



# LAST CUT

A SPACE TO EXPRESS EMOTIONS  
IN A TRAUMATIC TIME

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*with* SAMANTHA PAIGE

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# THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE WORLD IS UNSETTLING RIGHT NOW.

As a collective, we are grappling with a global pandemic, political and economic uncertainty, the long-standing impacts of systemic racism, and the effects of the climate crisis. These layered realities affect us all differently. Yet, there is a shared experience through this pervasive sense of unknown. For those of us who have been touched by cancer, or experienced trauma in some manner, this moment in time is especially challenging. Anxiety and fear can feel overwhelming. We are being asked to reckon with these emotions continuously. How do we feel like ourselves when life feels so uncertain?

I ask myself this question all the time. After being diagnosed with cancer at age 21 and facing five major surgeries in the subsequent 20 years, I struggled to find the right tools and outlets. I tried varying approaches to stabilize myself in the face of the uncertain, as I navigated PTSD, depression, anxiety, and migraine headaches. What worked has varied over time and is constantly changing. However, what has remained most effective has been an ongoing practice of acknowledging the full spectrum of emotions that encompass being human. Societal norms make us feel as if “holding it all together” and “putting on a happy face” are the right, and often only way, through challenging times. I still fall prey to attempts to live up to these standards and am always reminded that the most authentic way to heal is by naming and

expressing the breadth of our experiences.

*I love doing so through writing. When I put words to my feelings, even if no one else sees or hears them, I create movement in what otherwise becomes stuck.*

Even when I am unable to change my external circumstances, I am able to honor myself and make space for growth by working with the internal landscape. This is the spirit I bring to the Last Cut Writing Workshops I teach through Magnolia House. We are all writers, and all our feelings and experiences desire breathing room. Hope and connection are more attainable when we open up and are present with what is—the good, the bad, the uncomfortable and the unknown. Through writing, we may not find all the answers to this challenging time we are experiencing, but we do discover ways in which we are moving through it together as human beings.

*We are excited to share some writing from past workshop participants. We asked them to speak to the range of emotions they are feeling to highlight the importance of creating space for it all. As you will see, every writer has their unique style and expression. You too are a writer. Please join us for future Last Cut Writing Workshops.*



Photo Credit: Lisa Field for Last Cut Project

## SAMANTHA PAIGE

Samantha Paige is an artist, writer, and parent, with a passion for life. While she’s earned multiple degrees, been a jewelry-maker, lived abroad, and reached fluency in various languages, Samantha credits her health challenges as her greatest teachers. As a young adult cancer survivor and BRCA1 previvor, she has learned to use life’s experiences as fuel, generating raw dialogue with others about these life-changing moments through her speaking engagements, original podcast series, Last Cut Conversations, her book, LAST CUT, and LAST CUT workbook.

Samantha modeled in the powerful 2017 “Commit to Something” campaign for international gym brand, Equinox, freely displaying her scars from her preventive double mastectomy performed in 2008. She serves on the Executive Board for Get Lit - Words Ignite and currently teaches writing workshops at Magnolia House.

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**DAVID WILZIG**

*Malignant*

A stranger in my body named "malignant".  
Who would have thought? Who could have thought?

Certainly not I.

Cancer was no stranger to me. After 13 years no hema-oncolo-whatever  
And I mean not one of a gaggle, a scurry, or a passel of doctors  
Who spoke, examined, probed, questioned, and then viewed me  
Who spoke of white and red cell and T-cells  
Who spoke of unwanted cells coursing through my body and then  
Stuff, poison, fluid of uncertain use for yet another uprising within.  
A myriad of examinations, injections, infusions, "just a little prick here"  
Not one person, no one dressed in white said "Malignant". Malignant, the mistress  
I wished to dispose of. Her cells too old, crowded my spleen and  
I, what did I know? Very little it seems as with mouth ajar, eyes wide open  
I asked the doctor, my wife seated nearby, "I have what?", "I have a malignancy?"  
"Of course," she said, then looked to my wife asking with her eyes "is he joking?"  
I was not joking, I had a blood cancer and thought that as there was no tumor,  
Well, you know, no tumor, no malignancy.

It was on that day after 13 years with leukemia that I had to change partners  
and accept a stranger in my body, one called splenic marginal zone lymphoma.

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**JAYNE LEVANT**

*Diagnosis*

My heart dropped when I was told  
A struggle for life about to unfold  
Mystery and darkness  
Pain and fear  
I cried out to my angel  
I wanted her near.

Blackness followed those strange  
Hollow words

spoken so softly  
I hardly heard  
You are wrong I screamed  
Inside my head  
I can rise now from this  
Prison bed  
And fly away on  
Angels wings  
Far away where the  
Mockingbird sings  
Over valleys and rivers  
Purple mountains and planes  
And pastures fresh with morning rain  
Above the earth I have no name  
Until the dawn breaks  
I awake... I am the same.

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## HAGOP KASARJIAN

### *Stranger in My Body*

I felt like a stranger in my body when strangers tell me now my body is making decisions.

Five a.m. searching for Martha and her sisters in the Catskills; her human eyes forewarning me. Jill's son covered in afterbirth on my shoulders in the pouring summer rain to the barn, Jill nudging. Nameless, served for someone's veal dinner a few months later. No animals on my plate.

Washed down trucks, guided planes into hangars, children to school. Renewed my bones when they failed to carry my load. At seventy, future in hospitals repairing heart; killing cancer.

Moving forward?

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I felt like a stranger in my body when I looked at my new self in the mirror for the first time. The scar jagged and red across my chest where my beautiful breast had once been. Now I had one...of each....half man, half woman...the spirit of a warrior-ess...now blazoned across my skin like the flat line on a heart monitor.....but no.....not this brave heart...the retreat of the physical reflection notwithstanding... this spirited one will rise up...like the Phoenix from the embers....a blaze....not the one that destroys...the one that burns within...so deep and so bright, that the new world...the one still undiscovered... is lit with the flame of it.

*I felt joy within myself*.....yes, I was naked and alone on the radiating table....the one that would save my life....

BUT I FELT... such gratitude and love and awe at the ability of this hunky gray metal above me...laser focused, strong, steady, sure.....

Sure that I would carry forth that *joy from within myself*... into the world... to share it... with any body that would cross my path.

How blessed I am, to have a second chance.....

I feel *joy within myself by*..... allowing my heart to be seen, to be shared, to love and to be loved....especially made special by that hunk of gray.....after all.....why else are we here.

by TRISHA SIMMONS



## TA SAMPSON

### *Awareness of Self*

I feel “out-of-sorts” and like a stranger in my body when it seems as though I’m observing my own life from a third party perspective, as if I were a character in a book or a movie, and have no emotional or personal connection to or interest in the things that are taking place.

I feel joy when I know that I am present and actually living my life, not just distantly observing it, and by being true to myself, living according to my values and beliefs, and experiencing the things in which I find meaning and pleasure.