



SUZETTE'S STORY

Suzette Hodnett is a California artist celebrated for her bold, metallic creations. She's also a trained mental health therapist and a tai chi instructor. And she's the author of "The Journey is Everything: Saying Yes to Cancer," a thoughtful, emotional guide aimed at those facing a difficult diagnosis. It is, she says, her way of giving back.

Back in 2013, while doing tai chi, Hodnett noticed what felt like an enlarged lymph node. It turned out to be Stage 3 follicular lymphoma, slow-growing but incurable. Many patients who have it choose to "watch and wait." That's what she decided to do.

A year later, more tumors appeared, this time all over Hodnett's head, neck and the base of her skull. Worse, they were growing rapidly. What doctors had initially thought was an aggressive form of lymphoma, instead was advanced metastasized squamous cell cancer, Stage 4.

Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, Hodnett was able to have her care transferred to City of Hope. Despite her pre-existing condition, the ACA allowed Hodnett access to insurance with

affordable monthly premiums, perfectly suited to a self-supporting artist. That insurance, in turn, allowed her to be seen at a state-of-the-art, National Cancer Institute-designated comprehensive cancer center, which likely saved her life.

Hodnett's surgery was scheduled for May 2014. However, the disease was spreading so quickly that she was now in constant pain and could barely speak. It was decided to move up the operation by several weeks.

Doctors were concerned by the aggressive nature of her tumor. It had grown quite large in a very short time, to the point that her facial nerve became paralyzed. A team of three surgeons labored for 14 hours to remove the cancer and reconstruct the damaged areas.

But Hodnett's cancer journey was far from over. Over the next year, she endured long stretches of radiation, chemotherapy, often-excruciating physical and occupational therapy, and eight additional surgeries to remove cancer cells which continued to assert themselves.

Last year, her original slow-growing follicular lymphoma transformed into an aggressive Stage 4 diagnosis. But now,

once again after treatment (six months of chemo), she is in the clear.

These days, Hodnett is happily cancer-free, growing stronger and resuming much of her teaching schedule. Despite initial doubts about whether she'd be able to resume life as an artist with a severed spinal accessory nerve, she is cautiously returning to the art she loves, now with added heart and soul evident in each new piece. She was recently invited to present a one-woman gallery show in which she exhibited all the artwork created during her recovery.

For her part, Hodnett is unambiguous about the importance of the ACA:

"I have no doubt that I would not be alive had I not been able to obtain insurance with my pre-existing condition and be treated at City of Hope," she said. "I am alive today because of the Affordable Care Act."



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