

FULYA ÖZLEM İSTANBUL

When looked at more closely, everyone's life consists of a mix of tragedies and blessings, of pain and happiness, of ups and downs, basically. The question is, though, how one treats the tragic element in one's life, what one learns from the tragedies that one goes through and how one can go beyond them without trespassing them.

There are few people, though, who manage to do even more than that: They are those who sublimate their pain, they turn their pain into artworks or into humanitarian projects or scientific discoveries that everyone will benefit from. So sublimating a tragic event, metaphorically speaking, is like building a statue of that tragedy so that everyone can see it, share it or identify with it in terms of his or her own tragedies taking shape with this act of sublimation.

Such is the case of Jülide Yavan, a breast cancer survivor who is among the founders of the Women's Breast Health Foundation (MEME-DER), an internationally award-winning foundation fighting against breast cancer that is devoted to research and medical scanning of thousands of women in Turkey to improve the scientific database about this ever-increasing disease.

Yavan is a successful producer-program director with the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT). She is such an active, energetic woman that it makes you wonder how a woman like her could ever have been diagnosed with cancer and gone through all the heavy chemotherapy following her diagnosis. She was the first to feel a lump on her breast and thought it could be cancer.

On Feb. 14, Valentine's Day, of last year, she learned that she was diagnosed with breast cancer; a pretty big tumor was detected in her breast and she needed an operation. She was told she would lose one of her breasts and go through a heavy course of chemotherapy. Her first reaction was, "How am I going to tell my loved ones?" She says she never asked "Why me?" after learning about her situation. "Because," she says, "for example, many people in Africa do not have homes and I have a home, do I ask, 'Why am I blessed and not them with a shelter, a roof over my head?'" So in the same way, she never asked the "Why me?" question. Rather, for her, this disease reminded her that we are not alone in this world and it is the whole family who suffers alongside the sick person.

Since she used to be the director-producer of a health program on TRT, one of her program guests was general surgeon Vahit Özmen, and so it was to Özmen that she turned. Özmen, with his idealism and loyalty, both saved her life and gave her a precious gift of appreciating the importance of loyalty in life. He is a general surgeon at İstanbul University's school of medicine in Çapa. Özmen refused to open a private clinic and sees patients with financial difficulties for free every Thursday. His idealism to treat every patient with the same care and help out the poorer patients by providing them with free medical treatment is so admirable that Yavan says she would give an arm if Özmen asked for a hand.

During her first operation on March 9, 2007, a day on which her husband had open-heart surgery nine years ago, her breast was removed. After the initial eight-and-a-half-hour-long surgery, she had five more surgeries within one year and heavy chemotherapy treatments through which she lost all of her hair. But, thanks to Özmen, she was introduced to yet another of her favorite doctors, Orhan Çizmeci, who also performed surgery on her to add a new breast following skin expansion treatments and other treatments.

Çizmeci has the most interesting profile

as a doctor. He left the school of fine arts, became a surgeon and is a painter, a caricaturist and a collector.

Throughout her treatment, Yavan also underwent Liaison Psychology therapy to help her cope with losing her breast. The therapy was overseen by a specialist, Sedat Özkan, who was awarded the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey's (TÜBİTAK) Scientific Prize when he was just 17 and a student at Robert College.

She wants to underline the fact that all

these surgeons and top-quality specialists are within every citizen's reach at İstanbul University's school of medicine, which has a hospital in the Çapa neighborhood. She also says women should not be afraid of getting their breasts removed since they can be replaced by esthetic surgery -- and because this is considered the loss of an organ, it is considered a required surgery and not an aesthetic one when it comes to organ replacement. Everyone who works at the Çapa hospital is a top-quality professional in his or her field, in-

Jülide Yavan's fight against **BREAST CANCER** an inspiring survivor's story

Yavan, who was diagnosed with breast cancer on Valentine's Day of last year, is one the of founders of MEME-DER, an internationally award-winning foundation fighting against breast cancer that is devoted to research and medical scanning of women in Turkey



Jülide Yavan

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cluding doctors Pinar Saip and Yavuz Dildar, who examine patients for free every Thursday afternoon. All these doctors, she says, are such idealists that they do not have private clinics.

Nowadays, she is very excited about the new foundation MEME-DER. She says breast cancer changed the purpose of her life. Up until last year, perhaps all she worried about was whether she was going to buy the new car she wanted or things like that. But now, her new aim in life is that all women are scanned and treated as soon as possible. Dr. Özmen invited her to become a founding member of MEME-DER. He wanted to establish it and have it run by breast cancer survivors themselves alongside doctors who work in the area. Hence, MEME-DER consists of survivors and doctors from İstanbul University and Marmara University's school of medicine.

MEME-DER's goal is to devise a breast cancer map of Turkey. The foundation's first center was opened in Bahçeşehir, where 5,000 women will be scanned for breast cancer over 10 years. The center is equipped with mammography and ultrasonography machines and all other equipment necessary to scan for breast cancer. She says "scanning" is a very important term that has long been misused in Turkey since scanning is the name given to the periodical control of one and the same patient over the years. It requires a follow-up system. An occasional scanning of all patients by without keeping track of their situation over the years does not count as "scanning." It is for this reason that Bahçeşehir was chosen. It is a new neighborhood where a real and sustainable demographic watch can be kept through well-maintained records. When they prove themselves there, they plan on opening new centers in the poorer areas of İstanbul.

To me, it seems MEME-DER has already proven itself because it was awarded one of the most prestigious awards in the field in the US. The Global Initiative for Breast Health gave MEME-DER an award of \$25,000, calling it the "best project." The foundation will scan women between the ages of 50 and 69 and will supply the Ministry of Health with an excellent database in addition to data to be used at medical conventions. The foundation was established in September 2007, and 1,000 women have been surveyed so far to shape the project. The Finnish example of breast cancer scanning serves as the model.

MEME-DER will hold its first press conference on Oct. 15, World Breast Cancer Day. Survivors, relatives of survivors, doctors and artists, such as Candan Erçetin and Ali Poyrazoğlu, will attend. The foundation's official opening ceremony will take place on Mother's Day. Their Web site is memeder.org and more information can be obtained from info@memeder.org or bizesorun@memeder.org, where all questions concerning breast cancer are answered.

Yavan says that the most important thing to remember to fight against the disease is not to lower the quality of life which depends on, first of all, finding specialists in the field and not changing doctors throughout the treatment. Secondly, it depends on accepting the illness and acknowledging that choosing the right way to fight it may mean getting psychological help from a professional. Finally, it also depends on knowing that the patient is not fighting this illness alone, but with the entire family and all loved ones. Without the loving care and support of her husband, Şamil Yavan, she says she would never have been able to live to see this day. Her husband's words, which could now make up a slogan for many people diagnosed with breast cancer, were: "I do not need your breast, I need you! You are what matters, not your breast." As for Yavan, she says what this disease taught her was the importance of "loyalty" in life.