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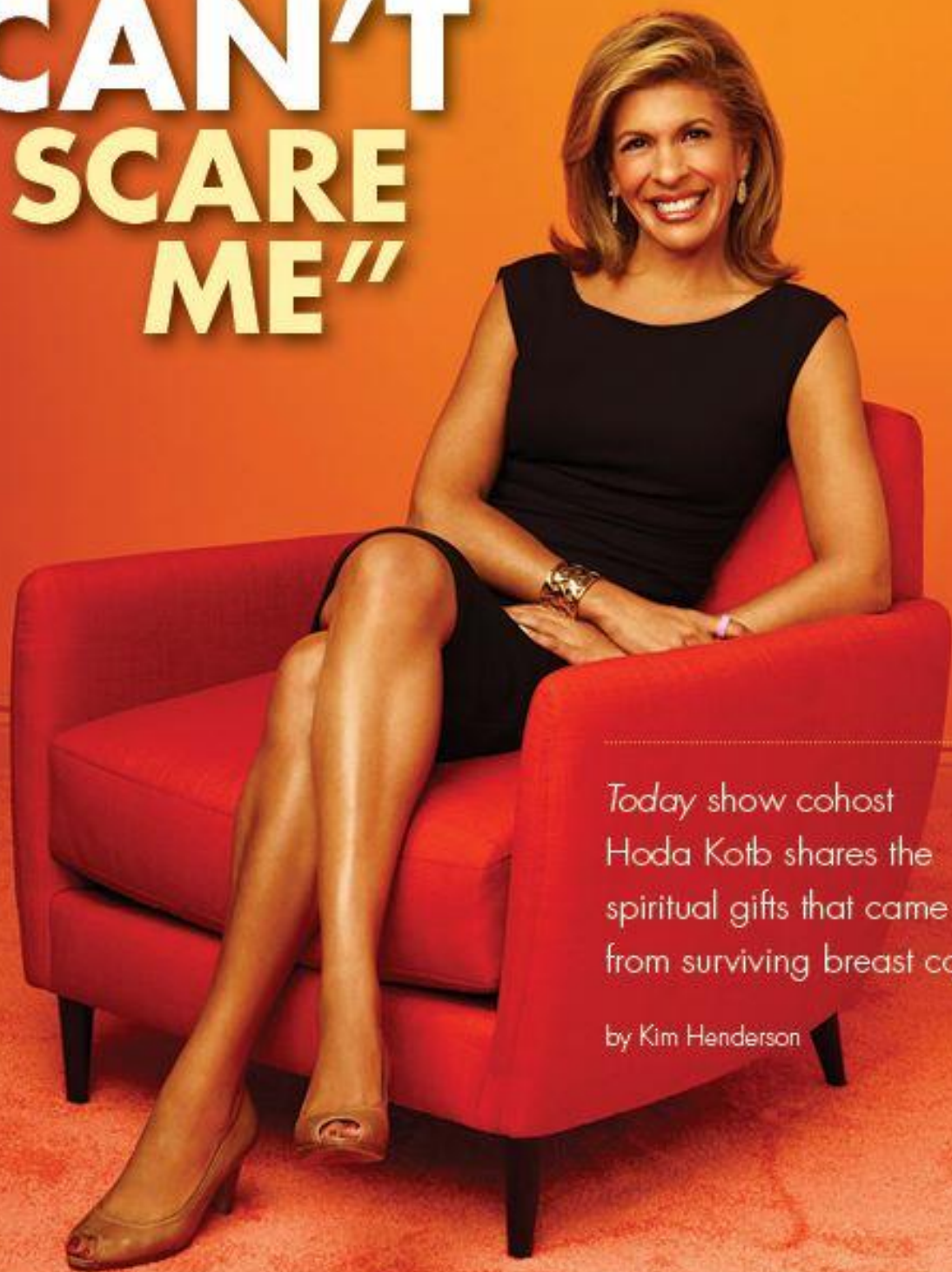
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HODA KOTB

America's girlfriend
on finding courage,
reaching her dreams,
and winning the battle
with breast cancer

COMPLIMENTS OF

"YOU CAN'T SCARE ME"



Today show cohost
Hoda Kotb shares the
spiritual gifts that came
from surviving breast cancer.

by Kim Henderson

Hoda Kotb has a beaming smile that lights up a room.

As the cohost of the fourth hour of the *Today* show, she actually lights up millions of rooms every morning across the country along with her equally fun and exuberant cohost, Kathie Lee Gifford. In fact, the fourth hour of *Today*

has become the unofficial “party” of morning television. If you’ve tuned in, you know firsthand how entertaining these dynamic women are! Yet, underneath her smiling exterior, Hoda holds a quiet power. An award-winning journalist, longtime *Dateline NBC* correspondent, and *New York Times* best-selling author,

Hoda shows a full spectrum of colors in her work and life. A breast cancer survivor—eight years and counting—she possesses real strength that comes from tough experiences. Lucky for us, Hoda shares her cancer journey and some of the unexpected spiritual and emotional gifts that came to her along the way.

GHL: What was it like to get your breast cancer diagnosis?

HK: I was at the gynecologist and they found a lump. I was actually not that concerned because I was living a healthy life. But I ended up getting a phone call and the doctor said, “Not good news for you.” At the time, I was sitting in my office talking to an intern. When I got off the call, she said, “Should I leave?” I told her, yes and then she asked, “Before I go, can I hug you?” And I remember thinking *God gives you what you need when you need it*. That was one of the most impactful days of my life.

GHL: What treatment did you elect to take?

HK: I went to different doctors and they all told me the same thing—I needed to have a mastectomy. That took away the decision making, which is what I wanted. When you are in that vulnerable of a state, you don’t really want to be making big decisions about your life. Radiation wasn’t necessary. Chemotherapy was debatable. Chemotherapy kills cells and a lot of other things in your body including healthy things. So I weighed the pros and cons and I decided not to do it.

GHL: What helped you most in your recovery from surgery?

HK: Interestingly, sharing my cancer experience with others. I tend to get

things over with and move on. That was my philosophy pre-cancer. But something happened when I was healing that really changed my perspective. My colleague Matt Lauer called and asked if I wanted to do a *Where in the World Is Matt Lauer* in Ireland. I wanted to go because I wanted to do something other than sit in my apartment and heal.

So I went to Ireland.

On the plane ride home, I felt terrible. I really wasn’t healed and I was kind of depressed. The guy next to me said, “How are you doing? My name is Ken.” And I was thinking, *Oh, please, anytime but now*.

He kept asking questions. I happened to have a compression sleeve on. And he said, “What’s that?” I told him and then he asked what it was for. “I had a procedure. The doctor said I should wear it,” I said. He continued probing and I finally said, “I had breast cancer, but I hope that when you get off this plane, you don’t remember me as the woman with breast cancer. I hope there are other things you think of before that.” And then he said, “Breast cancer is part of you like getting married or working at NBC.” And he added, “Let me give you some advice. Don’t hog your journey. You can put your stuff deep in your pockets and take it to the grave, or you can help somebody. What is your choice going to be?”

That’s when I made my choice.

I decided that I was not going to make breast cancer about my misery, my worries, my fears, or me! It changed everything. I have Ken to thank. I also have the best family and friends who helped me when I felt my worst. That support sustained me. I don’t know how anyone gets through breast cancer alone.

GHL: You said once that cancer taught you, “You can’t scare me.” Can you please explain what that means to you?

HK: You know when you have these weird epiphanies when you are at your weakest? I realized that this is as bad as it gets. Worries about work or this or that—they all seemed small in comparison because I had come through this really scary, giant green monster experience. Oddly, I felt empowered.

It allowed me to do things that I didn’t have in me previously. Like there was a new job coming up at NBC to host an added hour of *Today*, the job I currently have. In my wildest imagination, I would have never asked for the job. But I went right up that elevator to the 52nd floor where Jeff Zucker’s office was. And I gave him this weird speech, telling him that I could do this job and that “you can’t scare me.” And he looked at me like, *Whaaa!* I felt brave professionally for probably one of the first times.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER KRAMER/NBC

Hoda loving life on the Today show plaza.

GHL: How else did your cancer experience transform the way you live life and approach each day?

HK: I don't waste time anymore. I got divorced after cancer. I realized what is important and what isn't, what's working and what isn't. I got more clarity and I learned to be more courageous. Cancer reminds you that your life has margins. There's a beginning and an end. We all know that, kind of. But when a doctor tells you something about the end, you wake up and pay attention!

GHL: Your name "Hoda" means "guidance" in Arabic. What kind of guidance or wisdom can you share with other women who are facing breast cancer right now?

HK: I will never forget what my boss said after I told him I had breast cancer.

He said, "Hoda, I know a lot of women who have had breast cancer. And they all have one thing in common: They are still here". If you catch breast cancer early and you go through what you have to go through, you will live a long and happy life. And I think having that knowledge in your back pocket makes life so much easier.

GHL: What do you do today to stay healthy, vibrant, and positive?

HK: I exercise every single day. I try to find a song I'm crazy about to supercharge my workout. Right now it's "Fight Song" by Rachel Platten. God, it's so good! When the tank's on empty that's the song I pull out and play two times on repeat.

In terms of diet, I try to eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. I like to start the

day with a green smoothie. I put lots of bananas in it to sweeten it up and make it taste good.

GHL: What's next for you? What are your plans for the future?

HK: I'm finishing a book that's called *Where You Belong*. It's about finding your lane in life. Some people are in the wrong job or with the wrong person or living the wrong life. And then all of a sudden, something happens and they find the right thing. Instead of swimming upstream, they are riding a wave. That's what it's all about.

And I'm just laughing and scratching with Kathy Lee. What's better than that? ■

Kim Henderson is a Los Angeles-based writer who specializes in health and environment.