

CPM Application

Fall 2011

1. Tell me something about yourself, something that will make you come alive as a person. You get to decide what you reveal and at what length.

As the youngest daughter of two hard working and high achieving Chinese parents, my childhood seemed pretty straightforward and quite ideal. I worked hard, hung out with my nerdy but loveable friends, involved myself in school, and even had a number of lovely positive surprises along the way. I adored my older brother, and together with our parents, we represented the typical Asian family: scientist father, database administrator mother, brilliant older son who would study pre-med and who played the violin, younger daughter who was sweet natured and who played the piano. Beneath that facade, we still held the typical tumultuous dynamic that any family experienced, and like all others, we had our secrets and skeletons in our closets.

That said, I had a happy childhood. I was privileged no doubt, and that ability allowed me to focus on working hard and developing thoughtful relationships with my friends and community. My steady work ethic paid off, and I earned a scholarship to attend Carnegie Mellon University, my anomaly school amidst my desire to attend a small liberal arts school. Financially, CMU made the most sense and I ventured east – to what I thought was the East Coast since it was somewhere East of the Mississippi River (and because I wanted to follow my brother out East).

I didn't work hard during college, and instead immersed myself in the co-curricular opportunities that allowed me to surround myself with thoughtful, engaged, and interesting people. More-so, I gravitated to student leader positions that allowed me to support and help my peers – Resident Advisor, Sexual Assault Advisor, Leadership Intern. I should have known then what foundation I was laying for my future, but ultimately I chose to spend my time and energy on what felt natural and rewarding – and for me, it was on people.

Despite this, I applied to Ph. D programs in Economics, believing that my future would lie in academia. My dad is a rocket scientist whose name is on Mars, given his key involvement in one of the Mars landers. I am a terrible daughter, as I can't tell you what lander he had worked on. The dad that I remember is the one who, despite his lack of athletic ability, served as a linesman for my childhood soccer games dressed in a really awful looking uniform with tassels on his knee-high socks while running up and down the sidelines. With this, I know that a strong underlying current in my pursuing a doctorate was to follow in my father's footsteps. I didn't have any ambitions in achieving the success that my dad had found; I just wanted to do something that was respected and, in my ideal world, something that could help create knowledge and foster a common understanding among individuals.

I was fortunate enough to be accepted to and attend the University of Virginia for my Ph. D program in Economics, also thinking that I was going to the East Coast (which dissipated when I crossed to the southern side of the Mason Dixon line). Upon arrival, I found myself in an incredibly tight knit community of twenty other new doctoral students. While we all connected personally, I found that I had interests different than those of my peers (although my study group and I found ourselves having Nintendo's Mario Kart in common). My peers were passionate about numbers; I was passionate about people. To me, economics represented the possibility for financial and personal transformation for individuals able to learn and process economic logic. I

thrived when teaching in my classroom, connecting with my students and feeling a thrill when they applied their classroom knowledge with their daily lives. However, this thrill was short-lived when I realized the immense mathematics and long grueling hours (and years) the program would take – let alone the long path to finding a tenure track position and eventually winning tenure. After my qualifying exams, I gleefully accepted my “thank you for coming” masters and went on my way.

In my transition away from Economics, I was fortunate enough to serve as a summer school teacher at Phillips Academy at Andover, of George W. Bush fame. As a teacher of Calculus, I reaffirmed my love for the academic setting, and slowly allowed myself to let go of my expectation that my career would be on the professorial side. In working with students in my classroom and also in my residence hall, I found my niche in supporting the student experience in all facets of what the student experience could encompass. I left the program with a renewed focus and passion, in addition to many incredible memories with the close friends I made along the way.

I was fortunate enough to have been close with the Dean of Student Affairs at Carnegie Mellon, and during this transition away from my Economics life, he and I spoke about my next steps. My “dream” of being a professor grounded itself in my love for what the modern university represented – knowledge. The Dean pushed me one step further – if my heart lie in education, did I ever consider Student Affairs? He countered that while academia allowed individuals to pursue knowledge independently and then bestow it upon students through their classroom interactions, Student Affairs united administrators and students directly. He argued that although I wouldn't have concrete knowledge as Pareto Optimality to teach students, I would be teaching them a different set of knowledge about life skills – planting seeds that would later bloom; interacting and challenging students in a supportive and thoughtful manner; pushing students outside of their comfort zone and encouraging them to pursue their passions. So much of what the Dean articulated resonated with why I wanted to become a professor – and minus the ardor of graduate school, job hunting, and tenure track, Student Affairs sounded ideal. To this day, it still is.

This time understanding that Pittsburgh indeed is not East Coast, I returned to Carnegie Mellon for my first Student Affairs job to work under the leadership of my mentor, the Dean. I was comfortable. I reconnected with old friends, found my familiar haunts on campus, and quickly transitioned into a comfortable staff existence. Then the Dean gave me the best nudge I could have asked for, after having given me the best introduction into Student Affairs that I could have hoped for. Since my position was temporary, he encouraged me to seek a position outside of Carnegie Mellon to expand my experience. Through that, I became a Program Coordinator at Columbia University and started my New York experience.

The next five years in New York were incredible – I had a thrilling Manhattan life with dynamic friends; I had intelligent and ambitious students from whom I learned just as much as they learned from me; I had professional growth and challenge, which enabled me to be promoted to Class Dean at Columbia at age twenty five. Even a tiny, but stunning West Village apartment (just around the corner from Magnolia Bakery) that had its own 16'x16' deck which was not too much smaller than the studio itself, but which hosted many a fun BBQ, was my beloved home. The years flew by, and I had amazing memories and friends to show for it. However at year five, I realized that I was missing one piece – accountability to a map to my future. As much as I developed professionally and as exhilarating as my social life was, I realized that I could wake up ten years in the future having done the same gratifying, but stagnant, routine. It was at this stage

that I realized I needed to leave Manhattan and confront the hedonism of immediacy in favor of the thoughtfulness of long-term intentionality.

Ultimately, my return to California was a no-brainer. My nephew had been born only months earlier, and I would be less than thirty minutes from my brother and his family. The little guy unfortunately was undergoing some health issues at less than one year old. After pressing doctors to determine a diagnosis, my brother and sister-in-law battled the reality of my nephew's condition – he had tumors on his liver and gas bubbles in his intestines. Doctors monitored the tumors and struggled to find ways to contain their growth. Oncology became a feared, but realistic word. Stanford's medical team wanted to give my nephew a liver transplant as soon as he became big enough, which wasn't happening quickly enough given that the prednisone steroids my nephew was taking stunted his growth and development.

Through this, my uncle, a gastroenterologist, emerged as the thoughtful voice of wisdom. Instead of jumping into quick action and decision making, he relied on logic. He thought through the larger picture, pointing out the contradiction that prednisone, meant to curb tumor growth, would never allow my nephew's body to outgrow his tumors, meant to be the ultimate goal. He put took my nephew off of prednisone and trusted that my nephew's natural growth would allow him to outgrow his tumors. Years later, my uncle's hunch proved to be right, and our trust in logic and being one's own advocate for health could not have rung more true.

In the meantime, I quickly developed my network in San Francisco. I landed a cushy job as Associate Dean of Student Life at School A, serving as the chief student affairs officer of the institution. I reunited with my oldest and dearest friends who could provide me with the accountability and forward thinking mindset that I so desired. I settled into a balanced life of work, fitness, family, and friends, and truly felt that I was setting the foundation for an immediately gratifying long-term success.

I met B one year into my time in San Francisco, and our connection took me by surprise. B served as a groomsman at a new friend's wedding. I was still enjoying the newness of San Francisco and my time spent with an incredible group of girlfriends. That said, B was unlike anyone I had ever met and instantly intrigued me. Despite our age difference (twelve years my senior) and experience (his going through a divorce to my naivete), we connected. Our initial year was rocky; our differences in experience rose to the forefront and challenged me to reflect upon what a partnership truly would mean to me. At times, it felt easier to run away from the challenge and hide in the safety of society's conformity (marriage for the sake of tradition) than to accept the daily reality of what a “happy ending” could become. I had always prided myself on being practical – in high school, I questioned that monogamy was human nature, and expressed skepticism that individuals could choose to commit their lives to one other person only one-quarter of the way through their life experience – yet B was on a completely different level. Given his previous relationship, B would not get married again. He also had thoughtfully dissected other societal norms about relationships, and brought forward a perspective that was refreshing, yet gave me pause given that this was someone I wanted to have a future with. Honestly, I had no idea what to do with the ideological challenge that B posed to my safe and enclosed mindset, despite my internal commitment to finding a partner who would constantly challenge me.

Atop this, B's hesitation to commit to our relationship proved to be an additional challenge. To this day, I still respect that B was truly upfront with his feelings and concerns, and it challenged me

to try evolving the relationship instead of cutting the relationship short due to “timing.” Instead of choosing an all-or-none path which seems all too formulaic from the rom-com movies, I trusted in our potential enough to admit that I cared more for him than he did for me during our courtship – and tried not to let his hesitation take on a life of its own.

Amidst this evolution, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. At age 33, the last thing on my mind was my health. I played on (and have returned to play with) four different soccer teams and despite not liking to run, can say that I am fairly athletic. I never thought of myself being plagued by stress, a likely contributor to cancer development. Although I like my bacon as much as anyone else, I prided myself on eating healthy and to enjoying vegetables more than the average person. Yet I found myself saying the words that no one ever imagines: I never thought it would be me.

That said, it could have been me in September 2008 instead of October 2009. While having a routine gynecological exam in 2008, my gynecologist found a lump in my breast. I was a young naive and blissfully ignorant thirty-something girl who chose not to do self-exams. My gynecologist discovered the 1.5cm lump, and immediately performed a fine-needle aspiration biopsy. She assured me that it likely was benign given that breast cancer didn't strike women of my age, and provided me print materials of the benign conditions that it could be. She followed up a few days later confirming her hunch that my cancer was indeed benign and non-cancerous. She said that the lump was likely to grow, and if it ever grew to be uncomfortable, that would be when I should consider having it surgically removed.

Like any ignorant consumer of health care that the health care model has taught us to be, I took the “good news” and filed it as far away from my reality as possible. I never questioned why I would have a tumor in my breast, and if other tests could better evaluate my risk; if additional testing could be revealing; that my family had a history of breast cancer. I gleefully lived in my avoidance of a possible reality and went on my ignorant way.

Months later, it was B who started questioning my growing lump and encouraged me to seek additional evaluation. The lump felt like it doubled in size in less than a year, and I admit, the last thing that I wanted to do was touch my right breast. I knew B was right. I had been avoiding sleeping on my right side for the reason that I could feel the lump while lying down, and the size of the tumor was starting to become invasive even despite all my efforts to avoid it. In September 2009, I finally made an appointment with another gynecologist at Kaiser.

When I met my second and current gynecologist, I knew something was different. Unlike my first gynecologist who dismissed it without a thought, Dr. Hall chose to be thorough. She scheduled a mammogram and a core biopsy for me immediately following our appointment. She and my incredible surgeon Dr. Langer didn't sugar coat our conversations, yet showed compassion that I hadn't seen from my previous gynecologist. Both doctors were realistic but reassuring that the health care team at Kaiser would help me throughout the process.

I had no idea what to think. My previous experience with the fine-needle aspiration allowed me to contain the experience without a second thought. I told B, I told my mom, and then I filed away the benign results. This time around, I knew it was different. The mammogram alone told us that there was something suspicious in my right breast, and the results from the core needle biopsy were still in the lab. A dear physician friend of B's happened to be visiting town, and we met up

with him. I didn't expect cancer to be the topic of conversation – but this night was to be the start of my new normal and my acceptance of cancer as a part of who I was.

Our physician friend conducted a basic exam, physical and historical, and in a clarity I had never heard from my doctors, said that he felt I had a 50/50 chance of having breast cancer. No one had ever leveled with me with that honesty in the multitude of health care practitioners I had faced in the past two weeks. He postulated that the combination of not having had a child, my age being in my thirties, and even my long history with the birth control pill, all contributed to my high risk status for breast cancer. He explained how the fine needle aspiration, despite its claim to have accuracy in the 90-some percentile, was like sticking a needle in a chocolate chip cookie. If you hit a chocolate chip, you can with certainty (in the 90th percentile) say that the cookie has chocolate chips. If you don't hit a chocolate chip, you can't quite extrapolate anything about the rest of the cookie with much certainty. Through this candid conversation, our physician friend gave me the biggest relief that I had felt all thought-out that horrendous waiting period by finally telling me what I had suspected. There was a good chance that I had cancer, and no one wanted to say it.

Even to this day, the waiting period for my pathology to return was the most difficult of my cancer journey. It didn't help that my waiting period was a full two weeks, compared to the three to four days that most pathology results would take. Every day, I went to work with my cell phone glued to my side. Every night, I slept with my phone under my pillow. I hesitated calling my doctor's office for fear of pestering them – and also for fear of hearing bad news – but I just needed to be put out of my misery. I enlisted the help of my general practitioner in hopes that she might be able to convey to me any news – only to have one of the most insensitive responses returned to me by someone in a helping profession. Finally, on Friday October 2nd 2009, I got the call. I had breast cancer.

My numbers were surprising, but I have since learned that numbers do not directly determine outcome. Mine are as follows: 4.3cm tumor, comet shaped. Stage IIa – II due to size (had I been an additional 0.7cm larger, I would have made stage III!), and (a) since my cancer had thankfully not spread to my lymph nodes. My cancer was a mucinous variety, basically meaning that it was snotty and produced a mucus as it grew, which thankfully meant it was also slow moving (despite almost tripling in size in about one year). My snotty cancer was also a rare form – fewer than 2% of all breast cancers are mucinous. Atop that, women under 40 account for less than 5% of all breast cancer cases (fewer than 5% depending on which study you cite). Ironically, my maternal aunt developed her mucinous breast cancer in her early 40's.

B and our sweet dog immediately came to pick me up from work following “the call.” I remember eating our greasy Japanese take out for lunch, and then going to Crissy Field for our regular walk. Amidst the gorgeous scenery and the calming environment, we came across the most ironic event we could have imagined – the Susan G. Komen for the Cure 3-day Walk. Pink canvassed the green space at Crissy Field, with families and friends cheering on loved ones who were walking 60 miles over three days to raise money to find a cure for breast cancer. I was speechless. I finally broke down when I saw a teenage son waving a sign for his survivor mom saying, “Way to go, Mom!”

I started a blog chronicling my experience with breast cancer, and truly immersed myself in the reality of being a cancer patient. I was so alive to every minute I underwent yet another blood

draw; had radioactive material pumped into my blood to determine how my innards functioned; drank chalky white barium for my CT scans. I chatted and laughed with my lab technicians, and felt so grateful for the care that they gave cancer patients like me. I thanked my team of doctors who were so incredible in helping B and me learn what my diagnosis meant, and helping to empower us in choosing our next steps. For the first time, I questioned my mortality, my fertility, and my being, and felt more conscious than I ever had before.

I also learned many heart warming and harsh truths about relationships. I am so grateful for my family and friends throughout this period, and could not have made it through the past few years without them. That said, many relationships went through difficult periods as at times I found myself comforting my friends and family about my diagnosis as opposed to what one would expect as the opposite. My friends' and families' fears rose to the surface unconsciously, and it was eye-opening seeing who could and could not deal with my being sick. Some friends disappeared; other family members made my cancer so much about them that I became the care taker without them even being aware. Looking back on everything, I realize what a shock my diagnosis had on my community, yet am grateful for what each individual contributed. The ones that truly rose to the challenge I will always be so indebted to their thoughtfulness and kindness; the ones that may not have risen, I will continue to be so grateful for their love and their good wishes. In all, I couldn't have felt more loved and more fortunate for the community around me.

I don't want my entire essay to be about my cancer, so please feel free to visit my blog at *** for my chronicles from diagnosis to treatment.

My 2010 holiday card encapsulates my positive recovery and transformation following my diagnosis, so I'll introduce it here as recap of how far I've been fortunate to come:

Dearest Family & Friends,

One year ago, I celebrated the holidays with family and friends as a cancer patient. This year, I celebrate the holidays with family and friends as a cancer survivor. Thanks to your support and your friendship, 2010 brought triumph, laughter, two clean mammograms, and much gratitude.

I celebrated the one-year anniversary of my cancer diagnosis with two incredible journeys. As a part of Team Udderly ***, I joined my dear friends C and J, and boyfriend B, on an incredible (and incredibly exhausting) 60-mile walk. Thanks to your generosity, I also finished as a top ten fundraiser for the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Bay Area event having raised over \$7000 of your heartfelt donations that will be used to fund breast cancer research and support programs.

A week prior, I found myself in a role I never imagined I could be – as a fashion show model. All 5'2” of me strutted down the runway to raise money for the To Celebrate Life Breast Cancer Foundation. Their annual fashion show honored the breast cancer survivors that served as the show's models. I never imagined that the 30 women and 1 man who were my fellow models would provide so much laughter and joy during our hours of rehearsal – and would help transform a difficult period of my life into an empowering and enriching experience.

To date, I have visited Kaiser, a wonderful and supportive medical center, for over thirty doctor's appointments for my cancer, two biopsies, one surgery, a few almost-chemo appointments, forty radiation sessions, four mammograms, over six hundred Tamoxifen pills for hormone therapy, a

good handful of hot flashes, and many conversations about my future health. I now call myself cancer free, and could not be more grateful.

2010 proved to be a year of gratitude and reflection. I learned to savor every minute – from simple walks in the park with B and our dog, to laughing hysterically with my nephew and niece; from time with my parents, to our cousin reunion in Atlanta; visits to and from NYC girlfriends, B's mom, and relatives. I also bade a very fond farewell to School A, where I spent five incredible years, only to embrace my new position at School B.

2010 brought about change – and change is an opportunity always for the better. Thank you for being a part of this change and for helping me through this journey.

With love and gratitude,
Me

I never imagined that it would be a cancer diagnosis to bring B and me closer together, and likewise, couldn't have been more grateful for the experience it brought forward. B was truly my partner through my diagnosis and treatment. Together, we learned about breast cancer, possible causes, likely treatment options. We went for second and third opinions and questioned doctors relentlessly in our attempt to understand my condition. I finally understood that as a patient, I needed to be a consumer. In order to not let cancer dictate who and what I could be, I needed to understand it and actively choose my next steps. B gave me the platform and confidence from which we could make our decisions. Even the uncomfortable decisions, such as whether or not to harvest my eggs (very uncomfortable given that B wasn't yet convinced that we should be parents together) were done collaboratively with my health and our futures as our compasses. Ultimately, I learned that regardless of having a ring on my finger or a piece of paper bestowing upon us the rights and privileges of legally married life, I had a partner that truly cared about me and would stand by me when I questioned myself the most.

Since then, I am so fortunate to have had two clean mammograms. I am realistic enough to know that cancer cells are still floating within me (please read the book *Anti-Cancer* by David Servan-Schreiber if nothing else), and that I do control the environment in which these cancer cells may flourish. I know that having children may pose a risk to recurrence. I feel educated about my risks, and empowered to live consciously and thoughtfully.

Within that consciousness is the gleeful knowledge that I found my partner. In December 2010, B asked me to not marry him, and I couldn't be happier. My family and friends had no idea what to make of our commitment, and I appreciated those that could be happy for our decision, and tried to educate and explain to those who challenged our choice.

In July 2011, I went off of my hormone therapy (medication which prevents estrogen from attaching to breast cells, since my cancer feeds off of estrogen) in hopes that we can have a family in the near future.

In August 2011, I celebrated my one year anniversary working at School B as their Dean of Students. I shocked myself by leaving School A, and incredibly loving and supportive school with

such clean operations, for School B, a school in dire need of new processes and new leadership. I am grateful to be feeling a challenge – and to know that I have already made a difference in one year – but remind myself that no job is worth additional stress, especially given that stress is a strong contributor to cancer.

I still am a loving aunt, and couldn't be more thrilled that my niece and nephew still think I am cool (it helps being the only uncle or aunt on both sides of the family). My friends have started having kids, and I couldn't be happier to see them entering this phase of their lives. I hope that B and I can find ourselves as parents too, whether it be through our own devices or with the help of adoption. I still see my breast cancer friends, and we share our fears and our hopes, and commemorate those we knew that passed on from breast cancer. And, I celebrate all the relationships I am fortunate to have. My girlfriends, my soccer teammates, my New York crew, my family. I am so lucky to have individuals who keep me accountable, motivated, and supported, and can only hope that I have a fraction of the impact on them as they all have had on me.

At times, I reminisce about my time during breast cancer treatment as the good old days – the days when life felt ironically more simple and straight forward. When the days consisted of going for walks with our dog, learning new healthy recipes for my guinea pig B and myself, visiting the farmer's markets, and savoring the relationships that I had with those around me. I didn't allow my life to be complicated, as fighting cancer was my one and only focus. Reality has crept up on me now, and during the times that I think back wistfully on the lessons that cancer bestowed upon me, I remember how it was to feel so conscious and so alive. I strive to reclaim those moments of clarity in my new reality, and know that with this consciousness and thought, it will return.

2. Why do you want to take this course? Give me as much detail as possible. How did you learn about it? If someone recommended it, who and why did he/she do so? If any part of the syllabus spoke to you strongly, which part and why?

In 2010, I beat cancer. I had originally planned to work through radiation and to not let my diagnosis change my life. That said, I am so grateful for the unexpected turns that cropped up even in my attempt to control the environment in which I would become healthy.

Immediately following my diagnosis, I took time off of work. Balancing as many as five appointments in one day, not to mention the daily blood draws my veins endured, was too much for me to handle. Once I began radiation, I felt optimistic about my prognosis and craved the busyness (and distraction) that work would provide. I contacted my boss and told her that I was ready to return. Radiation would be only a one hour break in my day, and I could work with the radiation facility to schedule my appointments as close to lunch as possible. As I dreamed of returning to my students and reclaiming my old life, I was shocked to hear my boss decline my request to return to work. I didn't know what to say, how to respond, or even if what my boss had told me was legal. That said, cancer taught me to not fight against reality, but to make the best of a not-so-ideal situation.

My school offered short term disability payments, and thanks to my seniority, I had accumulated enough that the state of California and my school were able to provide me close to my full salary during my medical leave. Although I still felt anger at being told I couldn't return to work, I

realized that I may as well make the best of the situation – if I was getting paid to not work (especially since radiation fortunately had few side effects for me), I may as well enjoy. I woke up in the morning without a to-do list and a measurable agenda. I savored having time to explore healthy cooking with my willing taste-tester partner. I explored the farmers market and learned the difference between organic, pesticide free, free-range and pastured. I took our lovely dog on daily walks, and never felt more connected. B and I had my homemade lunch every day, given the good fortunate that he was working from home and able to spend this time with me. I attended cancer yoga with my cancer buddies, and befriended amazing survivors of all ages. Unfortunately I did hear of some friends losing their battles with cancer, and celebrated their lives and honored their memories by living my life with the gusto that they lived theirs. I was forced to take a step away from my hamster wheel, and developed a sense of calm and peace that I never quite felt before .

When I finally returned to work, I felt like someone had disrupted my new normal. I missed my radiation buddies and my radiation team. I missed spending so much quality time with B and our dog. I missed the simplicity of my life where, despite battling cancer, involved savoring every moment and not over-thinking the smaller aspects that were so easy to take on a life of their own.

Atop that, I changed jobs and started at School B only a few months following my return to work. I was stunned and honored when I was approached to apply for the open position by the school itself, not realizing that I had created a positive reputation in our small field. I questioned whether or not I was ready for a change. In returning to my old school, I found comfort and ease. I didn't have to exert much energy to do thorough, thoughtful, and high-quality work. A new position would be a big change, especially at School B which was still recovering from some very public mishaps and some financial difficulties. An interim president was in place, and there was no guarantee that at my level, the soon-to-be-hired new president would choose to keep me, or any of the senior management team, on. I surprised myself by saying yes to this new challenge.

I am so grateful to be working at School B, as I feel my brain being reactivated after too much time sitting dormant. The challenges are hefty, and the rewards even better. I have learned to deal with the politics, and to not allow short-sighted agendas interfere with my mission to provide School B's students a transformative education. I am doing well in taking the many changes at the school in stride, and to learn about what I am and am not in control. All of this, unfortunately, has come with a certain amount of stress. I have no qualms working long hours, but now being in a partnership, I realize that it is not just about me. My working late affects B's ability to have a life outside of work, whether it be to work out and see friends; my working late puts unfair burden on B to return home to take care of our dog; my working late means that I neglect our dog and B.

I have been extremely fortunate to have accomplished as much as I have despite not being overtly ambitious. I take pride in doing a job thoughtfully and thoroughly, and I have come to the crossroads that doing my current job at the high level I typically expect of myself will come at a compromise to my relationships and ultimately my health. I have lost my balance, and fear that the gifts cancer taught me are quickly being reversed. With this, I am eager to immerse myself in CPM in hopes of refocusing and recalibrating my priorities, and reconnecting with what truly is important to me and my loved ones.

In my moments of clarity during my cancer journey, I truly learned that I was in control of what was important. In not having control of my health and my body, I gained control of my mind.

The feeling of being consciously alive and choosing every action was liberating, and I hope to reconcile my new normal with that consciousness that cancer helped bring forth.

On a different note, I should mention that it is B who brought forward the notion of taking CPM. A CPM loyalist from years past, he had mentioned the class to me multiple times. I truly am excited for the possibility of taking the class now; I feel like I am finally ready to choose it for myself – not for him, not for our common experience, but for what CPM can bring to where I am in my life now.

I am so fortunate to be in the place that I am now – with a loving and supportive community, with clean health, and with financial stability. I eagerly await the transformation that CPM might provide me in truly integrating my cancer life with my current reality, and enable me to feel that clarity and calm amidst our greater life ambitions and goals.

3. What specific — list them — learning outcomes would you like to take away from this course? An example of such an outcome is “I would like to learn how to stop being bothered by what I think others are thinking about me.”

I would like to learn different strategies to choosing consciousness and thoughtfulness in a busy reality.

I would like to learn how to balance my career goals with a calm and realistic clarity.

I would like to learn to calm my mind and to learn ways to re-ground myself amidst situations out of my control.

I hope to connect with thoughtful, introspective, and forward-thinking individuals who can help create a net of accountability for me – and for whom I hope I can do the same.

4. What hesitations do you have? Are you nervous or concerned about anything you read in the syllabus or heard from others?

I truly am eager for any experience that CPM may bring forward. I hope to have my beliefs questioned and foundation shaken and then reaffirmed. I know that I might have pre-conceived notions of the course given B's close connection to Dr. Rao and the community, yet truly feel excited for and committed to making it my own.

5. How will other persons who take the course benefit from having you in it?

Each individual brings his/her experience to the table. I trust that my introspective and reflective nature will bring forward some thoughtful perspectives that may assist others in seeing a different viewpoint.

I hope my ability to listen with compassion can provide fellow classmates a safe space to explore their ideas and develop their own path. Through B's experience with CPM, I learned that each

person takes from CPM as much as they are willing to give – and their giving requires honesty, openness, and humility. In creating an environment in which individuals can trust one another, I hope to foster a community that is engaged, respectful, and challenging – to the extent that we all want a transformation at the end of our CPM journeys .

I plan to be an active participant in the transformative process that CPM might be, and to champion the journey that each of us will take individually and collaboratively.

6. What really, really, really and truly matters to you? Why?

Ultimately, the positive connections with my community are all that matter. As you've read from my history, I am intrigued by people and driven by the possibility of interacting with and learning from others. I can only bring forward my personal experience, but it is through listening and learning from others that I can live vicariously through someone else's experience and broaden a perspective that I hadn't yet witnessed.

Years ago, my dad had asked what mark I wanted to make in this world. Given that his name is on Mars, I suspect that he envisioned my saying that I wanted to find a cure for a disease or create a new model of thinking. Instead, in my high school or college (i.e. young) mindset, I said that I wanted to help transform one person's experience for the better. Whether it be by serving as a thoughtful listener, by providing a different perspective, or by creating a space in which someone could explore their own foundation, I wanted to make a difference on an individual level. Call me naive or stubborn, but I am proud to still hold that goal today.

7. This course requires an enormous commitment of time as well as emotional and psychic energy. If your participation slacks off, you will be doing a disservice to yourself as well as other members of class. Are you fully prepared to take responsibility to make this class a resounding success for yourself as well as for others?

I wouldn't choose this any other way – absolutely.