

SHAPE reports with sadness that writer Kelly Golat, 24, died of cancer on Nov. 20, 2002. Many of you told us how inspired you were by Kelly's personal story, "When a Young Woman Has Cancer (Time Out, August), shown below. Kelly expressed how being diagnosed with malignant melanoma had given her a renewed appreciation for time spent with family and friends. Kelly left behind her parents and four siblings, who recently discovered some of her unpublished writings. Kelly's indefatigable spirit shines in her own words: I pray every day for the miracle of life... Then I realize I am living it right now." Our condolences go out to her family.



I am 24 years old. On May 18, 2001, my doctor told me I had cancer. Malignant melanoma. An X-ray showed a tumor the size of an orange sitting right above my lungs. Further tests showed several small tumors in my liver. The strange thing was that I had no skin lesions.

Why did I get this? They didn't know. How did I get it? They couldn't tell me. After all the questions and tests, the only answer the doctors offered was, "Kelly, you are a bizarre case."

Bizarre. The one word that seems to sum up my situation this past year.

Before hearing this cancer news, I led a most ordinary life for a 20-something girl. I was one year out of college, working as an editorial assistant at a publishing firm in New York City. I had a boyfriend and a terrific group of friends.

Everything was in order except for one thing -- and it's fair to say that I had become obsessed: I was utterly consumed with perfecting my weight, my face and my hair. Every morning at 5 a.m., I would run three-and-a-half miles before heading over to work. After work, I'd sprint over to the gym so I wouldn't be late for the step-aerobics class. I was a fanatic about what I ate too: I avoided sugar, oil and, heaven forbid, fat.

The mirror was my worst enemy. With every meeting I found more flaws. I took one of my first paychecks, paraded into Bloomingdale's and bought \$200 worth of makeup, with the hope that the new powders and creams somehow would erase the mistakes I was born with. Stress also came from worrying about my thin, brown hair. A helpful hint from a friend led me to the doorstep of the most expensive hairstylist in Greenwich Village. His tip cost more than my weekly salary but, my goodness, those subtle highlights (ones that you could hardly see) worked magic!

This obsession with how I looked was immediately extinguished after learning I had cancer. Things in my life changed severely. I had to stop working. The chemotherapy treatments rattled my body and many times left me too weak to speak. The doctors prohibited any type of strenuous exercise -- a hilarious joke considering I could hardly walk. The drugs thwarted my appetite. The only foods I could stomach were cheese sandwiches and peaches. As a result, I suffered severe weight loss. And there was no need to worry about my hair anymore: Most of it had fallen out.

It's been a year since I first heard the news, and I continue to fight my way back to health. My idea of what is "important" has been forever altered. Cancer has pushed me into a corner where answers come quick and easy: What is most important in my life? Time spent with family and friends. Doing what? Celebrating birthdays, holidays, life. Appreciating every single conversation, Christmas card, hug.

The worries about body fat, a pretty face and perfect hair -- gone. I don't care anymore. How bizarre.

Kelly's article in Shape was recognized at the Maggie Awards, bringing the illustrious award to Shape magazine that year. Like the Emmys or the Oscars, the Maggie Awards recognize "The Best in the West" for a variety of publishing categories. To be nominated is an honor, but to win is a truly a remarkable feat.