**Susan Castle Interview**

The Block Center for Integrative Cancer Treatment

**SUSAN’S STORY FROM THE WEB**

My diagnosis took me completely by surprise. I was 54 years old, owning my own personal growth business, feeling well, and enjoying my life. Some minor menopausal symptoms prompted me to schedule a visit with my doctor. It was shortly after that visit that I received the news: I had Stage 4 ovarian cancer.

You're about to discover how I went from near death to cure in just 12 months...

Prior to my diagnosis, I’d always believed that if I ever were to face a cancer diagnosis, I wouldn’t put myself through chemotherapy treatments. It was with this mindset that I consulted with two oncologists. The first one told me I had 3-6 months to live and if I didn’t have chemotherapy, he wouldn’t accept me as his patient. The second doctor had a kinder bedside manner, but a similar message. I needed chemotherapy and surgery if I had any chance of fighting this disease. It was all a lot to process, and I needed some time to figure out what I wanted to do next. The doctor gave me the “OK” to go on a previously scheduled trip to Hawaii, which I did. Unfortunately, by the time I got back – about a month later – my condition had deteriorated. I knew I had to do something, and do it quickly.

Upon the referral of a friend, and the desire to pursue a Holistic Treatment course I sought care at an alternative clinic. They provided IV vitamins. That was it. Honestly, it never felt right. But I was vulnerable, scared and on the verge of a serious health crisis. I knew it wasn't the right place for me but it provided the glimmer of hope I was looking for. And this is at the core of my message to other cancer patients: listen to your gut, follow your intuition... seek until you find the right fit for you. It's out there. You’ll know when you’ve found the right place for treatment. Don’t let fear dictate your decision, follow your instincts. I wish I had done this when that voice inside me told me I hadn’t yet found the right place for treatment. Just over 5 months later I left the alternative facility and set out to find the right doctor and the right treatment center to help me fight and beat this disease.

While I was still trying to decide where to go for treatment, my condition was deteriorating. I was dehydrated and had to have stents put into my kidneys. I was told by several oncologists that my tumor was now too large and surgery was no longer an option. In fact, I was told I had lost the window of my opportunity for treatment of any kind. There was nothing that could be done. And still I walked on in pursuit of the right fit for treatment.

Then I had two strokes, the latter one being quite serious. My family was told to prepare for my passing, and I vaguely recall them gathered around my bedside. However, even then, I knew deep down I would survive. I knew that not only was I going to recover, I was going to move on and overcome the cancer. I believe that this deep inner knowing played an important role in my recovery. The fact that Paul, my sweetheart and partner of 20 years shared this belief, was of immense value to me throughout my journey. In fact, this deep knowing is what kept me alive.

In August, 2013, shortly after the stroke, I found the Block Center. Too weak to walk, I arrived in a wheelchair. But still, I knew. As soon as I met Dr. Block and Dr. Udhrain I knew I had found the right place to receive my treatment; I felt completely at home in their presence. It felt like not only the right fit... It felt like the perfect fit. Though no one minimized the seriousness of my illness, they offered me genuine hope. Every single person I saw at The Block Center was loving and caring. When they had to deliver more “difficult” news, they did it in a constructively positive loving way. I was treated like an individual, not a number. And they treated ME, not only the cancer. I felt like I had a team behind me. As Dr. Udhrain (one of the Center’s oncologists) said: “Susan, give me 3-4 months and you’ll feel so much better. You don’t need to worry about this. It’s my job to get the tumors to shrink. Focus on your treatment plan and getting well." It wasn't easy at times but that is just what I did. I surrendered and placed my trust in them and their 34 years of experience with the treatment and care of cancer.

After seeing several of the clinicians, a plan was developed. It started with building me up and helping me regain my strength. After a month of vitamin therapy I was ready to begin chemotherapy. In all honesty once I got going on the chemotherapy treatment, I didn't even know I was getting it. I had very few side effects and other than losing my hair the chemotherapy was nowhere near as bad as I had anticipated. Because of having over 30 years of experience in treating patients with cancer, The Block Center knows exactly how to reduce the side effects of chemotherapy to make that part of treatment more comfortable while still maintaining the benefits of treatment. Along with the Vitamin IVs and Chemotherapy I was given a specific diet to follow and list of supplements to take all based on extensive blood testing results to ensure this part of my treatment was individual and based on my own personal needs. In fact, everything about the Block Center is personalized. It's refreshing to know I am not a number but I am a person and my individual needs are the priority. This is rare and was certainly missing from the other cancer care programs I had attended.

The Block Center offered me many additional therapies to assist with the challenges of my journey to get well. I participated in several healing modalities such as massage therapy, relaxation techniques, guided imagery and personal counseling. All of which made the journey much more comfortable and played a role in my healing. I also learned how important proper nutrition is in order to support my body's optimal healing. The Block Center makes this very easy by offering not only an individualized diet plan designed by a registered nutritionist but they also offer complimentary cooking classes each day along with a healthy meal. They make healthy eating fun, creative and delicious. Every experience at the Block Center honors the individual person and is delivered with love and grace. Again, this is rare.

It wasn’t long before the treatment began to work well and I was gaining enough strength to ride a recumbent bike at the Center! And eventually able to engage in my favorite hobby... kayaking. So from the wheelchair to the kayak was a dream come true for me. Tumors were shrinking and finally I was strong enough to undergo the surgery that would remove the one remaining tumor.

And here I am today. “A Miracle,” according to my surgeon. The day after my surgery, my surgeon Dr. John Knaus – referred to me by Dr. Block – came into my room and said “I was able to get 100% of the cancer out. I can't say this to everyone but I can honestly tell you that your case is a Miracle. I believe You’re cured.”

Tears of gratitude filled my eyes and I remembered what I had heard myself say so many many times... "I want to Live... I'm going to Live"! Thank You!

I know I’ve been given this incredible gift. My message is this: if this Miracle can happen to me, it can happen to anyone. It can happen to You! I know that the Block Center’s approach to care, the staff and the atmosphere all contributed tremendously to where I am today. I encourage anyone facing a cancer diagnosis to not give up hope. Go until you find what fits for you and keep going until you land where you belong. Yes, there will be some down times, there will be some difficult times, but if you want to live, build from there. Know it's possible!

And it begins within You!

It's not in how hard we fall, it's in how we pick ourselves up! And still I walk on...

Just the other day I had the privilege to once again spend time at the Block Center... this time for a Wellness Check Up. You see the Block Center isn't just committed to cancer care they are committed to you as a whole person even after cancer treatment. Longevity and good health is the treatment plan now.

I will be forever grateful to the Block Center for giving me this second chance, and for helping me become this “Miracle.” I whole heartedly recommend the Block Center for anyone who is facing the diagnoses of cancer. You will be met with personalized loving, caring and state of the art care and most of all you will be given the chance to create your own Miracle. Make the choice to Live.

***Susan M Castle***

*Arlington Heights, IL*

**INTRODUCTION**

**Our Purpose**

To create an effective marketing message and campaign that tells the story of The Block Center’s unique approach to — and successes with — cancer treatment.

**Our Intent**

To do this by letting patients like you tell their own compelling stories.

**Okay with this?**

So, first, we want to make sure you’re completely aware of our plan and are comfortable participating. Are you?

**We need to engineer your quote**

Secondly, we have a specific approach that we’ve devised for The Block Center. It revolves around specific “articles of truth” about cancer care, specifically the Block approach to it. These articles of truth include things like the importance of…

* integrating nutrition and exercise
* a completely individualized approach
* very thorough and unique testing
* addressing mental/emotional factors
* of patient participation in their care
* etc.

So we have the need to focus our questions — and your testimonial — around these specific topics. This means many of our questions will be tied to these specific truths. It also means we will be using your responses to craft quotes from you about these topics. We take great care to base these quotes on your actual words, but we sometimes need to engineer them to suit the marketing need. But we’ll be sharing them with you to get your changes, if you have any, and to get your approval to use the quotes that we’ve written.

Does this still sound fair?

**We have off-topic questions**

We also have questions that will sound off-topic from these main concepts. This is because we want to understand you personally, the context of your life, etc. so that we can stay true to who you are, match your sensibilities, try to capture your unique voice, et.

**We may need to ask further questions later**

Lastly, we may have additional questions during the writing process in order to get more clarity or specificity. Is that okay with you

**Shall we start?**

**INTERVIEW**

**How old are you? What is your vocation? Avocation? What was your life like before your cancer diagnosis?**

*I was 54, 4 years ago (this October). Interesting to Include: Worked in med field, as an OT, at a large Chi hospital. Actually treated people who had cancer, and chemo was something that I saw patients go through (back then), and I told myself I’d never do chemo if I had cancer. I saw what it did; “I’ll never put myself through that.”*

*20 years ago, started own business, holistic, personal-growth field (coaching). When diagnosed in 2012, It came out of nowhere. I was not aware that I was sick; common with Ovarian cancer. The silent cancer. I was very very surprised to learn I had it. From that pint forward, I took a sabbatical from my business. 100% of time, energy and focus on getting better. For the past.*

*AVOCATION: My partner, Paul, started doing our business together. We were conducting seminars, holding retreats, developed personal-growth programs (meditation, relaxation). Had a wonderful life. Went to Hawaii 2x per year on these retreats. Loved my life. Difficult decision to put all that aside, but that’s what it took to get where I am today, so well worth it.*

*The Block Center stressed and helps you realize that you need to let go of stress in your life. I took that seriously, and I let go of many things in my life that were stressful or would take me away from my success. A key reason why I’ve done so well. Abnle to spend tyime and focus on wellness.*

*I’ve seen many people on my path who don’t mke this change. They struggle and don’t do well. They’re torn between what they need to do and caring for cancer. I made a big and impnrotant decision to look at my life and let go of things that are causing you stress so you can focus on being well.*

**How long ago were you diagnosed with cancer? What was your diagnosis (type/stage)?**

*Stage IV Ovarian cancer.*

*First thing I did was see a traditional hospital-based onc. And he told me the doom-and-gloom. Advised me to come in within days for chemo and surgery or I’d have 4 to 6 months to live. I told him I need time to think; important compoenent to survival. When doctors tell you something like months to live, come in now, you need to take time to make decisions and tune in to the part of you where you can access your intuition. It’s a very scary thing. I told the doctor I need time; he said no. So I took the time. The other thing is… It was one doctor’s opinion. I dedided I want a second opinion, which was much the same (more gentle). Same information. I told HIM I need more time. Neither doctor felt right to me. (Back to following intuition.) Didn’t feel like right fit. Kept seeking/looking. I made a choice to try alternative/holistic therapies (for 5 months). During that time, my health got worse. While in pursuit for the right fit of care, during that time, I suffered 2 strokes, one was very bad. I was determined to live and get better. I wanted to live more than anything.*

*Shortly after the strokes, I made my way to TBC. I’d been to other oncs who told me it was too late, too far gone, nothing we can do. Still kept seeking. you have to. I kept going, and I eventually found Block and TBC. When I walked in the door and met with Dr. B and his associate, it felt like home, the right place. I could feel this peace come over me, and I knew I found the right people to work with. They didn’t hold back on how serious my condition was. However, other docs had told me “youre too far gone,” but Dr. Block new how seriouis, but “I’ve had people who were worse than you but are having a good life.” “There’s something we can do for you.” It was like a light in the darkness. A ray of light. Ray of hope when I walked in. I felt the love that they have there, very palpable. When you meet Dr. B, he’s just a very loving, calming, extremely knowledgeable physician, and he imparts hope and inspiration. It’s like nothing else I’d ever come across. Described Tx for me, and for someone who didn’t’ want to do chemo, I felt very comfortable in his hand and, therefore, having chemo in my Tx plan. How they do it, combining it with holistic. Side effects are minimized, some people have none. It’s the way they do treatment there. I was vulnerable and needed help, but I was comfortable surrendering my whole health to Dr. B.*

*I was only able to do that because of how they are. You feel this trust and this love that comes from not only Dr. B but also the entire staff. Hopeful. Upbeat. Interact with care and love. Give you a sense of hope, which the others weren’t providing.*

*Dr. B has 35 years of experience. Was able to tell me what he told me. Worked with many types of patients. “I feel confident, but I can’t guarantee you.” We can use things in treatment that can hopefully make you better.”*

*Dr. B told me that no doctor should give you time left to live. It’s between you and your creator. When they do tell you that, it’s a huge disservice. Your mind starts hearing that.*

*When I walked in, I was literally near death. It wasn’t just TBC. I’m determined, and so is Paul. When first diagnosed, I was working with a counselor. He said he noticed “You tell me you want to live.” Some say “I don’t want to die,” which is a very different thing. Very big important first step to say “I want to live.” Not wanting to die is fear-based. You have to find a way to rise above the fear. So, whatever a person needs to do to not let fear take them over. Just this determination that I wanted to live (rather than not wanting to die). That was my mantra (self-talk) every step of the way. Stroke almost killed me. Determination pulled me through some very dark times.*

*HEAD STUFF FROM TBC?*

*Well, every person there that you have an interaction with (nurse, reception, Keith, PT, Penny), they all treat you as an individual. And they all interact on a very positive, upbeat nature. You, the patient, feel like you’re in good hands, that they understand and respect you. Not a number. There to meet your individual needs. Penny is very gifted/helpful in medication and guided imagery. She sat with me on several occasions and taught me how to do this. encouraged me to use these kinds of resources on my journey. Certainly they have an integrated program, so you get an integration of nutrition, counseling, PT, things like that. They’re also very open to things that you might know about and want to try. They’re very open, very good at listening to patients. Very good listeners. They hold open all possibilities for you. That openness gives people a great deal of hope.*

*They have massage therapy, dietitians, nutrition counseling, incredibly expansive blood terrain (testing) they do for you. They counsel you on nutrition and supplements based on your unique test results. Person, not a number. Holistic nature of IV therapies (with vitamin C). A lady who did reflexology and a little bit of Chi Gong (taught me that; more integration fo the holistic side of things).*

*Penny gave a weekly talk to any willing people, about different topics. There was education. It is amazing. A wonderful.*

**Where are you in your cancer care today?**

*After a year of Tx at TBC, we were doing chemo, we working on all the mets. Liver, abdominal, pancreas, no lymph or bone mets. A month after the chemo, because of all the abdomen cancer, I had a condition call aside-ease. Collection of fluid in the abdomen due to presence of cancer cells. Had fluid removed every 3 weeks for a year before finding TBC. It was active when I arrived at TBC. One month after arriving and chemo Tx, that was completely gone. I was excited. “Oh my God, it’s working.” Early sign that the chemo was working.*

*Dx in August of 2012*

*TBC in August of 2013*

*I was elated. Sign that things are working. Other thing about chemo…*

*Because of how they do it, I had very few side effects. Some, but nothing near what people normally experience in hospital chemo. I knew those people. I didn’t really feel like I was on chemo; I didn’t feel bad. Chemo started to work early on. It took me 8 months on chemo. Goal was to eliminate the mets and shrink the largest tumor I had. Chemo and Tx at BLOCK had cleared all mets and shrunk the tumor by 50% . In the beginning, the main tumor on the ovaries was too big for surgery.*

*We’d been working on mets. Hopeful that we could shrink the tumor. All met within a year.*

*One year later, surgery to remove the largest tumor. At the time, day after surgery, my surgeon (recommended by Block; the best) told me “I believe that you’re cured.” He was able to get all fo the cancer out during surgery. Nothing left. That was course of things. “Cure within a year.”*

*MUST BE HONEST:*

*I was clear of cancer for 16 months. Oh—Best thing about TBC… cuz I live close, I’d go every 3 months for f/u. Go there for blood tests every 3 months and PET scans. Perfect for year and 4 months. Then, about 17 months ago, there was a little microscopic cancer lighting up on the PET that they couldn’t see at time of the surgery. They think it embedded in the scar tissue. It decided to grow a little bit. So, cuz of that, I had to resume a little bit of treatment, which I’m just now finishing.*

*I’m at the point where, that tumor that decided to grow is about 80% gone. Still in treatment. I call it a “bump in the road” that came up. It’s been totally managed. I’m at a place on my journey where I’m back to feeling “totally free of cancer.”*

*Have 2 more days. It was chemo for 2 months, then some very targeted radiation for another month. Because of how RT was described to me, pinpointed/targeted, I was okay with it. I had 25 radiation treatments (10 minutes) with no side effects.*

*Today, I feel really really good. I feel strong, healthy. I can do almost anything I want. I can’t work out rigorousldy work out or climb a mountain, but fully functional. I feel good. Because of my TBC experience, I have a renewed commitment to health. My number-one priority. When people are told they’re in remission, they feel like they can go back to normal, like eating whatever. That’s not for me. I’ve learned from TBC how important it is to keep your health as #1. Importance of staying on diet and supplements. Some people here said “I’m not taking supplements now that I’m better.” Not me. I stay on the plan and follow it. One of the reasons why I’m doing so well. They’ve figured out how to survive cancer, and you need to follow it. If you vollow the plan, your chances of survival are really good.*

*There’s people I’ve run into, told them about Block, they’ve quit where they were going and went to Block. I’ve no doubt that tBC is one of the best choices a person can make. A key factor in saving my life.*

**Before we get into specific questions about him, what is your take on Dr. Block, his team, his approach and your experience at TBC?**

*Answer.*

**What did you know about “integrative treatment” before experiencing TBC?**

*Answer.*

**What did your “integrated” treatment consist of? What surprised you about your care at TBC?**

*Answer.*

**How was fitness incorporated into your treatment?**

*They shared with me the important of fitness. When I arrived at TBC for Tx in 2013, I was in a wheelchair and had to lay on the couch during the interview. They have PT there. The PT helped me to begin exercising (a few pieces of equipment there). Started on the treadmill. At first, I could do barely 3 minutes. Then worked up to 30 minutes. First ime on treadmill, my nutritionist was walking by, excited to see me exercising. Said “oh my gosh. You’ve gone from the wheelchair to the treadmill.” It became the saying. From the wheelchair to the kayak. Fitness was introduced to me there, Program that allowed me to build my fitness while getting treated, and they encourage me to continue with it. A strong part of their program. They explaine how important it is in your doing well.*

**Nutrition?**

*Answer.*

**Chronomodulation?**

*Not sure if my chemo required that. ASK PENNY. I never had chemo at night. The vitamin C and other naturals. They do it like a sandwich. One day, Vitamin IV, next day chemo, next day Vitamins. That’s one of the reason the side effects were so miniomal. Mine were minimal. In the beginning, first was stomach cramps, discomfort, fatigue toward the end. Never threw up. I’d have to lay on the couch some times, days where napping a lot. Overall, minimal. Did have hair loss in first time at Block (certain kind of chemical).*

*One thing the cancer journey has done for me is reorganizing mypriorities. Wake-up call.*

*If someone asked the worse thing that I could imagine: Cancer. But here I am. One thing I’ve decided to open myself to: What is the gift that has come my way? So many. Biggest: To follow my heart and my inner knowings, cuz they’re there. To move out of my mind into my heart and follow my intuition and inner knowing. It saved my life. Every step of the way. Every person has that. It’s about quieting everything and living in the moment. That’s all we have. If you live in fear, forget it. Stressing, not in the moment, in your head. On this journey, you don’t know your future and the past is gone. Greatest ability to survive. Every time I’d get a negative scan or bad blood work, you have a choice in every single moment. I chose the high road, not to dissolve into fear. I’d ask myself “What do I know to be true.”*

*If I had a couple things to counsel on:*

*You have to follow your own intuition. If I’d followed those doctors (who didn’t feel right)… I’d say “Follow your heart/gut/intuition.” Just take the time to go inside and feel it. Always be a seeker. Seek until you find the right fit. Ask for help with this. I had this wonderful partner; I was so lucky.*

**What did you know about cancer before? What do you know now?**

*Answer.*

**What is your prognosis? Outlook on life.**

*Answer.*

**How was biobehavioral care integrated into your treatment?**

*Answer.*

**Do you have any questions for me?**

*Answer.*