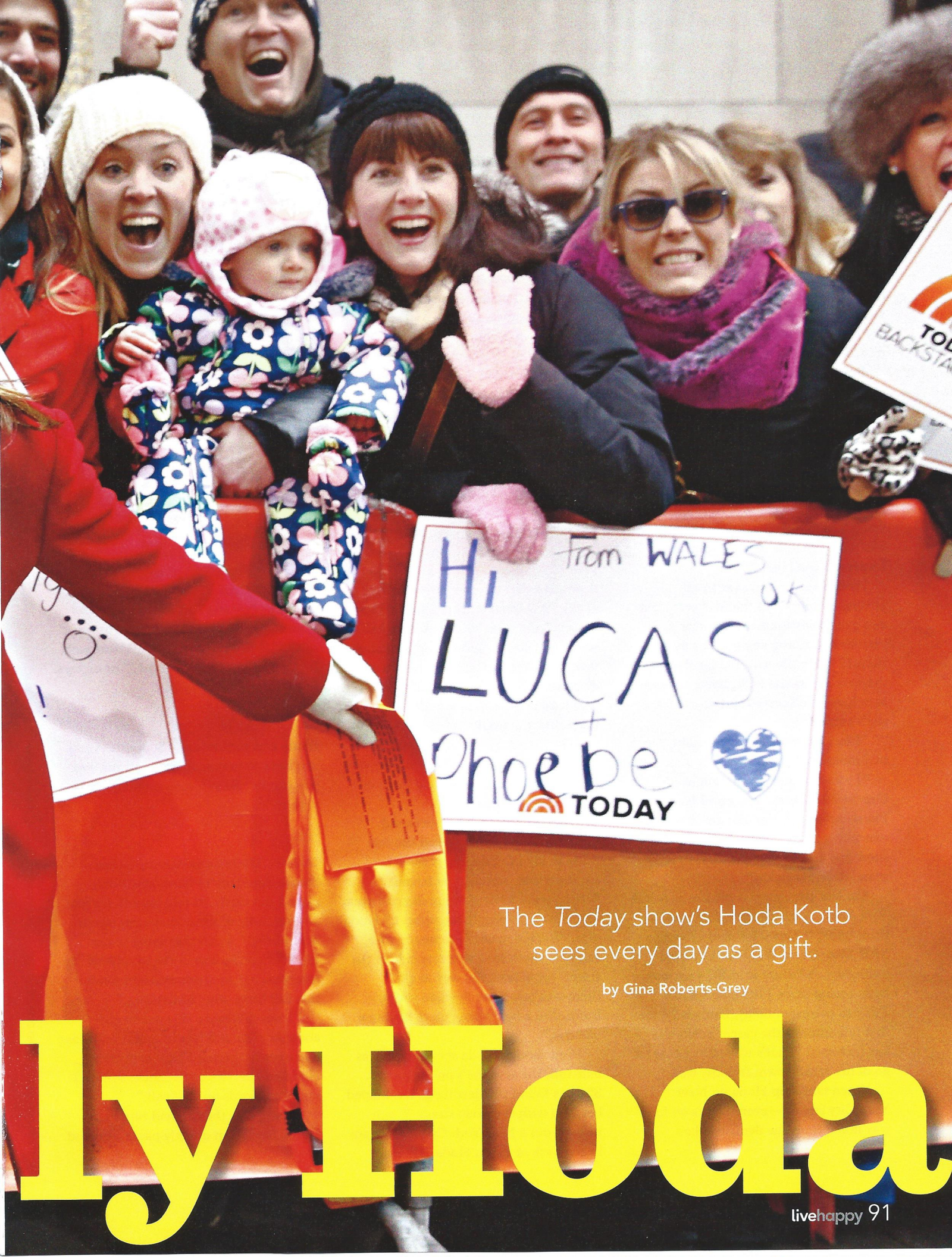


# Positive





The *Today* show's Hoda Kotb  
sees every day as a gift.

by Gina Roberts-Grey

# ly Hoda



An ordinary day for *Today* show co-host Hoda Kotb could find her in a spontaneous duet, singing “I Feel the Earth Move” with Carole King while walking down the halls of the NBC studios. It could also have the veteran journalist in tears, mourning the loss of her co-host and dear friend Kathie Lee Gifford’s husband, Frank...or learning she has breast cancer while in the middle of interviewing an intern.

But no matter if her days are filled with highs, lows or ordinary in-betweens, Hoda ultimately sees them as all the same.

“Every day is like an unexpected mini-gift wrapped in a bow,” she says. “You don’t know who you’re going to meet or how the day will work out, but when I open my eyes, I am grateful for whatever experience lies ahead, and I just soak it all in.”

Hoda’s career began at small television stations in the Midwest, first as a general assignment reporter and then as a morning anchor. For more than 12 years, she covered local news in markets across the U.S., never expecting to achieve the success and accolades she’s earned.

“I feel like my life is a constant ‘pinch me’ moment,” Hoda says.

“I was at a tiny TV station in Greenville, Mississippi, and I feel like I’m still *that* girl. I’m *that* girl, not *this* one who gets to be on a national news show and talk to world leaders in so many different fields.”

She has also enjoyed success as a *New York Times* best-selling author, and her third book, *Where We Belong: Journeys That Show Us the Way*, has just been published. A fixture in NBC’s national news lineup since 1998 (she’s also a *Dateline* correspondent), Hoda is aware that few summit the career peaks she has traversed. That’s why she’s never let go of her small-town, friendly way.

When fans stop Hoda on New York City streets—even if she’s on her way home from the dentist—she’s

always happy to stop and snap a selfie, sign an autograph or share a story. “Those meetings are reminders of how lucky I am.

“I just encountered a terrific bunch of ladies on the street who started shrieking when they recognized me. I got so excited, I joined in and started shrieking right along with them. In that moment, I thought ‘Wow, I get to do a job that could be anybody’s. There are so many who are smarter and more talented than me.’ And those instances are beautiful reminders of the gift I’m given every day just by waking up.”

## So Happy Together

A positive outlook may be in Hoda’s genes. “My mom truly is a shiny, happy person,” she says. “She wakes up and sees a new day as another opportunity to learn. So in her late 70s she’ll try a new restaurant, book or whatever and sees it all as an adventure. I’m not sure if a positive outlook is in your DNA or it’s learned. Or maybe it’s a little of both,” Hoda says. But she is sure that the people around her have a lot to do with her perspective.

“Most of the people I surround myself with are upbeat. And the one thing in my life I do better than anything else is pick great friends. When you’re having a blue day, it’s great that your core people are upbeat,” Hoda says. “Everyone needs someone who can help them see the sunny side of the street—or at least the way to get there—so you don’t feel like you’re trapped in a box when you’re having a bad day.”

Even though Hoda sees her glass as half-full, she says she’s no Pollyanna. She has found that letting go has helped her deal with everyday stress. When waiting out a New York City traffic jam in the back of a cab, Hoda says she



**FROM TOP:** Hoda Kotb celebrates the Women’s World Cup win last summer with U.S. soccer stars Abby Wambach, left, and Hope Solo. **BELOW:** She enjoys her own birthday spoils.

trusts and surrenders. “Sometimes you just have to realize there’s nothing else you can do. So you exhale and go with it.”

## Forward March

In 2007, Hoda found a lump in her breast. And true to form, she didn’t expect the worst. “I told myself, it’s just a lump. Lots of times they turn out to be nothing.” A call that came to her office when she was in the middle of interviewing an intern brought news that her lump was “something.”

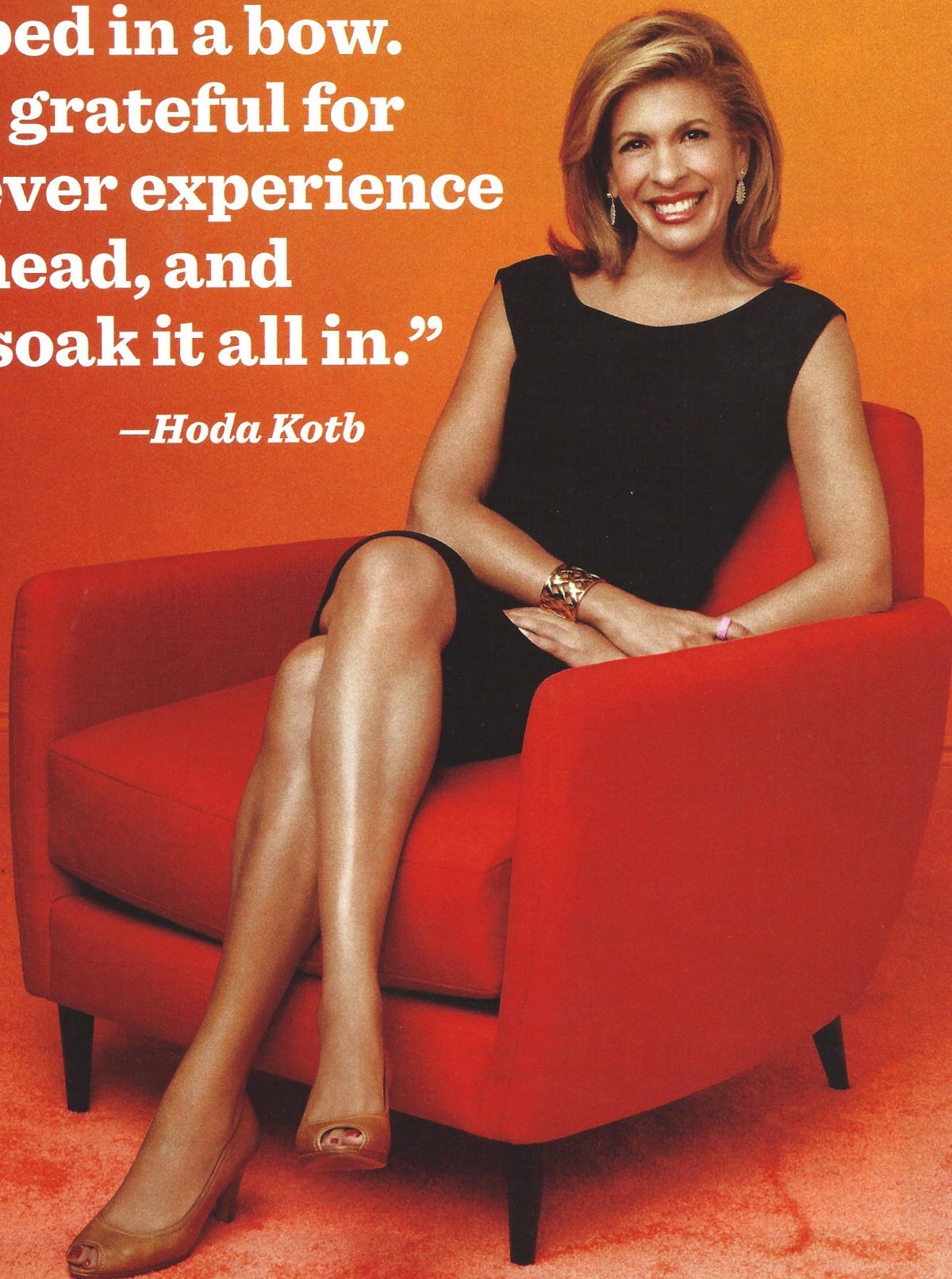
“I was talking to this young girl about her life and future career and was told over the phone I have cancer,” Hoda recalls. “I was in shock; I think I said four words on that call.”

Seeing that the call had rattled Hoda, the intern quickly packed up and



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## Hoda's Get-Happy Tips

**Play music.** "I'm always flipping music on. And if it is on...how can you be in a bad mood? Music makes everything better!"

**Stream speeches.** "If I'm in a funk, I'll listen to a graduation speech. Doing that, you can hear the best advice that some of the coolest people have ever given."

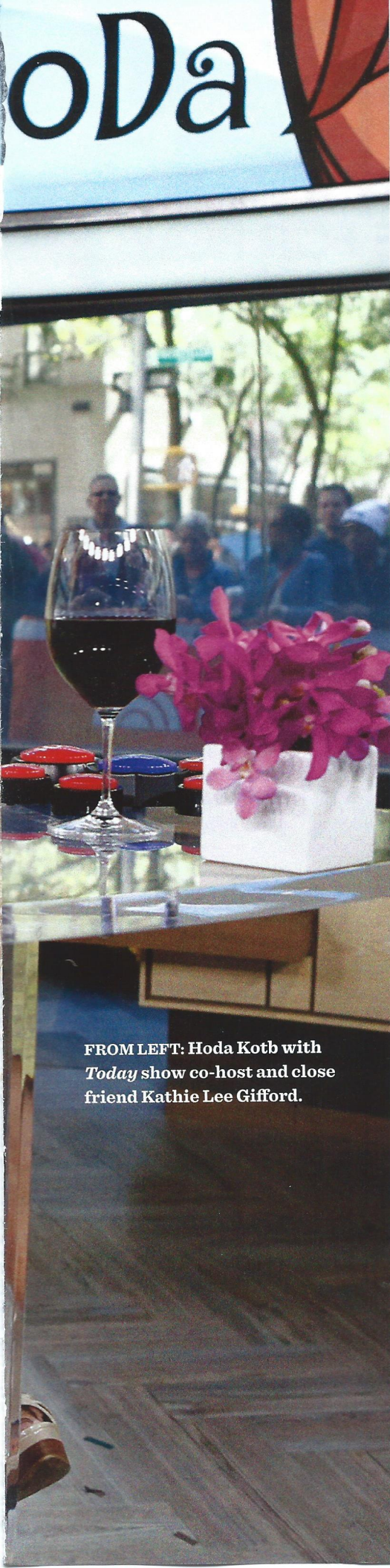
**Note small gestures.** Every day, Hoda jots down three things she's grateful for. "Not things like the sun or my mom, even though of course I'm grateful

for them. But I'll note the man who held the elevator for me when my arms were full of groceries to always staying aware of the thousands of reminders of goodness around me."

**Be nice.** Hoda loves doing random act of kindness, like buying a co-worker a cup of coffee.

**Seek joy.** "I don't think life just happens to you. You have to seek out experiences. Make magic happen by looking for good around every corner."





FROM LEFT: Hoda Kotb with *Today* show co-host and close friend Kathie Lee Gifford.

prepared to slip quietly out of the room. But before departing, the young woman asked Hoda for one favor. “She asked if she could give me a hug. And that moment was such a strong reminder that God gives you what you need when you need it. Here was this stranger who wrapped her arms around me, showing me such kindness.”

The diagnosis of breast cancer was followed by a mastectomy and reconstructive surgery, all of which were documented by the *Today* show. And it all played out while Hoda was in the midst of a painful divorce.

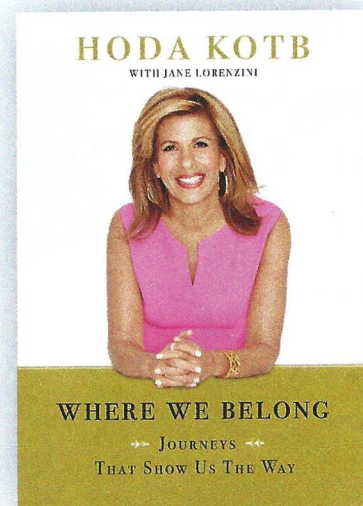
“In a strange way, having two major life upheavals at once was probably a blessing,” she says. “It meant there was never a lot of time to focus on just one crisis. But there were still times I felt like I might drown.”

The love of her family and friends provided unconditional emotional support. The word “forward” also helped keep her from getting stuck in what she calls “the weeds of the ‘what ifs.’” To cope with the emotional upheavals of cancer and divorce, Hoda turned to her journal. Writing daily, she says, she closed every entry the same way. “The last word on every page was ‘forward.’”

“You’re in trouble if you start to move backward or think ‘I should have,’ ‘I could have’ and so on. And looking to the bad outcomes can send you down a rabbit hole of despair,” Hoda says. But looking forward to a new day—even if it contained tests, treatments or trips to the attorney—was a constant source of strength and support.

The idea of always looking ahead is so important to Hoda that she wears a ring emblazoned with the word “forward,” which a friend had made for her. “It reminds me to never look back, that there’s nothing in the rearview mirror worth worrying about.”

Still, Hoda says her positive attitude doesn’t require that she always keep a stiff upper lip. “I get why there are times when all anyone wants to do is throw



**Q&A on her new book:**  
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their hands up in the air and say, ‘No more. I can’t take any more.’ I don’t believe you can suck it up forever. At some point, you’ll burst. So I think it’s OK to acknowledge and have those moments, as long as you remember you don’t have to stay in that space forever.”

When she does hit a low point, Hoda grabs a tissue and turns her thoughts to the struggles of others. “For me, when you are on your knees and feel lost, remembering there is always someone who has it worse than you do pulls you back and helps you look forward.”

Stopping to think about others’ struggles has strengthened Hoda’s emotional mettle. “There are people who have endured terribly painful experiences like the death of a child or a World War II concentration camp, and they go on. Instead of trying to change the past or explain it away, they weave it into the tapestry of their life and move forward to make the most of today and tomorrow. That gives me the strength to see the good in my life and move on from sorrow or pain.”

And Hoda will move onward and upward. “There are things in life you have to own and move forward from. They don’t have to define you; they’re just small parts of a big, beautiful life. Once you realize that, you can look forward to the possibilities of a new day.” 