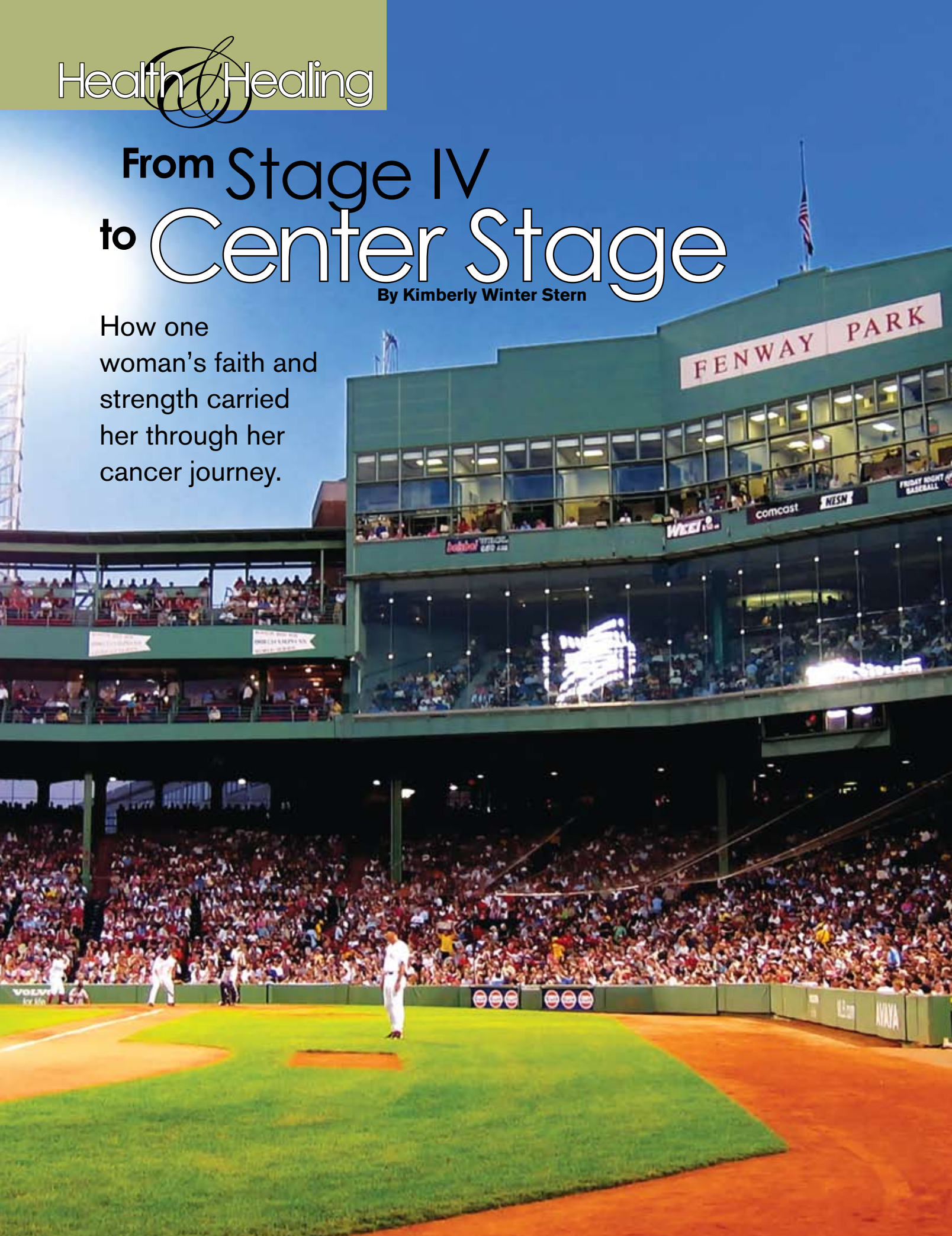


Health & Healing

# From Stage IV to Center Stage

By Kimberly Winter Stern

How one woman's faith and strength carried her through her cancer journey.



**R**ev. Denise DeSimone of Newburyport, Mass., has a personal story of profound faith, hope and light despite the screaming symptoms and raucous fear that often accompany a Stage IV cancer diagnosis.

“The first words I heard after waking from a routine biopsy to discover the pathology of a lump on the left side of my neck were ‘You have cancer,’” recalls DeSimone. “The doctor said I had a very serious, fast-moving disease and I needed to take immediate action.”

Doctors told DeSimone in September 2005 that she had squamous cell carcinoma, a type of skin cancer that manifested itself on both sides of her neck and deposited a primary tumor on the back of her tongue. DeSimone, a health fiend committed to a rigorous routine of gym workouts, swimming, walking, cycling and golfing, quickly realized that even an active life and conscious, healthy eating habits had not made her immune from the ravages of cancer.

She was given the bone-chilling news: three months to live. Despite the sobering prediction from medical practitioners, DeSimone, a 10-year member of Unity on the River in Amesbury, Mass., where she serves as a chaplain, remained determined to

let her spirit soar, a natural state for a woman who is a seasoned motivational speaker. One Sunday DeSimone addressed her spiritual community during morning services and made a simple request.

“I implored the congregation not to label me as a cancer victim,” says DeSimone. “I told them I didn’t have cancer but rather an incredible opportunity to take a closer walk with God.”

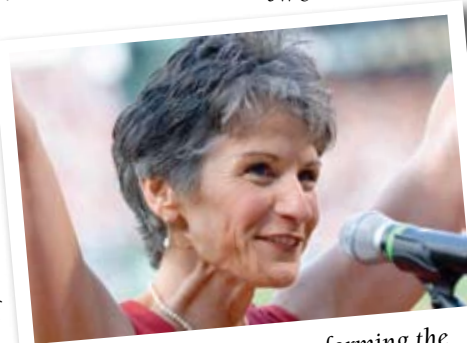
But DeSimone, later ordained an interfaith minister following a two-

year program, discovered that cancer’s brazen nature doesn’t take into account someone’s level of spirituality and that a relationship with God offers no physical defense. Armed with her self-described “master combination”

of exercise, diet and a powerful conviction, DeSimone faced the most daunting challenge of her life: embracing cancer with grace and faith.

“Spirituality is at the top of my list,” explains DeSimone. “I have always been a seeker and a person who communes with God.”

DeSimone contends her perspective on choosing to approach what is so often a terrifying disease with optimism rather than fear helped save her life. She adopted her cancer as a teacher and sage and assigned



*Rev. Denise DeSimone performing the national anthem at Fenway Park before a crowd of 35,000 people, less than two years after a Stage IV cancer diagnosis.*

To listen to a song by Denise DeSimone, go to [www.unitymagazine.org](http://www.unitymagazine.org).

it a snappy acronym—PIN, which translates to Pain in the Neck—and gave it permission to teach her rich and enlightening lessons. According to DeSimone, what emerged from that deeply personal acknowledgment of a powerful illness was an element critical to healing: self-love.

Through the years, DeSimone has immersed herself in the study of alternative healing modalities and has received certifications in reflexology, sound healing and polarity therapy. She is also a Reiki master. DeSimone considers self-love the ultimate healer and decided she was going to be a miracle magnet during her cancer odyssey; she became a ready and willing vessel to receive whatever miracles God had planned for her.

“When we love ourselves, we allow our vibration to be in a place to attract life at a higher frequency, one that promotes healing on all levels,” says DeSimone. “That includes healing emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually.”

DeSimone admits that choosing to take a positive approach to cancer didn’t negate the fact that she was angry at her situation.

“I’m human and my spirituality needed to make room and allow for me to express my emotions,” she says.

And frustration surfaced. DeSimone purchased a hollow, hard plastic ball bat and told her sister Diane it was a creative anger management tool.

“I told her whenever I felt anger, I was going to honor and express it by beating a pillow or my bed to make room for God’s healing power,” says DeSimone. “Clearing out unwanted cobwebs of anger allowed light to come into my being.”

DeSimone suggested to her team of doctors that she would seek treatment through alternative forms of medicine and was quickly admonished that she’d better have a miracle tucked behind the scenes.

She opted not to continue chemotherapy after the first round;



*DeSimone insisted on taking a positive approach to cancer, using traditional medical treatment as well as a spiritual approach encompassing mind, body and soul.*

## ‘Just Another Challenge,’ Dyer Says of Diagnosis

“It’s just another life force,” motivational icon Wayne Dyer says of being diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia. Dyer, who has inspired millions with his books, speaking tours and PBS specials, first mentioned the diagnosis to his radio program listeners in May of last year.

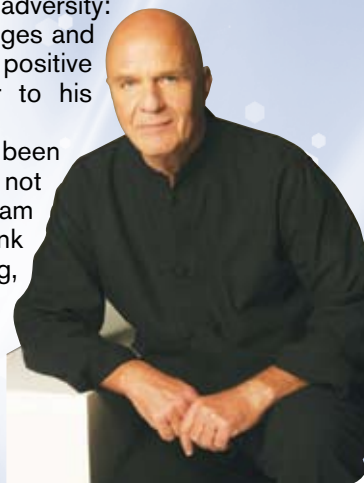
Dyer says he is approaching his diagnosis the way he would any other life event. “When you step into the world with big dharma, you get challenges,” he said. “This is just another one of them.”

Dyer, who is affectionately called the “father of motivation” by his fans, began his career as an author in the early 1970s by traveling the country alone and selling his first book, *Your Erroneous Zones*, from the trunk of his car. That book went on to sell more than 30 million copies and became the best-selling book of the 1970s.

Dyer is no stranger to adversity: He spent years in orphanages and overcame addictions. His positive attitude has carried over to his cancer.

“I haven’t judged it or been angry with it,” he says. “I am not worried about healing it. I am working to live with it. I think when you fight anything, you weaken yourself. I am inviting it to stay in peace and harmony with me or leave. It’s up to it.”

—Troy Frink



she didn't want the strong medicine to destroy the good things. DeSimone had surgery to remove the primary tumor and then received daily radiation treatments for almost three months to increase her odds of surviving. Two weeks after making the difficult decision to proceed with radiation, DeSimone began a journey through what she describes as "the rigors of hell." A feeding tube was surgically inserted into her stomach. She lost the ability to eat and drink and could barely speak. Three months passed before she could tolerate liquids, and for nine long months, DeSimone's daily nutrition was delivered through the feeding tube.

One of DeSimone's lifelong passions was singing. She was known to always have a song in her heart and a melody on her lips.

"What little voice I had would completely fade by midafternoon," says DeSimone. "The most devastating aspect was that I couldn't sing a single note."

During the months of brutal treatments, DeSimone remained dedicated to speaking with God. Her regular prayer asked Him to use her life to inspire others if she survived the cancer. She has no doubt that her prayer made a difference, because her voice returned, as fluid and resonant as before.

"On July 14, 2007, just 22 months after my diagnosis, I sang the national

anthem before 35,000 fans at a Boston Red Sox game," says DeSimone.

DeSimone was able to reach thousands that night at the ballpark with her beautiful voice. She also shared the miraculous story of how she not only survived, but thrived, in large part due to her unshakable faith and determination to not let cancer define her existence.

"I am



*DeSimone refused to let cancer take the joy from her life or the smile from her face. For more information on Denise DeSimone's work visit [www.denisedesimone.com](http://www.denisedesimone.com).*

contacted weekly now to pray for and often counsel people struggling with cancer," says DeSimone. "God is using my life in a big way."

In addition to her ministry DeSimone travels the country speaking and leading workshops on love, transformation and natural wholeness. She just released her third CD, titled *Pray Peace*, which was DeSimone's senior project for ministerial school. The recording includes prayers from different religions set to original music by DeSimone. Her crystal-clear

voice, once compromised as a result of cancer treatment protocols, speaks each prayer.

DeSimone has resumed her athletic pursuits, including riding a bicycle 85 miles in August 2007 for the Pan-Mass Challenge. She has raised more than \$25,000 for children's cancer research for the Jimmy Fund, which supports the fight against cancer in children and adults at Boston's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. She is also writing a memoir.

The great poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "There is no object so foul that intense light will not make it beautiful."

DeSimone, once labeled a cancer patient, is a living example of how beauty transcends pain.

As she touches people with her story of faith and recovery, she remembers that every day is a gift.

"Each day I open that gift with a heart full of gratitude," says DeSimone. ■

**NOTE:** To comment on this article, e-mail [lapptm@unityonline.org](mailto:lapptm@unityonline.org).