

As a breast cancer patient in continuing post-op care, I am pleased to write this letter of support for Moving On Aerobics. I've been involved with Moving on Aerobics for approximately one year, all while pursuing a doctoral degree (in Ethics) and holding down side jobs as a musician, researcher, and a (Catholic) lay minister. In the fall of 1998, I was diagnosed at the age of 29 with invasive breast cancer-at last. Here I emphasize the "at last" because I had problems with my breast bleeding more and more profusely for some seven or eight years already at that point, but physicians I visited during that period would tell me time and again that tests were inconclusive and that I was too young to even suspect cancer. Just after my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, I began a year's worth of operations and post-op treatment.

About five or six months after my last operation, I finally felt ready to move again, but not in any sort of high-impact, sometimes excessively strenuous, way as with the regular gym work I had been doing previously. I wanted to begin a regimen that would feel more gentle and holistic as I tried to become reacquainted with my body's capacities again and regain strength, flexibility and confidence. One of my doctors had recommended that I try yoga, which was helpful, but it was not a perfect fit. In addition to that, then, I returned to the modern dance and ballet classes that I had let slip for a few years. At the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y, and then at the studio I visited regularly, I saw a flyer for Moving on Aerobics and was pleased to see that this pilot project would take place at Teachers College, which is in the same neighborhood where I live and work. As a New Yorker without a car, accessibility, location, and scheduling are my primary criteria for deciding what to do or let pass! And, of course, as a graduate student, it was also a definite boon to have this class at no charge.

Moving on Aerobics has been-without a doubt-a thoroughly vital and restorative practice for me. It really has become both a metaphor and a process for moving past the difficulties of the operation and treatment and affirming that, yes, we do want to get on with our lives. From the choices that director Martha Eddy made in the music (at turns, motivating, centering, uplifting, and just plain fun!) and choreography (enough movement to get one's heart rate up while doing lots of the stretching to regain the strength and flexibility lost in the wake of the operations) to the mix of participants involved in the project-patients and instructors alike, everything about this simply felt right and positive. While the focus was on the upper torso areas most affected by the breast cancer, the movement and debriefing sessions afterward addressed each of us as a whole person. Both in the pilot project location plus other sessions around town (which I also attended when possible) the class has drawn a broad mix of women-different age groups, ethnicities, class backgrounds, diagnoses, and more. Just seeing the variety of patients fed into the healing process too; as an introvert who is wary of support groups in general (for their "talkiness," as well as the often-awkward group dynamics they engender and manifest), these sessions felt much more manageable. Communication with one's own body and tuning in to oneself is just as important here as listening to other people.

Of course, this experience of illness and recovery has fed into my own art, ministry, and academic work in ways that I'm still discovering. Moving On Aerobics has been a key

part of all of this, and I plan to stay involved with it as my schedule permits. I may even pursue further training as an instructor/facilitator for the program as it seeks to expand into other settings and communities.

I hope this letter proves helpful in your assessment of this program. I cannot commend the work of Martha Eddy and her staff highly enough, and I firmly believe that other post-op breast cancer patients would find these classes an incredibly valuable opportunity to become involved in their own healing and recovery. I strongly urge you to support the development of Moving On Aerobics for a wider audience.

Rachel