

4. Contributing to the Witnessing Project Archive

The Treatment Dedication Project is a component of the Witnessing Project. We are establishing an archive to which people who dedicate their treatments can contribute a brief account of what they did. In this way, their experience can inspire others. You may want to help the person write a brief account or the person may want to dictate an account to you, which you submit for him or her. We are also eager to post what the experience was like for you, the person's compassionate witness and helper.

You can reach the witnessing project at www.witnessingproject.org. There is a link to the Treatment Dedication Project on the "Projects" page.

A guide to dedicating cancer treatments



THE *treatment*
dedication PROJECT

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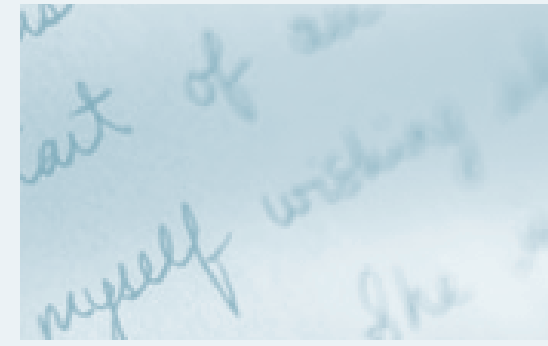
The Treatment Dedication Project
is funded in memory of

Peter B. Natchez
1941–1981

Peter lived energized by his love of family, his passion for ideas,
and his deep faith that healing is possible

My name is Kaethe Weingarten and I have been diagnosed and treated for cancer three times, in 1988, 1993 and 2003. I wrote this guide to give people who are undergoing cancer treatment something that they could do that would be meaningful to them, to others and to the world. We tend to think that the treatment period is a time out of our lives. We think of ourselves as diminished and vulnerable. But, being in treatment may actually be a good time to consider what is important to us and to do something, however small, about what we care about deeply. Further, I strongly believe that small acts of compassion can actually make a difference at the largest societal levels. We can make a difference in our world.

During my most recent round of treatment for cancer, I dedicated each radiation session to a person or cause I wanted to honor. I honored them by taking my treatment in their name. Preparing to dedicate the treatment, doing so at the time of the treatment itself, and communicating with my dedicatees about what they meant to me was one of the most significant, hopeful, and comforting experiences of my life. I have prepared this guide to help others dedicate their treatments. I hope that you will join me in creating a national movement of treatment dedication, embodying the belief that no act is too small, no person so diminished, that she or he cannot make an offering that matters.



This guide is intended to help people dedicate their cancer treatments to people or causes they wish to honor. Cancer treatment is often a disturbing, lonely, and uncomfortable time. Whether we are surrounded by family and friends who offer us loving support or are relatively alone in the world, we often lose a sense of meaning and purpose during this period. The disruption of normal routines and the difficulty of predicting how we will feel make daily life challenging. Cancer treatment can be an overwhelming experience.

At the same time, many of us are aware that we are indeed fortunate to live in a time and place in which potentially life-saving treatments are available to us. Knowing this softens the distress, but it does not erase it.

This guide is a resource for those of us who have found ourselves diminished in our capacity to lead our lives as we had before, but yearn to do something that can make a positive difference. The steps that I describe are suggestions, not prescriptions. There is no right or wrong way to dedicate treatments. You will know what works best for you.

Steps to Dedicating Your Cancer Treatment

The process of dedicating your cancer treatments involves asking yourself several questions and exploring the answers. Some people find that this part of the project is highly rewarding all by itself. Here are the questions:

1. Why should I dedicate my treatments?

Dedicating cancer treatments is a way of making a positive contribution even when we are ill and feel a loss of control. After a diagnosis of cancer, many people feel helpless, despairing, meaningless, resentful, sad, and alone. These are states of vulnerability. We feel bad, both physically and emotionally. Dedicating our treatments can have a positive effect on these states of vulnerability, helping us feel moments of effectiveness, hope, purpose, gratitude, contentment and communion. These feelings are associated with resilience. We feel better in states of resilience than in states of vulnerability. Dedicating our cancer treatments may help us shift from states of vulnerability to states of resilience. It is worth a try.

There is another reason to dedicate our treatments. Many people and organizations that are doing good work feel isolated and unrecognized. When we dedicate our treatments to them, they feel less alone and more motivated to carry on. We can never know what positive effects may ripple out from our acts of appreciation.

2. When should I dedicate my treatments?

Many of us are confused and upset after receiving a diagnosis of cancer. We may feel shock and be totally overwhelmed. These feelings are unlikely to last the entire time or to always be present. When things begin to settle down and you are a little more adjusted to all that you must do now, you can also consider whether dedicating your cancer treatments is something that will make you feel better.

In the beginning stages of learning we have cancer, many of us, appropriately so, can think of little else but ourselves and the effects our cancer will have on our loved ones or on our work lives. We may find it exceedingly difficult to think about anything but ourselves and the decisions we have to make. This early phase of cancer treatment planning is probably not a good time to undertake this project.

After we have made our decisions about what treatment to undergo, there may be a lull before the treatment actually starts. Or, treatment may begin right away and all the bustle of the consultations ends. A good time to take on this project is during a lull, or when you feel accustomed to the routines of treatment.

3. Can I do this alone or do I need someone to help me?

Of course, you can do this project alone. But many people will find it easier to do it with a friend, a family member, or a volunteer, either at the hospital where you are being treated or at an organization that assists people with cancer, such as the Wellness Community. Many people undergoing treatment for cancer have trouble concentrating, and anything new feels like it is too much, even if it would be desirable.

At the end of this guide is a companion guide that helps someone facilitate treatment dedication. The second guide is intended to make it easier for you to ask someone to help you dedicate your treatments. The Companion Guide for Volunteers Facilitating the Treatment Dedication Project helps someone assist you with this project. Volunteers—who can be family members, friends, or trained cancer volunteers—enjoy this project immensely. It gives them a sense of meaning, too. Often when people are ill, the people who are closest to them long to feel useful. Helping you with this project may be just what someone needs.

If you think it would be easier for you to work with someone on this project, you can think of it as giving someone an opportunity to feel useful and to feel that they are doing something meaningful.

4. How do I choose the person or cause to receive my treatment dedication?

You may want to dedicate your treatments to a person or to several people who have been profoundly important in your life, people you love and admire for sterling qualities of theirs that have made a positive contribution to your life. This may be the perfect choice for you.

Or, you may want to choose a person or cause whose work in the world you want to honor. Making the choice is both the hard part and the interesting part of the project. How often do we step back and consider the causes or situations that we care about deeply? For some of us, when we give to charity we are expressing our commitment and respect for the organizations to which we donate money. But this commitment and respect may not arise from a place inside us that feels vitally important. The first step is to get in touch with what you feel passionate about. It will help you be able to say a sentence like this: "The work that this person or organization does is crucial to me."

The following are some questions that may help you select your dedicatee:

Who has made a significant contribution to my life?

Whom do I admire greatly?

What are the situations I always seem drawn to?

What are the television news stories about that I never turn off?

What are the stories in the newspaper that I always read?

What do my family and friends talk about that always captures my attention?

**What did I care about intensely when I was younger?
Is this the same or different from what I care about now?**

If a genie came out of a bottle and told me that I had three wishes for myself and three wishes for the world, what three issues would I solve for the sake of the planet?

**If I could choose only one issue, which would it be?
If I can't choose, what might this tell me?**

I am imagining that you have now identified a person or one or more issues or causes that are truly important to you. If you have had difficulty choosing, and you are doing this alone, perhaps you could ask someone to work with you on this. Some people learn what they think in conversation with another person. If you have chosen a person whom you know, the next step is to figure out how you want to honor that person. You can go directly to Step Five.

If you have identified a cause, you will want to find a person or organization that works on the issue that matters most to you. Let's say the issue you chose that matters most to you is children's well-being or poverty or music. You may believe that the future of the world depends on the next generation, or that the world has the resources to make sure no one is poor, or that music soothes the soul. Now you need to find a person or organization whose mission and vision fit yours. You might want to dedicate your treatments to a neighborhood daycare center, a local homeless shelter or your church choir. Or you may want to recognize national or international figures or organizations that work on these issues. It is up to you. The following are a set of questions to help move from the abstract to the concrete.

Do I want to focus on this issue at the local, national, or international level?

Would I prefer to dedicate my treatments to a person or an organization?

Would I prefer to select several people or organizations to dedicate my treatments to, or just one?



With the answers to these questions, you have narrowed your choices. For instance you might be looking for a local organization that helps the homeless, or a person who works for peace all over the world.

Now it is a question of finding a match for your interests. Ask yourself:

Whom do I know who might be aware of organizations or people who match my interests?

Can I, or can the person who is assisting me, search the Internet to find a match?

How do the mission and vision statements of the organization I am considering match my values, passions, and concerns?

How does the person or organization I am considering live out my values, passions, and concerns?

Will I feel that my own mission and vision are fulfilled if I select this person or organization to dedicate my treatment to?

Don't settle on a dedicatee until you can answer the last question with a definite YES. Be patient. It may take days or even weeks to make your selection. This process is not meant to be frustrating but interesting. You will learn about what is being done in the area of your passion and you will also understand things about yourself during the selection process.

5. How do I notify the person or organization that I have selected that I am dedicating my treatments to them?

Old-fashioned as it may be, I think it makes more of a difference if we send a letter to our dedicatees than if we send an email or make a phone call. Therefore, in this section, I provide examples of dedication letters, together with suggestions about how to write one. The first sample letter is to a local person. The second is to a person who is internationally famous for his work in Africa and South Africa.

Betty Smith
Orange Daycare Center
14 Apple Avenue
Any small town, State

April 14, 2004

Dear Mrs. Smith:

I live a few blocks from your day care center and frequently watch you interact with the children in the center. I have always cared about little children and it makes me so happy to watch you take such good care of these children.

I am currently undergoing treatment for a recent diagnosis of cancer. I have decided to dedicate my treatments to you to express my admiration for the fine job you do and the loving way you do it. My treatments will extend for 5 weeks, starting June 3. Please know that during this time, I will be thinking of you smiling at your small charges and it will make me smile.

Please accept the dedication of my treatments as my way of expressing gratitude to you for making a difference for the children, their families and our community. I am proud to be your neighbor.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Alice Jones

In the sections below, I take apart a letter and show the elements that I think make sense to include in a letter.

1	President Nelson Mandela Nelson Mandela Foundation South Africa	
		2 Date
3	Dear President Mandela:	
4	I am an activist who is concerned about the effects of witnessing political violence and the experience of witnessing those suffering with AIDS.	
5	The last few months I have been undergoing treatment for cancer. I have decided to dedicate my treatments to a person whose work I wish to honor. On Sunday, December 21, I will dedicate my treatment to you.	
6	You have been an inspiration to me my entire life. Your name has been synonymous with the liberation of all people from all forms of oppression for as long as I can remember. Now people all over the world, and in South Africa especially, have the oppression of the AIDS pandemic. It is something that haunts me even at this distance. I have close friends and colleagues in South Africa who daily work to ease the suffering of those who have, live with, and care for those who suffer with AIDS. As someone who cares deeply about people who suffer with AIDS and cares about the families, communities and caregivers who witness their suffering, it has meant a great deal to me that you have used your great wisdom and status to support those who face the AIDS pandemic with passion and commitment.	
7	I have decided to make each treatment an opportunity to share the blessing of treatment. On December 21 at 7AM I shall absorb the painful, healing beams in your name and in your honor.	
8	Thank you for the work you do in the world, the person you are, and the hope you help others feel.	
9	Sincerely,	
bk	Kaethe Weingarten	

Components of Writing a Letter

- 1 *Provide the address of the person or organization*
- 2 *Date your letter*
- 3 *Use a salutation*
- 3 ***Introduce yourself briefly:*** I chose to say I was an activist, but I could have chosen other characteristics of mine. I could have said I am a mother or an academic or an American. I then wrote what it was that I care about. It telegraphs to President Mandela why I am writing to him.
- 5 ***What and when:*** In this paragraph I tell him what I am doing and when. This paragraph lets him know that I have chosen him to dedicate my treatments to on a particular date. If I had dedicated all of my treatments to him, I could have written, "On December 21, I will dedicate all my treatments to you."
- 6 ***Why you are dedicating your treatments to this person or cause:*** It is important to be as specific as possible about what it is about the person or the organization that has lead you to select them to dedicate your treatments to them. Specificity does not have to mean lengthy nor do you have to be exhaustive, covering everything. The more specific you are, the more believable is your admiration.
- 7 ***Repeat the dedication and express the heart of the matter:*** This is the place in the letter that you get to express what you are trying to do when you dedicate your treatments. For me, it was turning a painful experience into one out of which good could come. If I were having chemotherapy and were dedicating those treatments, I could have written: "On December 21 at 7AM I shall accept the chemotherapy infusion in your name and in your honor."
- 8 ***An expression of gratitude:*** Again the trick is to be as specific as possible.
- 9 *Closing salutation*
- bk ***Name and any other identifiers you want to provide***

Here is one more example, to the members of a national organization:

Books for Children
100 We Care Street
Washington, DC

April 14, 2004

Dear Kind People:

I am writing to let you know that I have selected your organization to honor you for your work distributing books to children. At the moment, I am undergoing treatment for cancer. This has given me an opportunity to reflect on what is truly important to me. I have realized that I care deeply about books and literacy. I did not know about your organization until I began to think about what was really meaningful to me. Then I found your organization on the Internet and read about all the programs you have. Your work is excellent and you do exactly what I think is important to do: provide books to young children and their parents and help them learn to read.

I will be undergoing treatment for the next 6 months. During this period, I will bring a children's book with me to each of my treatments to symbolize the work that you do. During my chemotherapy infusion, I will be thinking about the good work that your organization does and dedicating the treatment to you. I dedicate my treatments to you to show my appreciation for the work that you are doing.

Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

Mr. Robert Booth

6. What do I do during my treatments that will make the spirit of my dedication come alive?

I will pose some questions that will help you generate ideas that will suit you. Again, there is no right way to do this. Some people will stop right here. Having written the letter and sent it off will be enough. I found connecting my actual treatments to my dedicatees very helpful in providing a focus to each treatment. In fact, one day the radiation equipment broke and I couldn't go for treatment. I kept calling to see if it was fixed because I was so eager to dedicate that day's radiation to the person I had selected.

In this section, I am trying to help you decide whether you want to do something beyond sending your letter to link your dedication to the treatment experience itself. This could be done at your home or at the treatment center, on a treatment day or on a day you don't go for treatment. It will depend on what you decide to do.

I suggest you try to answer the following questions: who, what, where, when, and how.

Who: Do you want other people to know about your dedication or is this something you want to do on your own?

Do you want the staff at the treatment center or your doctors to know that you are dedicating your treatments?

If you want others to know, do you want them to participate in any way in your dedication activity?

What: Do you want to create an activity that acknowledges the dedicatee?

Do you want to do something that helps others learn about the dedicatee?

Where: Do you want to do something at your home or at the treatment center?

When: Do you want to do something just before, during, or just after treatment?

Do you want to do something at a time that is clearly separate from an actual treatment, for instance on a weekend between treatments?

Do you want to do something during each treatment that recognizes your dedicatee or once only?

If you are doing more than one dedication, do you want to do the same activity for each dedicatee or design something unique for each one?

How: The how is really a creative assembly of what you have learned from answering these other questions. There is no end to the possibilities. I am going to provide some examples to start you off and then, I hope to hear about what you chose to do. If you wish, your dedication can be placed on the web site of the Witnessing Project (see Step #8) to help others figure out what they might want to do. Here are a few examples.

Example: You invite your closest friend to light a candle in honor of the dedicatee before your friend drives you to the treatment center. At the hospital, you give your nurse a card that tells her what you have done and provides the name and address of your dedicatee.

Example: You take the letter you have written to the hospital and read it to yourself just before you begin your treatment. During treatment you think about your dedicatee. During each treatment you think about your dedicatee.

Example: On a Sunday afternoon, you invite a few friends over to your home and they bring some goodies to eat. You sit in a circle around your kitchen table and read them the letter you have written. Each person says something to you about their response to your writing the letter and your choice of dedicatee. During the treatment itself, or just before, you read a short poem that is meaningful to you.

7. Will I hear from my dedicatee?

It is impossible to predict who will and who will not respond to the dedications. In my case, about half of those who received my letters did respond. Of those who responded, it was clear that it was of positive significance to them. Some people and organizations did not respond. They may not have known how to respond or they may be so swamped with correspondence that they cannot respond personally. It is important to undertake this project with no expectation that you will be recognized. It is really an opportunity for you to confer recognition and appreciation.

8. Completing the Project

The Treatment Dedication Project is a component of The Witnessing Project. The Witnessing Project helps people cope with the shock of witnessing or experiencing directly violence and violation. The Witnessing Project operates on the premise that it is possible to turn disturbing and frightening experiences into positive ones by taking effective action. The Witnessing Project helps people figure out what action is right and meaningful for them.

If you do dedicate your treatments, we would love to hear from you. We are creating an archive of dedications and will post them on our web site. You can contact us at www.witnessingproject.org.

The Companion Guide for Volunteers Facilitating the Treatment Dedication Project

My name is Kaethe Weingarten and I have been diagnosed and treated for cancer three times, in 1988, 1993 and 2003. I developed the Treatment Dedication Program so that people who are undergoing cancer treatment can do something that is meaningful to them, to others and to the world. We tend to think that the treatment period is a time out of the lives of people in treatment for cancer. But, being in treatment may actually be a good time to consider what is important and to do something, however small, about what we care about deeply.

During my most recent round of treatment for cancer, I dedicated each radiation session to a person or cause whose work in the world I wanted to honor. I honored them by taking treatment in their name. Preparing to dedicate the treatment, doing so at the time of the treatment itself, and communicating with my dedicatees about what their work meant to me was one of the most significant, hopeful and comforting experiences of my life. Further, I strongly believe that small acts of compassion can actually make a difference at the largest societal levels. We can make a difference in our world.

This guide is intended to help you assist a person with cancer dedicate his or her treatments to a worthy person or cause. I highly recommend that you read the entire Guide to Dedicating Cancer Treatments first. This companion guide will help you work with someone undergoing cancer treatments. People with cancer often feel diminished in their capacity to lead their lives, but yearn to do something that can make a positive difference. They may not have the energy, focus, or confidence to steer themselves through a meaningful project, but would welcome support to complete one. You can help a person living with cancer with the dedication project, thereby contributing to his or her sense of well-being and accomplishment. I believe that you will derive as much benefit from working on this project as will the person with cancer.

By participating in this project, you will join a national movement of dedication, embodying the belief that no act is too small, no person so diminished, that she or he cannot make an offering that matters. Thank you for your contribution.

The steps that I describe are suggestions, not prescriptions. There is no right or wrong way to dedicate. The two guides that I have prepared are just that: a compendium of suggestions.

1. Introductions

A. Introduce yourselves

Whether or not you know the patient, neither of you “know” each other in the context of this dedication project. Therefore, introductions make sense. If you have never met before or don’t know each other well, spend a few minutes, or more, sharing something about who you are, your interests, what is important to you. You might want to share where you live, or what you like to do. If you do know the person well, spend a few minutes sharing what is important to you at this moment.

B. Discuss why this project is appeals to you

I think it is important to talk to each other about why this project appeals to you.

The person you are working with, your friend or the person with cancer with whom you have been paired at the treatment center, may be comfortable talking about herself or talking about her reasons for doing the project, or this may be difficult. You may need to ask the person questions to help him talk about his reasons for doing this project. Helping people talk about why they are doing this gives them an opportunity to feel connected to core beliefs and values. It usually makes people feel good to talk about themselves in this way.

In general, throughout this project, it will be preferable to ask questions that are in the form of open-ended prompts than in the form of probes or forced-choice questions. For example,

Prompts:

Was there something that struck a chord with you when you learned about the Treatment Dedication Project?

Did you perk up in some way when you realized you could participate in the Treatment dedication Project?

Rather Than,

Probes:

Why are you doing this?

Are you doing this because you feel hopeless?

Or,

Forced-Choice Questions:

Are you hoping to feel better or more fulfilled after you dedicate your treatments?

2. Moving Through the Guide to Dedicating Cancer Treatments

The Guide to Dedicating Cancer Treatments is intended to provide a logically structured sequence to help people dedicate their cancer treatments. We all know, however, that we don't always think or operate logically. Read the guide a few times yourself. Try to absorb the intention of the guide. Here is another way of thinking about the different parts of the experience the guide is trying to help patients achieve.

- a. **Help people connect with a sense of purpose or meaning greater than themselves and their current emotional and physical state**
- b. **Help people feel that they can make a difference**
- c. **Turn helplessness into effective action**

I am sure there are many ways of doing this. I chose dedicating treatments because I liked the idea of making my treatments serve "double duty": while they helped me, I also used them to help others.

The key elements in this project are to:

- a. **Help someone figure out what they really care about**
- b. **Figure out who or what will represent this cause**
- c. **Help them write a letter that explains what is important to the letter-writer and recognizes the person's or organization's contribution to the letter-writer's cause**
- d. **Keep the spirit of the dedication alive during the treatment period**

It may take one session or it may take a few weeks for someone to work through this guide. The process should be open-ended. If you have limited time, let the patient know in the beginning what your time commitment can be.

Because there are no right answers and because when people are sick and tired they have difficulty being creative, the patient may come to rely on you for a lot of suggestions. You want to help without imposing what you would do on the patient. For this to be successful, you want to think of yourself as a coach to someone who will end up doing the "performance" himself. However, in the process of working on this project together, it may have an impact on your life.

3. Managing Your Own Responses

By participating in this project with a person living with cancer, you become a witness to that person's experience. I have written a book on this subject, *Common Shock—Witnessing Violence Every Day: How We Are Harmed, How We Can Heal*. In this book I discuss illness as an experience of violation that affects not just those who are ill, but also those who witness their struggles with the illness. While the experience of the witness can be painful, there is also the potential for healing if we witness with compassion and we feel effective in what we have to offer. Hopefully, this project will provide a meaningful action that feels like a worthy outcome to you, too. It is also possible that thinking through these questions will put you in touch with what really matters to you. I trust you will welcome this insight.