



INSPIRED CONSCIOUS LIVING

LOVE
LETTERS
TO
OUR
BODIESTM

VOLUME 2

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN
CANCER SURVIVORS

FUNDED BY LLOYD SYMINGTON FOUNDATION

Introduction

"Love Letters to Our Bodies" is a contemplative, transformational workshop for women journeying with cancer. This series of workshops was specifically for African American women and women of the African diaspora.



This cohort was selected because according to the American Cancer Society the incidence of cancer in the United States is highest in African Americans. Also, as a group, African Americans have poorer health outcomes.

In the workshops the women explored themes related to how they experience their bodies pre- and post-diagnosis, stories they tell themselves, how that has changed since their diagnosis, and how they engage in self-care. In addition, through a series of interactive polls, women shared whether they had previous traumatic experiences, how they were dealt with, and what they love and appreciate about their bodies.

Four "Dynamic Sisters" who are thriving and supporting others joined us this year and shared their journeys, weaving a rich tapestry from direct experience.

Throughout the workshops, the women participated in guided inquiry, meditation, contemplation, journaling, breath work and mudras. They were supported energetically with processes to quiet the mind and open the heart, and holistic healing energy to restore balance.

Gwendolyn Mitchell
Founder, Moyo Institute, Inc.
Creator, Love Letters to Our Bodies





Ginger Waters

Dear Body,

I'm here today examining our journey. Today I am feeling grateful and at peace. I think back to the start of our journey - what a difference and how time has changed our outlook on life. How precious life is now, not that it wasn't before. I felt you going through a transformation before we were told the words, "you have cancer."

Oh, my precious body, I knew before we heard the news that I had to prepare us for this road ahead not knowing where it would take us, or where it would end up. So, as always, I had to continue to embrace you, adore you, and tell you even more how beautiful and powerful you are. I had to talk more to our Heavenly Father. I had to tell our Father that death was not an option for us because we had so much amazing work to do in our lives.

I had to prepare us to be strong, not knowing the direction of our path. We had no time to be weak. We had to be stronger for our other sisters and brothers who were stricken with this disease. Oh self, you hung in there with me, even when I didn't feel like it. I love you for allowing me to take strolls on the beach, continuing to go camping, and interacting with people, as if nothing was wrong. I love you.

I never wanted to say we were sick, rather, we were having a moment. So girl, now that we're cancer free, we are more beautiful and sexier than ever. We helped other cancer patients go through their journey as we were going through ours. Thank you. I love you.

Tracy Wildy



I have been unfaithful to you, and yet I was not aware of my unfaithfulness. At one point I walked into a wall and it hurt. The pain was unbearable, but it let me know that I had been asleep and so had the giant within me.

Now I am awake and facing truths I had always known, but never acknowledge or given myself permission to believe.

I am perfect in my imperfection. As long as I can breathe, I can change and grow. I love you, I love me without question, I just didn't know it as fully as I do now. Awakening, I have found a new way of being. Only I, only you can define me, and she's beautiful and funny, serious and grateful for all of life's experiences.

Mom once told me "As long as you're alive, you'll be forever growing." I'm going to spend my life enjoying the adventure with you, with me. Spirit will give you and me the wings to fly!

The last lines of the poem *Desiderata*: "... With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be careful. Strive to be happy."



Ingrid Heidelberg-Williams

Hi Girl!

I've been waiting for this time/space for a long time. A few months ago, I really learned how the power of words/emotions impacted the mind, body, and spirit. We started our journey of loving us by doing what makes us happy, intentionally smiling more, and making us laugh for no reason at all just because!

We learned to say I love you in the mirror and out of the mirror, affirming the fact that we are beautiful, we matter, we are more than enough, and we are loved.

I kissed us on the hand or on the arm just because! I started making amends to you for all the pain, sorrow, and bad choices that gave us the path we were on. I chose purposefully to unconditionally love you more!

I thank you for not giving up on me and giving me unconditional love; for being resilient, long suffering, and kind. Girl, there's still so many more things we have to do. You have cared for so many, now it's our time. We are going to live our best life for we are now one in the spirit and we have been empowered and equipped for what's needed in the next chapters to the end. I love you!



Anita Moorjani
Author

"Dying to be Me"

"When I awoke into my infinite self, I was amazed to understand that my life could be dramatically different just by realizing that

I AM LOVE.

And, I always have been.

I don't have to do anything to deserve it.

Understanding this means that I'm working with life force energy. Whereas performing at being loving is working against it.

Realizing that I AM LOVE was the most important session I learned allowing me to release all fear and that's the key that saved my life."



Valencia Balkcom

Dear Body,

I am writing to apologize for not being more appreciative of you. Thomas has been such a light, showing his appreciation, more so than I have.

Please forgive my insecurities and doubts about what you now look like after surgery... The pain, trauma, and feeling as though I am no longer whole.

I'm grateful and thankful that you didn't give up on me. Please continue to allow me some grace as we move forward and heal.

Love,
Valencia

Lillian Walker Shelton



Dear Body,

What is it to need? What is it to control? I think that sometimes I have needed you and tried to control you, and it did not work.

I felt that you disappointed me. But let's look at what I did to you... all the things that I did to you. Sometimes over the years, I have been downright disrespectful to you - from starving you, depriving you, making bad choices of lovers, and just ignoring you.

I don't think I have been fair to you. Body, I am sorry. I need you, but clearly, I cannot control you. I stand on legs that look like drumsticks. We have chestnut brown skin and midnight black hair. The mole above our eyebrows is mythical.

Body, you're intelligent and you can dance. Body, you are blessed. We're going to make this work. Dear Body, I love you. We are on the same team.

Body, our relationship has developed over time. Now, my goal is to understand you better.



Dee Manuel Cloud

Dearest Body of Dee,

Thank you so much for the many ways in which you support me. Sometimes I'm surprised at what you can still do at 53. Thank you for the signals that let me know it's time to take a break or that something isn't quite right.

I know I don't always pay attention to you or care for you in the manner I should, so thank you for not giving up on me when I push you beyond your limits. Moving forward I vow to nurture you more with nutritious foods that fuel you. I vow to stay in motion to keep you healthy. I vow to be kind to you and give you rest when needed. I vow to honor your limitations and show gratitude for the way you sustain me.

I promise to be your best friend and cheerleader and to love you like no one else. I vow to honor you and care for you forever.

Love & Light,

Dee

Regina Stradford



Dear Body,

I love how you are so agile, healthy and that you allow me to experience the joy of walking, exercise, and movement - like dancing and swimming.

I love that you are the perfect picture and presentation of me. I love the beautiful color for my skin that covers you so perfectly. I love how you protect my inner being, my organs and all that is within. I love how miraculously all the parts work together.

I love how my heart continues to expand with love, joy and gratitude. I am full of gratitude and blessed to have you.



Mildeen Worrell

Dear Body,

I love the softness of your skin to touch. I adore the darkness of your complexion and how well it contrasts against colors like red and purple.

I love that you are strong, majestic, and so easily connect with nature and the universe. Everything I need is already housed within you.

Thank you for being so total and complete.

Thank you for housing my ever-evolving mind and spirit. Help me to guard what enters in and what leaves from within you. Together, we will more than triumph in this journey called life.

Ivory Jones



Hey Girl,

Have I ever told you how much I love you? Appreciate you? And admire you? I'm sorry for taking you for granted. Even when I loved you the least, you've loved me harder. You've given me chances to treat you right, which I have given away to others. I still take you for granted. Forty two years of me promising to be better added to three more of the same, yet you continue to show up for me.

It's finally time that I show up for you; that I give you the love and embrace you like you've done for me. When I hated you the most for getting sick, you did what you were supposed to do. You healed. Even when I could keep nothing down, when I couldn't nourish you, you began the process of fighting, and you continue to fight.

I don't know how.

I've made promises which I failed to keep about never eating sugar, eating better, working out more, and treating you better. What's true is that even though sometimes I do eat sugar and don't work out, when I show up for the scans, they continue to tell me that the lumps are gone. They tell me that my bones are healing. I don't know how or why I got so lucky with you.



Privacy Requested

Hey Beautiful Lady,

You sure don't look like what you were going through. Your faith, I know, is bringing you through this.

I just wanted to let you know how much I love and admire your strength. I hear you in the late night hours, when the house is quiet, praising the Lord, and thanking him in the midst of this fight.

This situation has made you stronger in many ways. I see you advocating more for yourself - taking much needed time to rest, recover, and put yourself first. Now, you know to shut down things and people when they don't mean you well. I love how you are taking one day at a time... One treatment at a time, and looking forward to your healing. People say you have changed. I say it's for your good.

Your eyes are wide open and you can see things so much clearer now. You are learning so much more about yourself through this journey. I can't wait until we introduce the new you to the world!

Gwendolyn Mitchell
Founder, Moyo Institute
&



Love Letters Project Creator

"We are master creators, creating every moment with our thoughts, words, deeds and emotions. It is up to us to use our capacity to create consciously.

Doing so, we experience beauty, joy, fulfillment, gratitude, and resilience."



Pat Robinson

Pat,

I love you. You may not feel like I have. But I promise to love you for all the days of your life. What does it mean to love you? What do I do to love you? Talk to me.

Hey there lover, I want you to hold me. I've been through so much. I'm tired of holding so much. Can I let go of everything I hold to be loved by you?

I don't have to let go forever. Just hold me back when I hold you. We can pause and come back to our work when the time is right. Right now is the time to love you. How? Show me how to love you. That's an order. Show me.

Touch me here. Tickle me 'til my brown face turns red. Feed me loving truth to nourish my sweet soul. Whisper peaceful poems to me about how you feel loving me.

It feels like a warm fire in my stomach and goosebumps all over my skin when I'm in love with you. We sit together in a call and response. Your eyes say so much more, reflecting back at me in the mirror. I can sit here and stare at you for a while. I want to know how your scars heal. I can watch that.

May I lend you a loving, healing touch whenever? We are one.



Washingtoni

Dear Beautiful - My Deep Hidden Soul Within,

I apologize for not seeing you when you needed my love, acceptance, and respect. I allowed my mental realities to distort my perception. Emotionally, I fell victim to self-destruction and sabotaging reasoning. I simply gave in to the physical trap of constant pain and weakness, and the ugliness in which I dwelled. Spiritually, I became lost in the wilderness of pain, despair, rejection, and loneliness.

I apologize for not seeing you, my beauty.

I remember our past moments, struggling for acceptance. Now, acceptance is all you need from me. You have endured many storms and shielded my wellbeing, while reshaping your skin, bones, and self-image to keep me alive. Yes, you changed on the outside from the scars of my life decisions. Yet, your beauty within remained unchanged but became deeply hidden because I refused to accept the life lessons as blessings.

As I continue to love, accept, and respect you - the beauty within - please forgive me. Please forgive me.



Talaya Dendy

Dear Divine Vessel,

Thank you for sticking and staying with me, especially when I took you for granted. Now that I have grown, and I am committed to life-long healing, I truly see and believe you were made just for me. And you are a masterpiece just the way you are.

I remember the younger me constantly judged you for not being perfect... for feeling like you just couldn't get it right. A lot of those feelings were due to me allowing the pesky societal thoughts and recordings to come between us. I also tried to form a relationship with perfection, but you knew long before I did that it wouldn't last.

I was really surprised and saddened when the uninvited guest - cancer - showed up. They say cancerous cells can lie dormant in the body for many years before they become problematic. Wow, I want to thank you for working overtime to protect me and fight for me all those years.



I look forward to growing old with you. It will require ongoing inner work to keep us in a good place. But you are worth it. I am so grateful to you for doing what you needed to do, and what you were designed to do, which is live and thrive.

It is a blessing to be with a vessel that wants to live. When I listen, you never steer me wrong. Today as I profess my love to you, know that I am at a point where I can say, I truly honor and value you for “who” and “what” you are. What we have is sacred. I will do what I need to do to take care of you and protect you.

Divine vessel, you are unique and a beautiful miracle. We are one. I love you. Dear body, thank you for listening. I hope this letter touches you as much as it touches me

Talaya

12-year Cancer Thriver

Afua Derise Tolliver



My Dear Lovely Body,

Let me begin by saying thank you. Thank you for being the temple that has been with me for almost 7 decades; seeing me through so many good times, desired times, and those not so desired. I have experienced crawling, walking, running, dancing, and much more with you. I know love and affection through you from kisses, hugs and embraces. Being with you has made me smile often.

I am aware, however, that I have not always shown my gratitude for you. I actually did not appreciate your beauty seeing you through the eyes of others. I was injected with the belief that I was not pretty enough. My hair was too short, my stomach too pouchy. I could not run or walk, nor move better than others. Comparison kept me away from the sweetest love that was always present and available with you.

And when the pain of the cancer diagnosis came, I felt like you, my body, had betrayed me after all I had done, I believed, to take care of you.



When I felt I had no other decision, than to have surgery to save my life, I wondered why. Maybe it was to be reminded by you of my own importance. I need to take care of myself and to love myself. I got it now, as you have taught me that you were always helping me to learn to grow, and to heal. I love you.

I love the asymmetry of my chest after making that life-saving decision to have surgery. My scars are beautiful. You are beautiful. Now I have learned your language and, more and more, am listening to and hearing your messages. I appreciate what we have been and done together. Without a doubt, you have been here for me.

What I know now is that you “be” for me. What I can say now unabashedly, unashamedly, and unapologetically is that I thank you. And even more than that,
I love you.



Sharmel Rutheford

You have been here always warning me when I needed it even though I don't and I didn't always listen. I accepted my flaws because I love my strength more. I have loved the way my brain works more than how my body looks to others.

You told me I had cancer before the doctor told me. You gave me thoughts of who to call to pray for my family, and what to do next. You told me to lean on my faith and truly give it to God. All the conversations we had about life's surprises, good and bad, came to direct me.

I realize you always seem to be preparing me for life good and bad. I love that I was never diminished while growing up. I'm happy you told me to tell my mother the exceptional part she played in this and what an exceptional person she was. I didn't recognize it early enough to tell my father before he died. I love you so much. And, I love to share myself with others, more and more with age and experience, especially since being diagnosed with cancer. I love you my body. You are a gift.

Lucille Olson
Music Director
Unity Spiritual Renaissance



*"Our thoughts are prayers,
and we are always praying.*

*Our thoughts are prayers,
Be careful what you're saying.*

Seek a higher consciousness,

A state of peacefulness,

And know that God is always there.

And every thought becomes a prayer.

Tricia Griffith



Dear Sweet,

From the time the sun shines on your face to the moment the moon floods your bedroom, I want you to know that I love you and that you are love. Permission granted to allow love back in... Know that you're okay and we'll be just fine. Go ahead smile, laugh, dance. Dance like no one's watching. Laugh at the jokes, even if you're the only one laughing. Your laughter spreads joy. Give joy but save some for self and smile because it literally does light up a room. I love your smile.

Life is a journey and there's so much to this life. I am excited to keep the promises we made... To see all the sites, go to all the places, and do all the things. But wait, it's not a performance. This is real life and it's okay to rest too. So, let's add that to the list of fun things to do - REST - it's amazing.

I wrap my arms around you, scars and all. We've got this and I've got you. I will love you forever and a day... to love.

Tricia

Norma Douglas



Dearest Norma,

I love you. And today I wish to express my sincere gratitude to you. Despite my challenges, you have helped me to function in all of my activities of daily living. You have enabled me to function independently, which made me feel secure and less afraid.

Thank you for giving me strong feet, strong arms, strong legs, good vision, and overall good health.

I must admit that sometimes I have been careless in the way I have treated you. But moving forward I promise to do better.

Gratefully and lovingly yours,

Norma

Kamika Allen



Hi Body,

We have been through a lot since 2017 to present. I grieved for the loss of my father unexpectedly in 2017. Then body, you almost tried to take me out of here in 2019. I used to ask, "Why Me?" Why did I have to endure so much after being diagnosed with Stage 2 TNBC - Triple Negative Breast Cancer - one of the most aggressive cancers? So many ups and downs and complications... I was almost ready to give up until I realized God was showing me another side of me. This sickness has made me a stronger person. Now I realize that I can conquer anything and make it. Praise God!

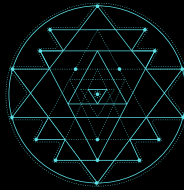
I don't look like what I've been through. You have allowed me to minister and encourage others. Body, you brought COVID-19 and it took my dear mom unexpectedly - a blow to me that I'm still trying to work through. She was here throughout my cancer journey. I'm longing and wishing that she was still alive to see her oldest grandson and youngest one. We miss and love you dearly. My heart has been totally broken since then. My mother-in-love left me on February 15, 2023, unexpectedly. My heart is shattered. It is so hard to go through the day.

At times life is a struggle now. But God, you are keeping me here for a reason or purpose that I have to see my way through. Sometimes my life is so hard God. But God, all I can say is that life is a constant struggle, but I am still here, working my way through it.

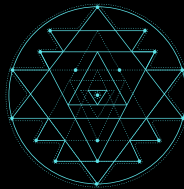
Sri Amma Bhagavan Enlightened Avatars Golden Age Movement



*Health is a cumulative
experience of the mind.*



*Health is not just treating the
physical body, but healing the mind and
nourishing the consciousness.*



*A return to oneness between various systems
of the human body is the return to health.*



Angela Wilson Turnbull

Dear Angel,

You are the most precious and wonderful child of God, given all that you need to traverse the mountains and deep valleys of life. The secrets of greatest wisdom and knowing have been given to you from the moment of your birth. In the quiet of silence summons this knowledge and allows each molecule of your most sacred body to thirst upon the pure essence and healing of the Divine.

Know that every encounter you have experienced - from your growth inside your mother's womb, to nursing at her breasts, to crawling, crying, creating in your new world, taking your first steps, traversing the playgrounds, giant slides, canoe rides, horses, mountain streams, tractors, shotgun lessons, orchard picking, bush meetings, ocean swims, bicycle rides to Harbor Island and Lakewood Park, boat rides to Peach Island.

I have been with you loving you, protecting you, and embracing you through each scrape, shiver, chill, fright, fall, misstep, to deep garden digs for nourishment. I gave you every drop of water, morsel of food, ray of light, embrace of nurture, ease of care, and encounter of worldly passion.



I have been with you from your very first dance, prom and homecoming, musical and play performances, concerts, creative and spoken word performances from here to Paris, to Ghana, the Mediterranean, and across the globe.

I gave you the voice, courage, the grit, perseverance, more courage to stand, not back down, to fight to seize the victory, and most importantly to live. I am giving you this divine body to experience all there is for you to taste, touch, smell, sample on the wildest imagination of your dreams.

Let nothing stop you from living fully, loving every person you encounter, especially those who gave you great harm from their evil deeds, like the Hamans in the book of Esther. Forgive them all and cast their negative energy far away from your sacred temple, replacing every ounce of pain with love, healing, and joyous victory. For my flesh is mine and mine alone.

My cells that have fallen down will be cast off of me and replaced, with a purity of sacred wholeness. The defiance of all my ancestors, the power of all the love created in the universe for my triumphant survival. May each breath I take remind me why I have this great power within my body, my resilience, and my soul's everlasting power to live. Amen.

Jada Seegers



Beloved of Mine,

Thank you for all that you have done for me. Thank you for allowing me to experience life - to see, hear, feel, touch and be touched. I love you. Forgive me, I never meant to hurt, neglect, or abuse you. That happened out of my ignorance.

From now on, I am working to be sensitive to you, listening and being aware of how you communicate, and guarding my intake and outward thoughts, emotions, and words that can harm us. I realize that what I think, feel, and do affects you.

Beloved Body of Mine, I love you. 💕

Dynamic Sisters Spotlight

*Featuring Women Who are Thriving
and Positively Impacting Others*

Erin "Bionic" Brown

"For me the word 'suffer' holds no weight when speaking about my cancer, amputation, or any other illness or incident. I did not 'suffer.'

I overcame and now live in a community that has always existed.

Our cancer journeys are unique.

Each is designed for growth."

DYNAMIC SISTERS

SPOTLIGHT

ERIN "BIONIC" BROWN



An incredible black woman who has had cancer is now thriving. Erin "Bionic" Brown, the above knee amputee from bone cancer (Osteosarcoma), has leaned into her identity as an athlete and inspired a movement of disability inclusion in The Bahamas. She also has the distinction of being the first black woman with a disability, Bahamian, and Para Triathlete in maritime history to be named *Godmother of a Royal Caribbean international vessel - Royal Caribbean International Odyssey of the Seas* - an honor usually reserved for royalty, heads of state, and celebrities.

Erin and her firm Erin Brown Connects are focused on Disability Advocacy and Inclusion Management, both nationally and internationally, helping to shape policies that include disabled people.

Erin currently leads The University of the Bahamas, Office of Disabilities and Compliance and is increasing access, inclusion, and opportunities for students and educators with disabilities.



DYNAMIC SISTERS

SPOTLIGHT

DEE MANUEL CLOUD

A two-time breast cancer survivor, Breast Cancer Recovery Strategist, International Speaker, and owner and CEO of Intentional Living Academy, Dee is also the author of the bestselling book, *Beauty in the Breakdown: Finding Peace in the Midst of Life's Disruptions*.

As an accomplished speaker, Dee was awarded the "Rocking the Virtual Stage Award for Women Rocking Business" by Sage Lavine.

As a Breast Cancer Recovery Strategist, Dee helps survivors overcome the fear, trauma and suffering of breast cancer to creating a life of peace, joy, and fulfillment so they can thrive and rebuild their lives even better than before.

Over the years, she has developed her signature program, "*Thriving on Purpose*," which provides a unique approach to bouncing back from breast cancer. Understanding the unique life experiences and goals of breast cancer survivors enables Dee to create an action plan that supports survivors in moving beyond breast cancer to create their best life.

DYNAMIC SISTERS

SPOTLIGHT

TALAYA DENDY



A 12-year Cancer Thriver, Cancer Doula, Independent Patient Advocate, Cancer Health Equity Consultant, Mental Health First Aider, and Podcaster who has dedicated her career to guiding, supporting, empowering, and advocating for people diagnosed with cancer.

She has developed a fulfilling career path from cancer patient to Founder and CEO of On the Other Side LLC, a cancer navigation enterprise that provides personalized support using a patient-centered and holistic approach.

Talaya hosts the *"Navigating Cancer TOGETHER"* podcast and is a contributing author to a #1 best-selling book, *"I Survived Cancer And Here Is How I Did It."* It shares the stories of cancer survivors and thrivers to spread hope and show that a cancer diagnosis is not the end.



DYNAMIC SISTERS SPOTLIGHT

TRICIA GRIFFITH

Author Tricia Griffith is a Certified Project Manager, member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., Board Member of Sisters Network, NYC Chapter, volunteer, and community activist to name a few of her activities.

She also holds membership with The National PanHellenic Council (NPHC), Top Ladies of Distinction, and her Alma Mater's Black/Hispanic Alumni Association; supporting activities in and around her community.

A breast cancer survivor, Tricia enjoys volunteering with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network as a Legislative Ambassador to improve policies around cancer research, treatment, and equality.

Tricia completed the Diva Half Marathon and loves traveling, event planning, and communing with family and friends.

She recently published, *"The Positive of My Triple-Negative Breast Cancer: Pearls of Wisdom from the Patient's Perspective."*