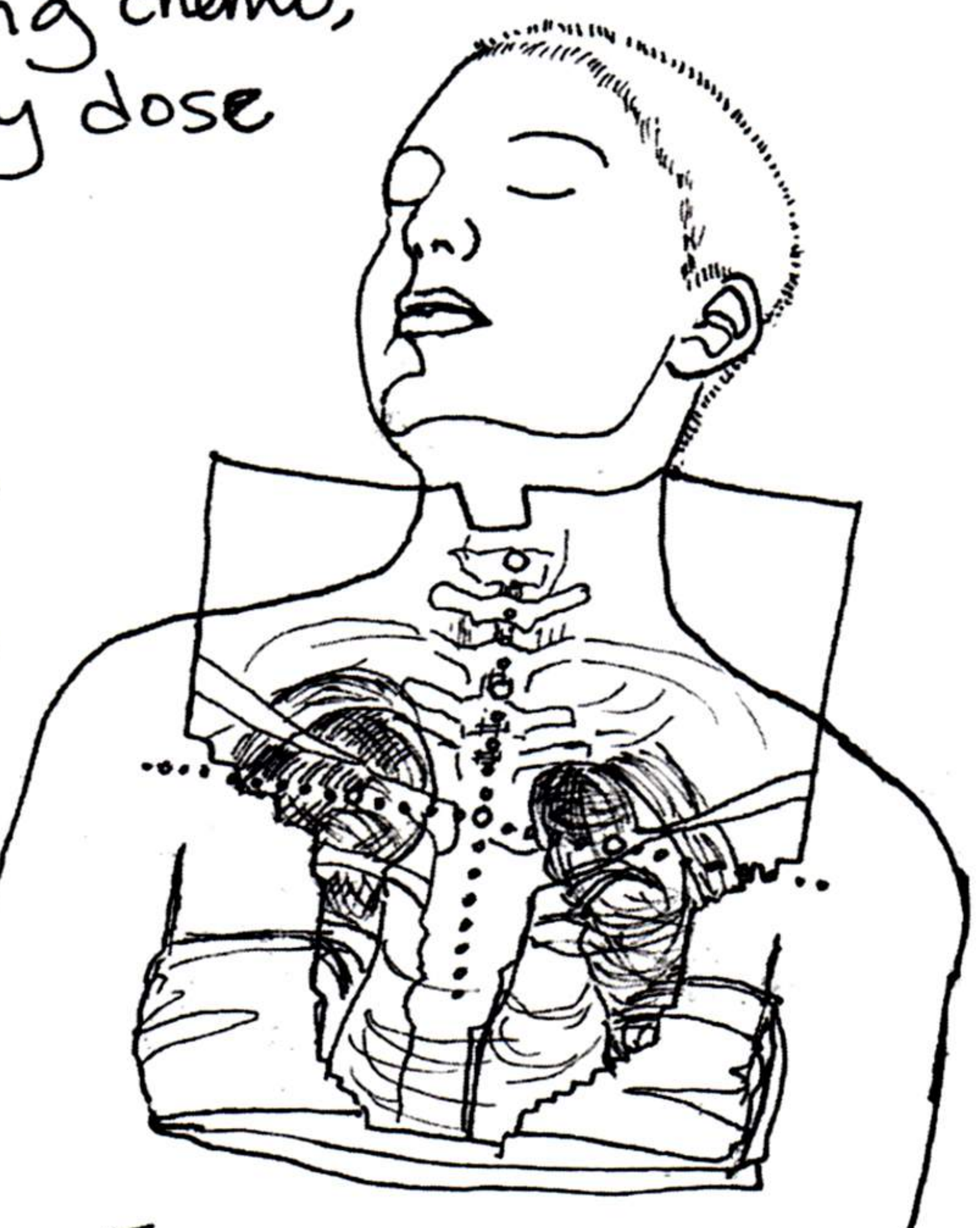
The adventures not over yet! Free radical rides on the rays of

RADIATION



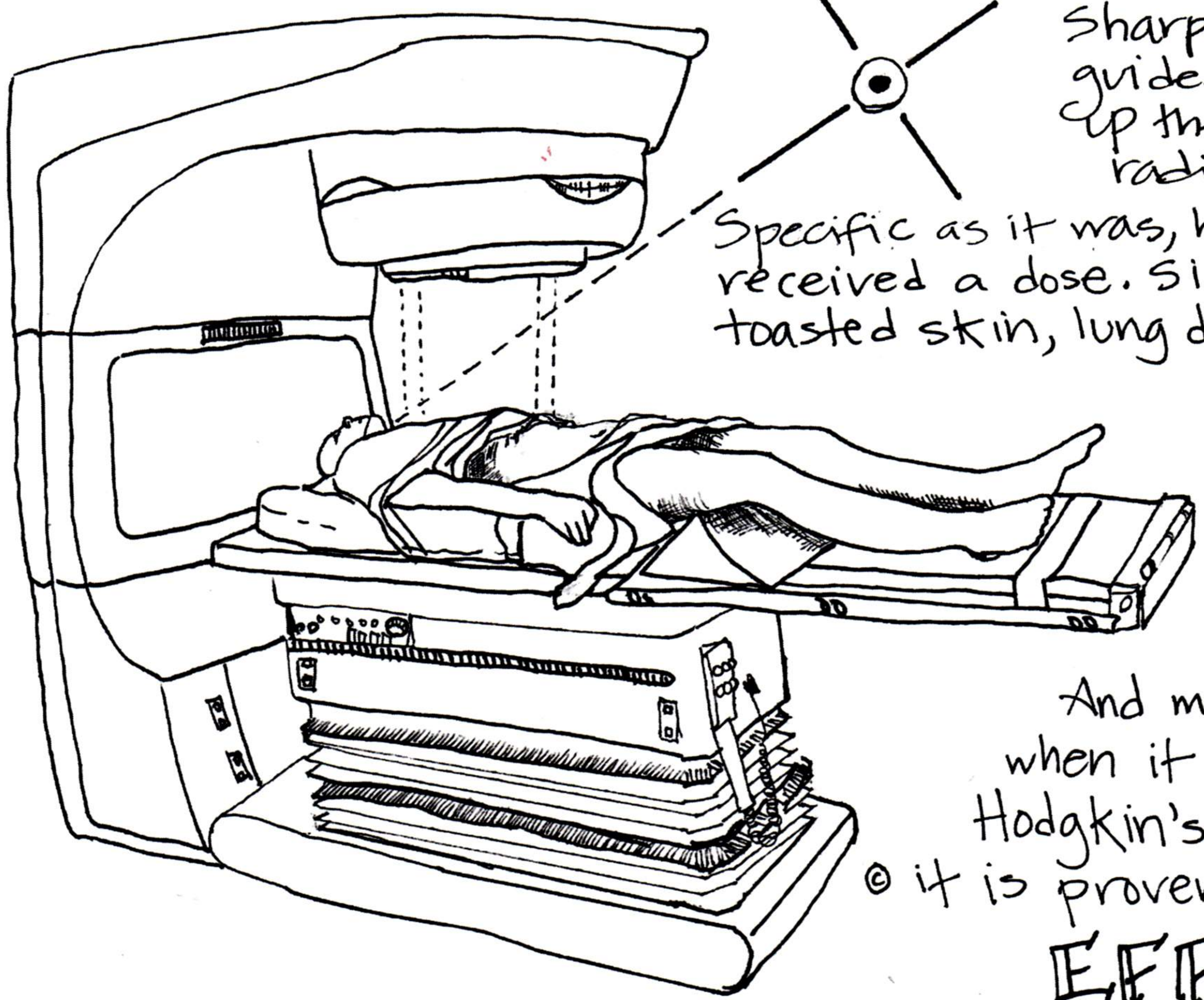
A month after finishing chemo, I signed up for a daily dose of toxic energy.

Powerful X-rays irradiated the cells of my tumor and other lymph glands.



Lovely décor in the treatment room, complimented by many giant, gleaming machines and criss-crossing laser accents. Includes a custom-formed position mold for a personal touch. Come in, lie down, and leave your modesty at the door!

Exact positioning was critical, so they took X-rays and cast a mold of my body. Sharpie-pen "tattoos" guided lasers to line up the field of radiation.



Specific as it was, healthy cells also received a dose. Side effects included toasted skin, lung damage, and an excruciatingly sore throat.

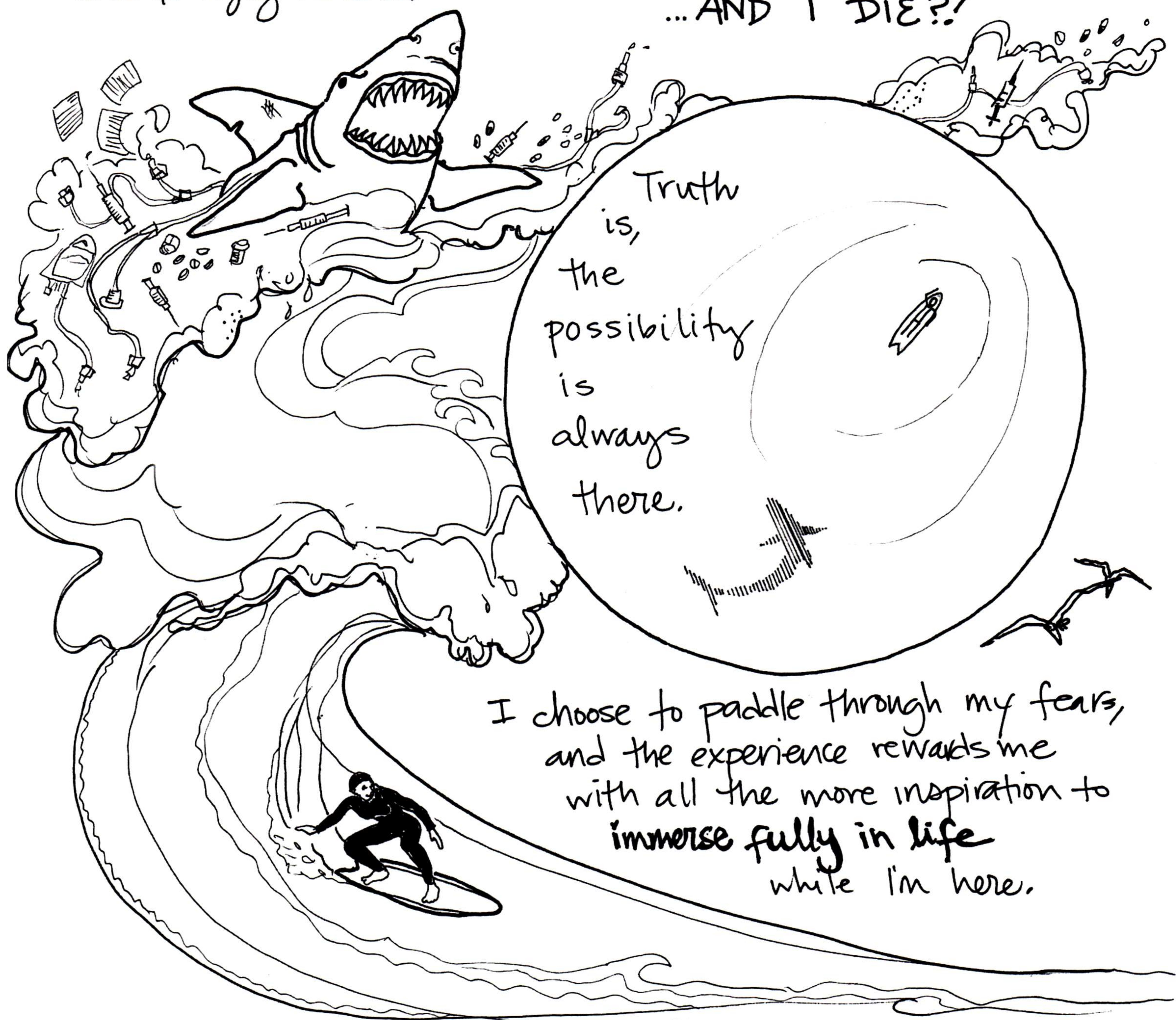
(still, all in all it was less traumatic than the chemo)

And most importantly: when it comes to curing Hodgkin's Lymphoma (me) it is proven to be **EFFECTIVE.**

Surfing the Emotional Aftermath

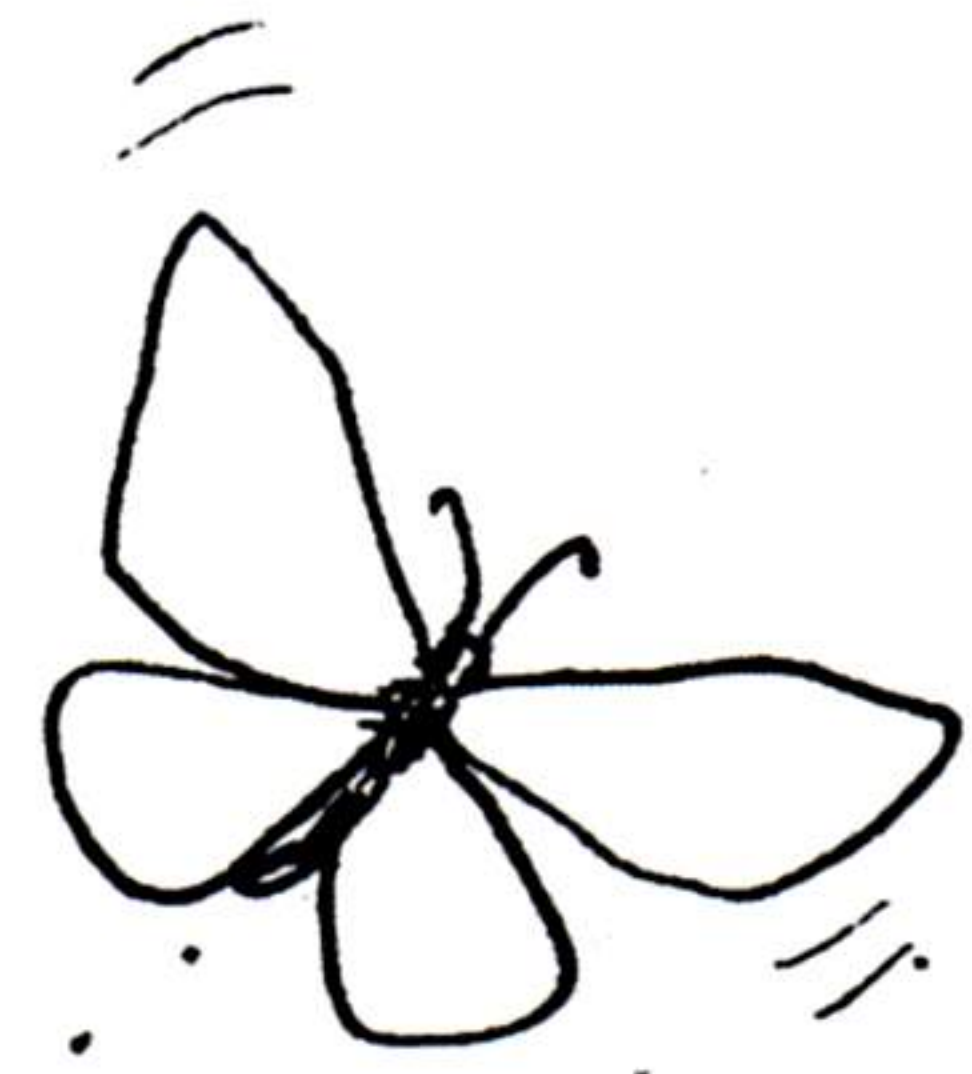
Sometimes
Fear
rears its ugly head...

WHAT IF CANCER COMES BACK?
...AND I DIE?!



Truth
is,
the
possibility
is
always
there.

I choose to paddle through my fears,
and the experience rewards me
with all the more inspiration to
immerse fully in life
while I'm here.



Thank you for
sharing
my journey...

♥ Mieke

... May yours be
full of profound
healing
too.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Annamieka Hopps Davidson is an artist who teaches from a place of wonder. Her name is pronounced “Awna-mEEka” but you can call her “Meeka” for short. Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, she currently lives in Portland, Oregon. A cancer survivor since age twenty, she chose to study art in college because making art is life-giving. She has been teaching art+nature workshops in gorgeous places since 2007 and is astonished by the beauty & courage of her students every time. She took the leap into the online sphere when she filmed her art+nature workshop, and released it as an online course called Wild Wonder, which debuted in 2017. She will never cease to be dazzled by how astounding it is to teach a class to people who live all over the globe! She believes that we are all bright stars in a constellation of kindred spirits - and that there is no competition in creative work, once we tap into our own true experience. She now leads a year-round creative mentorship program called “Let’s Go Deep” which helps artists create a cohesive body of work. She believes that ART BRINGS YOUR WORLD TO LIFE.

See more and read the Wonderletters at Annamieka.com
Visit her on Instagram at [@annamieka_](https://www.instagram.com/annamieka_)



Photo by Corrinne Theodoru 2018