

SUPER SURVIVORS

Former GMA Co-Host Joan Lunden Tackles Breast Cancer to Lead Important Advocacy Initiative

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By  **DR. NANCY BERK** @nancyberk 



Joan Lunden during chemotherapy treatment (photo courtesy of Joan Lunden Productions)

Joan Lunden's award-winning journalism career was based on asking important questions and gathering critical information. So the former *Good Morning America* host admits that she was taken by surprise when her own battle with breast cancer highlighted how much she didn't know as she began her journey to fight the disease. But that information gap began to narrow nearly as quickly as it was noticed when Lunden dove in to the problem and began collecting the resources and answers that would help her and others navigate the often-rocky and confusing road many breast cancer patients face.

Parade caught up with Lunden, now three years post-breast cancer



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diagnosis and “NED” (with no evidence of disease), to discuss her new campaign *At Home With Joan* and her mission to empower women to become their own health care advocates. While it might have been easy for the high-profile journalist to “put a little baseball cap and sunglasses on and slink in and out of my treatment,” Lunden realized that there was a great need for cancer awareness education and she was up for the challenge.

Listen to the conversation with Joan Lunden.

When it comes to dealing with our health, and especially treating a disease that can often involve a team of caregivers, we as patients must take an active role in our healthcare.

“It’s imperative that you become your own health advocate,” stresses Lunden who hopes the stories she helped capture on *At Home With Joan* help those facing breast cancer and its challenges move forward in positive ways.

“I didn’t even realize in the beginning that I didn’t know the questions to ask. But as you go through that journey you kind of—you get enlightened,” explains the journalist, who found herself learning from the many people she met, including strangers on the street and on social media.

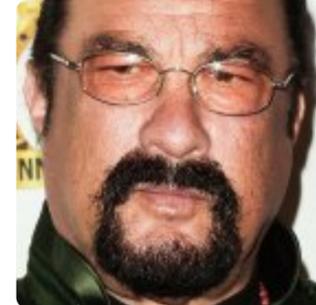
“But it started just opening my eyes to the fact that it’s so important to know the questions to ask and that I needed to make sure that I was there helping to deliver that information. And you know there’s no bad question. There’s no dumb question that you can ask an oncologist or an oncology nurse or a breast cancer surgeon. People need to know that.”

When she publicly acknowledged that it was her strong family support system that got her through her cancer treatment, Lunden was later struck by a stranger’s social media shoutout reminding her that not everyone is fortunate enough to have a built-in support network.

“Well let me tell you, I’ve never forgotten that woman. And it really kind of opened my eyes to the need for a support system for so many going through this. But I’m happy to say that with that I’ve also learned that there



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are a multitude of support groups around this country—many local ones and these days you can look it up. You can literally Google it,” stresses Lunden whose new platform includes links to many of these support groups.

“It’s interesting that this sisterhood that is the breast cancer community is amazingly compassionate and amazingly helpful. Go to a breast cancer walk in your area and walk into the survivor tent and there’ll be 30 people there, 50 people there that are ready to reach out their hand and help you. I have found that to be one of the most extraordinary things I’ve ever seen. It really refurbishes your belief in humankind. There are many, many different organizations around. And I say, ‘Don’t go it alone. It’s really not a good idea. And you don’t need to go it alone.’”

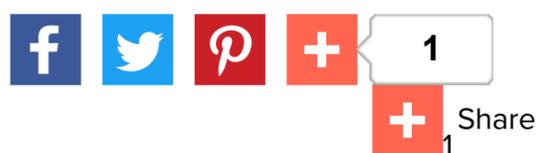
Lunden, who spends more than her fair share of time on the road speaking about breast cancer awareness and advocacy, frequently hears from women who have been impacted by her messages. Many have made the decision to finally get the screening they have been putting off. Some have been diagnosed with breast cancer that might have otherwise gone unnoticed until it was too late.

“For every woman that says that, I think, ‘Alright, get on the next plane. Go to the next city.’ It really is important,” Lunden says.

Read an excerpt from Joan’s book [Had I Known: A Memoir of Survival](#).

Follow Nancy’s conversations on [iTunes](#) and [Facebook](#).

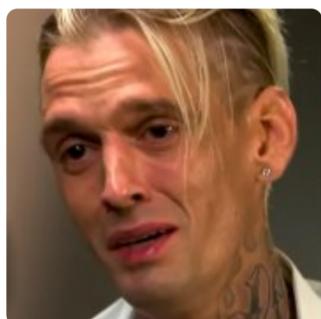
*[Nancy Berk, Ph.D.](#) is a clinical psychologist, author, comic and entertainment analyst. The host of the showbiz podcast [Whine At 9](#), Nancy digs a little deeper as she chats with fascinating celebrities and industry insiders. Her book [College Bound and Gagged: How to Help Your Kid Get into a Great College Without Losing Your Savings, Your Relationship, or Your Mind](#) can be seen in the feature film *Admission* starring Tina Fey and Paul Rudd.*



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