

YOU ONLY SEE THE STARS AT NIGHT

A Memoir of Iambic Tweets

Told With a Tear in One Eye and a Twinkle in the Other

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And in this harsh world

drawn by pain, filled in with hope

I tell my story.

INTRODUCTION

What follows is a brief history of my time and what I've made of it thus far. Like a Polaroid whose image emerges only slowly and in retrospect, my mission now seems quite clear – to answer two questions: Does a virus cause breast cancer in women? and, Is the world's first preventive breast cancer vaccine, developed by Professor Vincent Tuohy of the Cleveland Clinic in 2010, safe and effective for use in women? I intend to see that these questions are answered, or die at some point along the way while doing so. If I'm lucky and live long enough to get these questions answered, I'll happily move on the next thing, whatever that may be.

What follows is an abbreviated autobiography, told in a series of iambic tweets - an arranged marriage between poetry and the collapsing universe of our time.

PROLOGUE

Set upon a stormy sea, shipwrecked by circumstance, I built a boat from the wreckage I found along dark, strange shores. I gathered my materials at night, and built my boat when I had light. Leaving the place where I'd washed up, I sailed east – forever circling home.

MEMOIR

September 8, 1951: Theresa, my Mom, marries Bud, my Dad. She's Italian, he is Irish – fat meets fire love. I'm two months old, in utero.

April 29, 1952: I'm born and separated from my self at birth, and years go by before we meet again. My mother stays at home while Dad flies round the world.

June 1, 1953: A sister is born. Her name is Mary Ellen.

September 7, 1954: Another sister is born, and her name is Barbara.

We children circle like planets drawn into an elliptical orbit around parents held together by the gravitational force of endless war.

My mother irons everything, including her apron. She teaches industry and Dad shows us adventure. But his rage, it is the roar of hell.

Curious, I put a bobby pin into a light socket and gave myself quite a jolt! I burned my hand but nothing more. It's hard to kill a kid.

Christmas, 1957: Marge (Dad's mom) knit an outfit for my baby doll one night and set her on the sofa for me to find in the morning. This is love.

*1958-1962: St. Louis Catholic School. I'm sure my parents thought that they were giving me their best; but only sin and guilt were taught or learned.

I got good grades, and took piano too. In 5th grade, Michael Barry said we've learned all there was to know; would just review it ever after.

1962: We move to Florida. I go to public school. Sunshine, freedom and the Space Program were my salvation. It was like Oz. Heaven really.

1963: I love Florida but Mom can't stand it. We return to Virginia with a new sister in

tow, Maureen. I go back to St. Louis - gloom and doom.

1966-69: High school started badly as I ran with the wrong crowd; but I was saved by my first love, David: then I settled down. I grew beautifully.

*August, 1969: During the summer of 11th grade, I ran away and married the manager of the shoe store where I worked - Grant was 23; I had just turned 17.

Sometimes there are forks in the road where decisions are made, but this was an intangible flood sweeping me away. Oh, turbulent tempest!

This was not what I thought would happen to me. I was full of hopes and dreams and plans for a glorious life. Despair. And fear.

*September, 1969: Grant and I move to Georgia to live with his sister while her husband is in Vietnam. Grant sells shoes and I find work at Woolworth's.

October, 1969: I discover I am pregnant. I miss school and my friends. Grant drinks beer for breakfast, a fifth of rum at night, and wets the bed.

December, 1969: I must leave my job at Woolworth's soda fountain - pregnant women are not allowed. I sit at home and watch TV. I daydream of a better life.

December, 1969: I am so young that all I really worry about is the pain of childbirth. In no way am I ready to be a mother. Grant is fired; embezzlement.

*April, 1970: A daughter is born, Renee. C-section, the agony a shock! A punishment? No doubt. My mother comes to visit me and I cry when she leaves.

September, 1970: Grant and I and Renee move to Virginia to live with his parents. His father and brother are alcoholics too. Grant works at a gas station.

December, 1970: We get our own apartment on the poor side of town. I work as a secretary. Grant's mother takes care of Renee. It's a blessing for us all.

I knew it was a waste of time, yet still I dreamed big dreams - a grand house filled with

wondrous things. But it would never be.

*April, 1971: I run out of birth control pills and take my chance and come up pregnant once again. No job and no health insurance. Depressed, very.

Sometimes a book can save your life. I found "Sisterhood Is Powerful", an anthology about women's liberation; and the fog cleared.

*May, 1971: I call the health department for prenatal care. A flyer arrives in the mail: Adult Education. My exit strategy begins. A diploma, a job.

July, 1971: I only need 3 classes to obtain my high school diploma. I begin with chemistry, a subject I enjoyed in junior high and get an A; I love it.

September, 1971: I take 2 classes: Government and English Lit. I read Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Gertrude Stein. Grant asks, why do I need a diploma?

January, 1972: I'm 19 years old and 8 months pregnant, and being cared for in the Charity Clinic at Fairfax Hospital, but I have my diploma! Next, a job.

*February, 1972: My second daughter is born; I name her Charity. No one likes the name but I. They don't understand what it means to me.

*April, 1972: I go back to Fairfax Hospital, high school diploma in hand, looking for a job.

*May, 1972: I go back to Fairfax Hospital looking for a job. They take me on as a unit clerk, train me for 2 weeks, and put me in the ICU: \$3.75/hr.

*June, 1972: I pick up 4 paychecks and then tell Grant to leave - go live with your mother! He comes after me with a knife and a gun: I send him away.

*January, 1973: I enroll, part-time, at George Mason University. My major is American Studies. I want to be a writer; I like science and medicine too.

Grant's mother took care of my girls. I discovered women's liberation and other men. I enjoyed my writing but loved medicine more.

*1974: I left Fairfax Hospital and took a job as a medical secretary at Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C. I continued classes at GMU.

*1975: My mother finds a lump in her breast. Cancer. She is 45. No family history. Why? Terror! Anguish. And the surgeon cuts off her breast.

*1976-77: Physically, Mom does well, but not emotionally. I work as a secretary for the Teamsters Pension Fund. It's very boring and somewhat weird.

*1977: I leave the Teamsters and go to work at George Washington University where I can take classes tuition-free. I take Algebra and Chemistry.

I discover the Physician Assistant program at GWU and look into it. I meet with the director and decide it is exactly what I want to do.

I must have at least a year of clinical experience to get into the P.A. program, so I become an EMT and volunteer for an ambulance corps.

I ask three physicians I have worked with for letters of recommendation and am so pleased (and surprised) to read what they've written.

I apply to the P.A. program but do not get in. Disappointed, I decide to keep working hard and reapply next year. Undaunted me.

1978: I'm accepted the second time around. Now I'm scared but I don't know why. My boss, a very wise man, tells me "Don't look back." O.K.

*1979-81: I absolutely love the P.A. program, the work, the material, the patients, and my new friends. I begin to think about medical school.

I graduate the P.A. program and feel splendidly accomplished and deeply gratified. But I need a few more classes to get my B.S. degree.

*1981-82: I work at GWU Student Health - now as a P.A., not a secretary. I take one class every semester. I want to get A's and go to med school.

1982: I receive my B.S. from GWU but I need ten more pre-med classes before I can apply to med school. Holy cow, what a lot of work.

*1983: I take the MCATS, twice - my first score didn't seem high enough to me. I apply to GWU med school. I'm accepted and can hardly believe it.

I can't afford med school tuition and ask if I can wait a year to start. Yes. Can I apply to other med schools in the meantime? Yes.

1984: I apply and am accepted to New Jersey Medical School - tuition 80% cheaper than GW. I'm 33 years old, with 2 teenage daughters.

If I'm going to become a doctor - I can hardly say the words, they sound so far removed from me - I need to know more about God.

I go to the library, check out books on religion and study God - an important step before being at the helm of life and death.

As a P.A. I liked taking care of women. As an M.D., I'd like to create a brand new field - that is, Internal Medicine for Women.

*1985: First semester med school: I'm overwhelmed by the workload, which is insane. I'm used to getting A's; now every class is an ordeal.

1986: I pass all my classes, thank God; now on to second year. I'm living off student loans and help from my church.

I don't think I would have made it through my first year if it weren't for the help I received from friends at church: food, a car, care.

*1986: Second Year: The syllabus for Pathology is 1000 pages! Are these people nuts? Yet I love it and decide to become a pathologist.

*1987: Third Year: I'm convinced I'm going to hate surgery, but then I fall in love with

it and decide to become a surgeon - a big change.

1988: Fourth Year: By far the easiest. I deliver a baby. I take care of a baby whose mother shook him in a rage, tearing his brain.

*May, 1989: It's Graduation Day: I go on stage and receive my Doctor of Medicine degree. When I get back to my seat I stare at it in wonder.

I buy my first new car, a Mitsubishi Eclipse. It's silver, with a racing stripe. A bit a glory before the gory work ahead.

*1989: There is no way I can tweet the story of my internship year. The Berlin Wall came down, and I was nearly crushed to rubble too.

In the third month of my internship I am assigned to the Surgical Intensive Care Unit. I just look at my Chief in disbelief.

1990: I survive my surgical internship. As the only woman I suffer a bit at the hands of jealous, threatened men; but most are plain good guys.

A woman who had a laparoscopic gall bladder removal comes to the ER because a surgical clip fell off and her belly filled with bile.

An attending surgeon remarks, quite off-handedly, that surgical clips come off quite easily. I'm shocked and puzzled but I say nothing.

1990: My Chairman tells me I need to decide on a research project. I say I want to design a clip that does not fall off. He's skeptical.

*1991: I enlist the help of a mechanical engineer and in 4 months we've designed a surgical clip that's completely secure - doesn't fall off!

Without saying a word, I drop the Ruddy Clip on my Chairman's desk. He's impressed. I test the clip in animals and it works well.

One night I'm called to cut out the heart of a 17 year old boy who tried to commit

suicide, was left brain dead: a tragic organ donor.

Christmas Eve, I'm on the Trauma Service: a 2 year old girl dies of internal bleeding, the result of sodomy - her mother's boyfriend.

*1992: I successfully patent the Ruddy Latching-Ligating clip. Problem: what if the clip is accidentally placed on the wrong duct or vessel?

I discuss this with my engineer and he, a genius, designs a tool for removing the Ruddy Clip without damaging surrounding tissue.

In the dead of night, in the ICU, I save a patient's life by doing a tracheotomy at the bedside. And the nurses cheer.

My Chairman knows I have an interest in breast cancer and he arranges for me to do an elective at Memorial Sloan-Kettering in NYC.

After a month at MSK, there is no doubt I want to specialize in breast cancer. My destination now perfectly clear, just need a plan.

*1993: FDA approves the Ruddy Clip for use in humans. Next step: try to find a manufacturer to make, market, and distribute it.

Back on the Trauma Service: I'm asked to sit alone with a man who's been shot in the head and let everyone know when he is dead.

1994: The FDA approves the Ruddy Clip for use in humans. Animal testing at Ethicon Endosurgery in Cincinnati go beautifully. Yeah!

The engineers love the Ruddy Clip, but the "brass" insist there are no problems with their clips falling off. And they are liars.

*1994: I'm the only intern in my group to complete the surgical residency as Chief.

*1994: I ask Memorial Sloan-Kettering if they'll create a Breast Fellowship and allow me to be their first. They say, "Yes." Hallelujah!

*July 1, 1994: I walk through the door of MSK as their first Breast Fellow in a state of awe and disbelief, and with a deep sense of responsibility.

August, 1994: I didn't believe the executives at Ethicon when they said they had no problems with clip security, so I wrote to the FDA.

March, 1995: I asked the FDA for any reports of "Adverse Events" related to clip security and I receive a huge envelope - complications and even deaths

I'm shocked; I call Ethicon to confirm their position they have no problems with clip slippage. "That's right." I'm told. Liars!

*June, 1995: I complete my Fellowship at MSK so grateful for the opportunity to work with some of the best cancer specialists in the world.

*July, 1995: I am offered a job by Cancer Treatment Centers of America to create a Breast Service in New Jersey. I drop to my knees and thank God.

*September, 1995: As Medical Director, I pull together an integrated Breast Service patterned on the one at MSK housed in a brand new Women's Center.

*1995-2006: More than four thousand women are seen on the Breast Service. Our outcomes are excellent: fewer mastectomies, better survival.

I introduce sentinel node biopsy, dose-dense chemotherapy, arimidex, and herceptin to the Breast Service. I'm slam busy but love it.

June 2006: I enroll in the first International Masters for Health Leadership at McGill University; I'm one of two candidates chosen from the USA.

The IMHL program at McGill University includes a 'managerial exchange'. Salman Al Sabah, a surgeon from Kuwait, and I pair up.

*September 11, 2006: As luck would have it, I land in Kuwait on the 5th anniversary of 9/11. Salman, a member of the royal family, is a gracious host.

I discover there is a very strange, aggressive form of breast cancer raging in the Gulf countries. I am baffled. Why?

I ask the women and they say, "It's because of the burning oil wells set by Saddam after the invasion." The doctors simply shrug.

November, 2006: I return to Kuwait to help create a Breast Service for the Royale Hayat Hospital for women. I see patients and give lectures.

*February 2007: A colleague, Dr. Ken Blank, gives me his copy of a review from the 2006 San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium. It contains a bombshell.

The handout contains 2 slides submitted by Dr. James Holland about a breast cancer virus. A what? A virus? You have got to be kidding!

I don't know anything about a breast cancer virus. Never read anything about it. Never heard anyone mention it. Can this be true?

I ask my medical librarian, Arlene, to get me a copy of Holland's paper, and everything else he's written or can find on the virus.

In the meantime, I pour through my own library of material on breast cancer looking for any mention of a virus. I find nothing.

Arlene finds hundreds of articles about a breast cancer virus first discovered in 1936. I am stunned at what I read.

I return to Kuwait to attend a Breast Cancer Conference the Ministry of Health is sponsoring for Gulf countries. I wonder about the virus.

Doctors from the Gulf and Middle East all report a strange, aggressive form of breast cancer in young women. I wonder about the virus.

I think about the female soldiers who have come to serve in the Gulf - the first such deployment in history; and I wonder about the virus.

*June 2007: Once home, I begin discussing the research on the breast cancer virus with

everyone I meet. No one has heard of it and most are skeptical.

*April 2008. I think about how I'd like to apply the lessons I have learned at the IMHL to breast cancer. How can I be an effective healthcare leader?

Obviously, more attention should be given to the breast cancer virus and to prevention in general. I approach Komen; not interested.

The IMHL has trained me to be a healthcare leader, so I decide to create a foundation whose mission and focus is prevention.

*April 2008: I form the Breast Health & Healing Foundation (501c3) and commit to finding the causes of breast cancer and its prevention.

Globally, we expect 1.4 million new cases of breast cancer this year. What if it's true, ~40% are related to the virus?

*I create the Pink Virus Project – to answer the question, *Does a virus cause breast cancer in women?*

And so, I create the Pink Virus Project to answer the question, Does a virus cause breast cancer in women?

May, 2008: On Mother's Day I launch the Theresa Quilt, an online virtual quilt, dedicated to my Mom and the Pink Virus Project.

I meet with Professor Beatriz Pogo in NYC. She has been working on the breast cancer virus for decades.

Pogo was the one who found the virus in ~40% of women with breast cancer. It's now called the "Pogo Virus"

I meet with Professor Paul Levine at George Washington University; he's been working on the virus too.

Pogo, Levine, and Joyce O'Shaunessey (a breast cancer expert) agree to join my Advisory

Board.

I must raise awareness about the breast cancer virus, so I decide to write a book. I've never written a book before, but it's time.

September 2008: I begin to write "The Pink Virus: Of Mice, And Women, And Breast Cancer". A lot of work and very slow going, but I love it.

I finish writing the The Pink Virus and publish it on Lulu. It's a humble start, just the beginning of a real book.

October 2008: I host a luncheon in honor of my breast cancer patients. My mother, a 35 yr survivor, is the star of the show.

August 2009: I consult in Caribou, Maine to help create a breast service. I meet Senator Susan Collins there.

I ask Senator Collin's if she will provide a room for me in the Capitol; I want a Summit on the virus.

Collins says, "Yes." I say, "Thanks!" A local philanthropist contributes the funds and we're on our way.

I send The Pink Virus to a professional editor and republish it. I'm still not satisfied.

I notice all the new apps in the iTunes store and then decide to make an app for breast cancer.

Breast Health GPS is my first app. It locates the nearest mammogram center in the country for free!

September 2009: The Breast Cancer Summit for the Pink Virus Project is held in the Rayburn Building. Nice!

Drs. Holland, Pogo, and Etkind (who are researching the virus) attend the Summit. A dynamic Q&A follows in the Senate Hearing Room.

Dr. Fatah Kansanchi, a virologist from GWU asks to speak; he says, "I think you're on to something."

Other breast cancer foundations, survivors, visitors from the NCI, and Congressional staff attend the Summit too. A success!

I meet with Congressman Pascrell whose wife died of breast cancer. He has never heard of the virus, and he's ready to help.

October 29, 2009: Pascrell sends a letter to the Director of the NCI asking if they know of the virus and whether they support its research.

*December 11, 2009: The NCI Director (Niederhuber) replies, saying it does not fund research on the virus and has no plans to do so.

Avon and Komen both announce that they will work to find the causes of breast cancer. Let's see what they do.

*January 2010: I continue to revise The Pink Virus manuscript. I then send it to another editor for review.

I meet with a media consultant and suggest we make a film about the virus. We write the script and hire crew.

We shoot our film, "It's Time To Answer The Question" in the middle of an inconvenient snowstorm!

*February 2010: I submit my app, Breast Health GPS to Apple's iTune Store.

*March 2010: My film about the breast cancer virus, "It's Time To Answer The Question" is edited and posted on You Tube. I hope it helps our cause.

I ask for a meeting with the Director of the NCI. I want to know why it refuses to fund research on the breast cancer virus.

*April 2010: My editor returns my revision of The Pink Virus saying, "You have written a sound book." Nevertheless, there's more work to be done.

I re-read Malcolm Gladwell's, "The Tipping Point" looking for clues that might help my

cause, my mission, my quest to nail the virus.

I submit "It's Time To Answer The Question" to the annual Rethink Breast Cancer film festival and it's nominated Best Film of the Year.

*April 14, 2010: I meet with several scientists at the NCI and discover what they require to "reopen the case" concerning breast cancer virus.

The NCI wants to know the specific "insertion site sequences" to "reopen the case" on the breast cancer virus. I think we have them!

*April 20, 2010: I want to write a longer, better, more thorough book about the virus, so I find another editor to help me with the next revision.

April 23, 2010: Jake from the Madison Daily Record, my hometown newspaper, interviews me about my app, Breast Health GPS.

April 25, 2010: The Daily Record runs the story, "Surgeon Develops Mammogram Screening Center iPhone App". The Associated Press picks it up.

The story gets picked up by all the major news organizations, including CNBC. CBS calls me for an interview.

The interviewer, a young woman, is concerned about her mother who was just diagnosed with breast cancer. We talk about the virus.

April 26, 2010: The CBS interview is aired repeatedly. The Star Ledger carries the story too. And downloads of the app soar around the world.

April 29, 2010: Apple features Breast Health GPS in their iTunes store. The app is downloaded in 33 countries.

April 30, 2010: My secretary sees an ad in The Star Ledger in which Apple displays the icon for Breast Health GPS on the iPhone.

Breast Health GPS becomes the #1 breast cancer app in the iTunes store for the next 18

months.

May, 2010: Professor Vincent Tuohy of the Cleveland Clinic publishes his discovery of a preventive vaccine.

Tuohy's vaccine is 100% effective in preventing breast cancer in 3 different animal models. I'm shocked!

Tuohy's paper is published in Nature Medicine, a prestigious journal. His data were vetted by experts.

I call Tuohy to congratulate him on his discovery and offer him all the support I can. What a breakthrough!

I hire social networking interns (college students) to help me promote the virus and the vaccine.

September, 2010: I submit "It's Time To Answer The Question" to Rethink Breast Cancer Film Festival. It's nominated Best Film.

I host the second Summit for the Breast Cancer Virus and the Vaccine on Capitol Hill. Tuohy comes.

November 1, 2010: Gloria Gaynor becomes our International Goodwill Ambassador for Breast Cancer Prevention.

March 31, 2011: After promising to do so, Komen refuses to fund clinical trials for Tuohy's vaccine. Why, pray tell?

The NBCC announces that it will develop the world's first preventive breast cancer vaccine. What?

It took the Cleveland Clinic 10 years to make its vaccine. Why won't NBCC just support it?

The Chinese move in to negotiate for the rights to develop, license and distribute the vaccine.

I've been through a lot in my life; I hope it's prepared me to take on the breast cancer industry.

April 2012: I have lunch with my editor, Christina, to talk about the last details of my final manuscript.

May, 2012: Christina sends me an email saying, "I hate to bother you, but I have a lump in my breast. Help."

I diagnose Christina with very aggressive breast cancer and send her to MSK in NYC for treatment.

Christina helps me find another editor so I can finish my book. Her name is Laurie Tarkan.

Tarkan writes for the NY Times. She reads my manuscript and says, "Your book is fabulous."

Another editor helps me write a book proposal. Her name is Carol. She, too, is just wonderful.

June, 2012: I work with Tarkan to finish the manuscript and with Carol to finish the book proposal.

July, 2012: I submit my book proposal to seven literary agents and receive offers from three.

I settle with Stephany Evans, Fine Print Literary Agency, to help me get my book published.

September, 2012: Stephany and I work to polish the book proposal and then she sends it out.

September 28, 2012: I'm invited to a luncheon at the home of Loreen Arbus. She is hosting faculty from the Harvard School of Public Health.

The faculty are leaders in women's global health issues, but no one has heard of the virus or the vaccine.

Everyone - faculty, guests, and Arbus - are intrigued by the possibility of a virus and the promise of a vaccine.

I ask Arbus if she will host a Summit for the virus and the vaccine. "Yes", she says. Harvard is interested too.

October, 2012: Faculty from the Harvard School of Public Health invite me to attend the annual meeting of their Leadership Council. Yes!

Arbus sends me another invitation to her home: a reception for the Clinton Global Initiative. I am blessed and grateful.

No one at the reception for CGI has heard of the virus or the vaccine. Everyone is interested and excited to learn more.

October 12, 2012: I attend the Leadership Council meeting of the Harvard School of Public Health. They ask me to join. Yes!

November, 2012: The Clinton Global Initiative invites me to join them in tackling the daunting challenges facing the world. I'm all in. Yes!

December, 2012: Arbus, Harvard and I begin drafting the agenda for a Spring 2013 Summit: The Global Burden of Women's Cancers - Viruses and Vaccines.

A producer from L.A. contacts me. He'd like to make a documentary about the virus and the vaccine. Am I interested? Yes!

January, 2013: We set the date for the Summit - April 9, NYC. I invite scientists working on the virus and Dr. Tuohy, creator of the vaccine.

Lt. Col. Herb Koehler sends me an email. He's now at the Pentagon, U.S. Army Chief of Staff's office. He's interested in the virus.

Koehler introduces me to Lt. Col. Paula Smith who's interested in the perceived increased incidence of breast cancer in female vets.

January 25, 2013: I'm introduced to Lorraine Egan (CEO, Damon Runyon) by Janet Hanson. We have coffee. She's never heard of the virus or vaccine.

January 26, 2013: As promised, I send Egan a copy of Tuohy's paper, published in Nature Medicine, May 2010. Egan receives the pass and heads downfield.

February 3, 2013: I complete this Twitter Memoir, but my story isn't over - not until I get some answers. And now I have all kinds of help. Amen.