

## *The Contemplation Day*

Cancer is often described in the language of war. We "battle" and "fight". We are "warriors". That language has never sat comfortably with me. My weapons are treatment, hope and a positive outlook, but to a large extent it is beyond my control.

Recently, after some disappointing results during my cancer treatment, my mother suggested we organise a day in which she asked all those in our extended circle of family and friends to pray for me – a sort of personal vigil as churches are shut during COVID-19.

My parents have a strong Catholic faith, which I admire and respect, but my own faith is less certain.

As there would be people involved who are not religious, Mum suggested that we call it a "contemplation day" and that people do whatever felt appropriate to them. Her goal was to have people commit to 15 Minutes for Sarah and for there to be a constant stream of prayer and energy dedicated in my direction for eight hours of the day.

The response was remarkable. The nuns from my former school and the Carmelite monastery got on board; friends in the US, Italy and Britain wanted to participate. The Cistercian monks in the Yarra Valley were involved.

By the time the day rolled around, Mum had filled the schedule with more than 400 people. People committed to pray, meditate, dedicate their yoga, go for a walk, go for a run or play music for me. For roughly 12 hours, there would be people thinking of me.

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I was incredibly touched and wondered how I would feel on the day. With all that energy swirling through the world focused on me, would I sense it? We started the day as a family sitting around the kitchen table in our own contemplation. I had expected to feel solemn, maybe maudlin, possibly overwhelmed. Instead I felt a powerful sense of restlessness that I was unable to shake all day.

Afterwards many people wrote to my mother and me saying how much the day had moved them. People reported powerful emotional experiences. One friend sent me an amazing photo of the beach where she prayed, with the cloudy skies opening to reveal blue. Another sent a picture of a tree they contemplated beneath. That day touched a nerve in people and unlocked something. In these times, when we are separated from those we love and unsure of what lies ahead, we yearn to be reminded of our shared humanity.

For the past five years, I have been carried and energised by the love, kindness and generosity of my community. It's a powerful force and I'm sure it has contributed to me living as long as I have. I genuinely hope the contemplation day will have had a good impact on my health. Regardless, it was a powerful and joyous experience. I am grateful to everyone who was involved.

**Sarah Tidey is a Melbourne-based freelance writer living with ovarian cancer.**