

The Beautiful Struggle

A CLIENT STORY BY CAROLINA MENENDEZ

I was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer at the age of 29, just 2 weeks after giving birth to my firstborn, Kamila. I went from the greatest high of being a new mom and enjoying my newborn to feeling numb and fearful of our future. I never thought I could feel so alive yet with the reality of death knocking at the backdoor.

The night she was born, we discovered a huge lump in my breast as I tried to breastfeed her. After much speculation between nurses and a doctor about it possibly being a clogged milk duct,

I was sent for an ultrasound/biopsy that determined it was cancerous. It turned out that this cancer was estrogen based and the tumor virtually grew as I was giving birth. In essence, my daughter is my guardian angel in the flesh. Without her this cancer

"Life is a shipwreck but we must not forget to sing in the lifeboats."

-Voltaire

would have continued to grow undetected.

I underwent 8 rounds of chemotherapy, a double mastectomy including the removal of 4 lymph nodes, 5 weeks of radiation, months

of painful tissue expansions and reconstruction breast surgery.

Three years later, I'm still receiving

treatment every 3 to 6 months for my bones and to maintain low estrogen levels.

God has had a hand in every single aspect of my cancer journey, from the timing of my daughter being born, being diagnosed, the generous support of organizations/strangers/donors/counselors and all the strong resilient women I've met along the way. I've learned pain is only temporary and I've learned to lean into the Lord more than I ever have before. I never thought I'd be thankful for this diagnosis- I love deeper; my marriage became stronger; I gained a better outlook on life; I have a greater appreciation for my family and friends in my life and the greatest of all is I have a better



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Here is a list of the

Upcoming Concerts

Elliot Steger	March 21
The Rafters	April 11
Ashley Jordon	April 18
Elizabeth Lorrey	May 16

healinggardensupport.org/events



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Meet Erin Raber

HEALING GARDEN'S MUSIC THERAPY & MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING INTERN

In cancer care studies, there is extensive research that validates the efficacy of music therapy for biopsychosocial and spiritual concerns of cancer patients, such as symptom and pain management, fatigue, depression, anxiety, breathing capacity, isolation, self-esteem, body image experience, need for empowerment and connectedness to self and other, and quality of life. Cancer disrupts one's social, physical, and emotional well-being and can result in a range of negative emotions. Music therapy services can help patients cope with those negative emotions, as well as strengthen resilience and internal resources, promote connection to



self and others, and provide a safe space for emotional and cathartic experiences that may be too difficult to explore without the container of music.

Erin joined the Healing Garden as a music therapy and mental health counseling intern in September 2020. Her expressive, voice-based music therapy approach combines theories and ideas from transpersonal and psychodynamic frameworks and ancient and modern sound healing techniques. She offers group and individual sessions to the cancer and bereavement clients. Our clients are deeply appreciative of Erin's sessions. Testimonial from a client in her music

therapy support group:

"I look forward every week to being with others who appreciate the healing powers of music and being guided by a sincere, open hearted, talented, patient, and optimistic music therapist."

Erin is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Music Therapy and Mental Health Counseling at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. She is a vocalist, certified sound healing practitioner, arts administrator, and freelance editor and writer based in Boston, MA. Erin has received accreditation through the California Institute of Integral Studies in Sound, Voice, and Music Healing and the Vox Mundi School of Sound and the Voice. She also has received vocal training at the California Jazz Conservatory.

For more information about the music therapy sessions please email kelly@healinggardensupport.org.

THE BEAUTIFUL STRUGGLE

continued

appreciation for my relationship with Christ. I've seen the power of prayer in so many unbelievable ways.

In my sister's efforts in finding the right support for me, she came across the Healing Garden. As an introvert, I was reluctant in attending a support group but I'm so glad I did. The Healing Garden has been a safe haven place for me. I attended support groups and I cried my pain/fear/anxiety away with women who could resonate with my experience. I attempted yoga for the first time and felt empowered. I received counseling that helped me focus on healing and coping with the reality of my life after cancer. I received acupuncture and therapeutic massages to help break up the cording caused by the many surgeries I had. Lastly, I received financial assistance, either by grocery



gift cards, assistance in applying for grants, resources, and Christmas donations. All these alleviated the financial stress and allowed me to focus on my health and enjoy my baby girl.

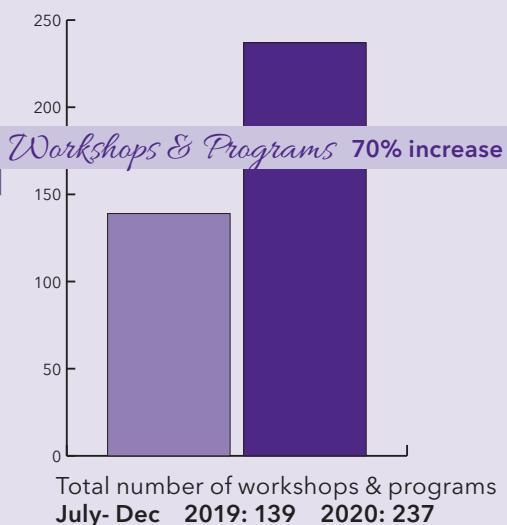
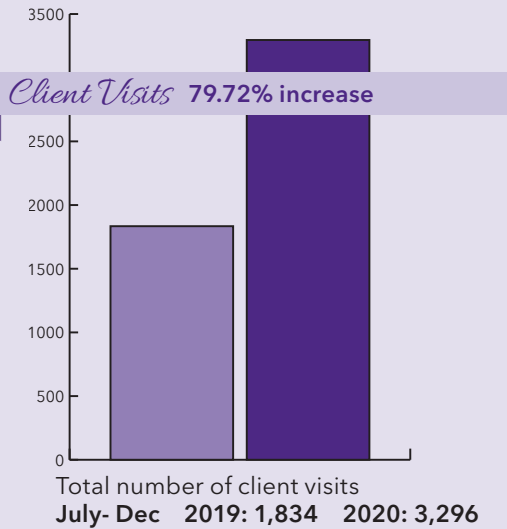
The Healing Garden is truly an amazing organization with incredible staff and counselors who are all very compassionate individuals. I'm beyond grateful especially to Brianne for her help through these years in navigating my emotions and providing resources to assisting my family. The Healing Garden took care of me during the most critical time of my life.

Charles River Lab helped make Christmas special for the Menendez family.

This adorable drawing by Carolina's 3-year-old daughter, Kamila, shows her family opening presents on Christmas morning. The squiggly lines are the wrapping paper flying everywhere!

My advice to others recently being diagnosed is to practice optimism. It may seem impossible to develop such a mindset when one is in the eye of the storm. But this very moment, of challenging adversity, is the very moment warriors are created. THIS is when you transform. Also, don't be afraid to reach out to great organizations such as the Healing Garden to help you heal and gain strength to fight the battle. You will be surprised at the amount of loving and generous people you will find along the way. I am eternally grateful to this wonderful organization and I thank the Lord he nudged me in your direction.

YOU HAVE HELPED *Us Grow!*



Dear Healing Garden Friends,

What a year we have been through! I am so thrilled to share that because of your generous support along with the tenacity of the Healing Garden staff and therapist team, we have not only continued our important work of providing compassionate, effective cancer support services, we have **TRIPLED** our impact.

As you might expect, the heightened risk of potential exposure to the Covid-19 virus has resulted in our client population experiencing modest to extreme isolation and deprivation of the usual supports they receive. The Healing Garden with the assistance of Zoom has come to the rescue!

In the words of a client:

"You make such a HUGE impact on the lives of people going through these difficult times - for me especially. I am an unemployed, divorced woman who lives by herself. I am 100% isolated due to COVID and I am dealing with chemotherapy alone. To say it is lonely and depressing is an understatement.

When a therapist said to me that many people in my situation give up and choose not to get out of bed in the morning. I replied,

"Well that isn't an option. I have yoga and sound therapy on Mondays, meditation on Tuesdays, Qi Gong and Music therapy on Wednesdays, knitting on Thursdays, etc."

You literally give people classes and events worth getting out of bed for and a community that helps a person not feel as alone on this difficult

journey (especially during this isolating pandemic.) My guess is that without the Healing Garden I, too, would not feel like getting out of bed in the morning.

Again . . . a HUGE thank you to ALL of you. I wanted you to know just how important and appreciated you are!

Thank you so VERY MUCH!!!!!!"

Zoom has allowed us to stay connected with clients, in more ways than we could pre-Covid. We have learned that behavioral health is more accessible through tele-health. If your depression or illness is keeping you from getting out of bed—no matter—you can join the support group right from bed. And for those with whom we would have lost touch in the last stages of life, we now can stay connected, allowing these clients access to the love and support of their dearest friends from the Garden.

None of this would be happening without YOU. Your donations, your volunteer assistance, your mention of the Healing Garden to others allows us to deliver essential care to people who have the heaviest of burdens to carry. You comfort the scared, you relieve the pain, you offer peace to the dying, and you offer hope to those who do not think they can do this thing called cancer.

Thank you for the gifts that you give!

Meg Koch
Executive Director





The Virginia Thurston

Healing Garden Cancer Support Center

Providing education and therapeutic services to those affected by cancer

145 Bolton Road | Harvard, MA 01451

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Volunteer Spotlight

BY GAWON YOO, JUNIOR AT
ACTON-BOXBOROUGH REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

In 2016, my dad was diagnosed with lymphoma. To my small family, this was an event that changed all our lives. I'm fortunate to say that he won against cancer, and through this process, one thing that my family truly experienced was the importance of community. From friends and families to neighbors and strangers - I can't imagine what this journey would've been without their support.

I first learned about the Healing Garden volunteer opportunity from my school. As I visited and heard more about the Garden, I fell in

love with its beauty and philosophy. Beyond everything, the comfort and healing within this welcoming community seemed immense, something I wish my family had years prior. That's why I didn't waste a second to take the opportunity to serve and share this community with

other families like mine.

I'm so grateful that the Garden helped me take my first step into giving back to society, and I hope to continue this path by pursuing cancer research in college.



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Find us on Facebook @VirginiaThurstonHealingGarden

The Garden View is the newsletter of the Virginia Thurston Healing Garden Cancer Support Center, the premiere provider of integrative oncology care in Massachusetts. We offer therapeutic services, support groups and counseling for those who are affected by cancer - men, women, and their caregivers - regardless of cancer type, prognosis, or financial ability to pay for services.