

DANIELLE BAILEY LASH — STAGE IIIB / IV CANCER PATIENT

Stage IIIB Astrocytoma at age 35—they gave me a strange expiration date 3-6 months.

OR if there was a miracle,  
I would live thirty years.  
...So I'm going for the miracle  
[laughter] of course!

I've been in remission, the only issue is,  
my *skull* is not in yet.  
[lifts hair and shows where it is bare]

My daughter is 14—I love her so much—she's always like: "Eww, Mom: I can't believe you *showed* that!?"  
[Laughs] And it is so gross in that video...  
But I'm like, you know,  
"I'm *PROUD* of this! *I'm alive!*"  
Stage IIIB Astrocytoma. I'm just glad to be here.

But I gotta be careful at restaurant booths and *stuff*,  
I can't sit on the outside. It can't get elbowed or anything). ...So I just did, I was talking to Caroline and saying: "Maybe we need to start sending them pictures of our doctors' billlllls  
...and like my *skulllllll*  
...and you know people's like people's ga-ross wounnds and stuuuff  
and you know, like  
*here's all my receipts!*

Just wanna let you know that this is affecting *real people*. *You know*, we are *real* people. It's not just reading about people in New York or something  
[polite but dismissive voice]  
"Oh, I hate that that's happening there!"  
...This is happening in your own neighborhood...

Wwhat will *happen* is, when you go to all these little cookouts around here—  
because we go to *everybody's* funeral  
we go to *everybody's* wedding  
we go to *everybody's* little cookout  
...'cause it's *cou-n-try* [laughter]

That's when you hear about, "Oh, so and so has cancer" ...it's just cancer, cancer, *cancer*, so many people *with* cancer.

But for me, living near *Belews Lake*,  
with all the coal production and lagoons  
I started to realize, at this house:  
like we had a neighbor whose dad died of cancer,  
her children born with all these deformities,  
around the corner a little boy who  
had a brain tumor,

down the street another woman with cancer, friends my age [*late thirties early forties*] with neurological problems, tumors, lots of breast cancer...

...My oncologist has treated like five people from this area [small street].  
That seems like a lot for such a small town.  
We're all like—"Oh do you go to Dr. \_\_\_\_\_?"  
Yep! That's my doctor." *Too*.  
[laughter]

...It's one thing to be in *denial*  
you know how like a woman's in denial that her husband's cheating-on-her [*smiling, confident*]  
"Oooh, I'm sure it's not *that*."

But for us, also: if we have to believe this,  
then *where are we gonna go?*  
*like*, my house is not paid for  
so I'm still paying for a mortgage over there  
and I don't *liiive* over-there  
and I can't sell my house to someone  
and then, you-know  
rest easy at night and be like ... "Oh. by the way. there's-radon-in-there."

It seems like there would just be a *simple database*.  
—I know [*authoritative tone*]  
Doctors-Are-Very-Busy.

[back to her pitch] But like, the same way when you go to the doctor's office—all my doctors are connected  
...the oncologist he's *typin' stuff in*.  
...My primary-healthcare-physician sees that same thing  
...as-well-as-the-hospital that I go to  
for my M-R-I's — so everything's connected!

And it seems like it would be connected that *same way*  
and it would be just-a-little-box-that-says:  
THEY LIVE nine miles from  
a Duke Energy Plant — maybe not just Duke Energy, there's other power plants too,  
—and then, it should just *connect*.

A simple database.

But everything is always made so com-p-li-cated and there's these "experts" that come on TV and say [*nasally voice*]: "Wehll *ack-tually*, the cancer could be caused by the *UM*, cancer could be

caused by, *you know their parents had cancer or...*”

...It kinda just makes you feel like well: they’re always gonna-find-an- excuse, like a *paid expert witness* in court ...there’s always some *ex-pert*.

...and I don’t know how you *get to BE the expert*, but *uhmmm*, [pause]  
That’s actually something I would just like to *do for Walnut Cove*.

[...] But, I guess, [*laughter*]  
That’s sorta how they pick where to put these *toxic sites* — you know if they tried to put it at *Stratford Road*, that’s where all the doctors and dentists *happen to live*, they would be like, [*hoity-toity voice*]  
“Well, *first of all*, my cousin in the *so and so* of such n’ such.”

...I don’t know, it’s like they have a *map* or something  
Maybe it’s not quite so *direct as a map*—  
but it’s like an *acronym*—

P - B - C - P - H. [*matter of fact voice*]  
“Poor Black Community, Put Here.”

[...] My son is away in college, where he’s exposed to people who are *aware*, of more than just *Walnut Cove* ... and what he’s learning, he believes that it is possible for *government, and big companies* to *keep stuff away from us* that they have done.

Whereas before, I was kinda *naive*, like  
“They’re not gonna do that! ...That’s in the *old days* that they did stuff *like that!*!”

[*a kind, yearning voice*]  
...I just want there to be *some department* in the government,  
just someone who says,

“We can’t be bought off.  
We are *for* the people.”

Because—I’m people.  
My *children* are people.  
My *neighbors* are people.

It’s just so *disturbing*  
to think someone would say:  
“*Let them get sick* ... over there.”

ACTION: *Danielle’s warm demeanor beams from within. With graceful posture, she leans forward, and often rotates or gently gestures with her hands. Danielle is poised—and quietly hilarious—and goes deep, while sometimes laughing through to the end of her words and phrases. She cuts into the core of dysfunction and oppression so neatly and nicely, a listener may hardly realize they are in the muck with her, until she slings it off.*

*In a life full with family, community, and public service, the past decade has been about dealing with coal ash and health effects in her own knowing body and in neighbors’. Danielle’s is a rare combination of quick wit and humor, and contemplative, even loving care.*

SOURCE: This interview was conducted with Danielle in September 2015 at her mother’s home in Baileytown near Walnut Cove, NC (with interviewer Marie Garlock, PhD, [contact.marie@itisinyou.org](mailto:contact.marie@itisinyou.org)). In addition to the full interview (submitted to U.S. Commission on Civil Rights hearing/federal docket on coal ash waste and environmental health), Danielle’s insights excerpted here are featured in the production [Flipping Cancer](http://FlippingCancer.itisinyou.org/flipping-cancer) ([itisinyou.org/flipping-cancer](http://itisinyou.org/flipping-cancer)), a performance developed with people facing advanced cancers as patients, family caregivers, and clinicians.

In the initial and subsequent interviews, Danielle reflected her wish for clinicians—given their authority in the lives of people facing health crises and illnesses, and clinicians’ social clout more broadly—to honor and listen to, rather than dismiss patients’ questions about their proximity to polluting industrial facilities at the fenceline of their homes/workplaces/schools. Marking the patient’s report of environmental pollution into their record—in the “Social History” portion of post encounter notes—is a helpful start. Listen to Danielle on the intersection of healthcare provision and environmental health: [bit.ly/SocHxDanielle](http://bit.ly/SocHxDanielle)

To activate audiences for healthcare and environmental justice, [Danielle’s wisdoms](#) have toured to medical schools and professional conferences in continuing medical education (CME) for physicians, nurses, pharmacists, administrators, social workers, and more. Audiences often reflect that Danielle’s insights remain with them and [influence their future approaches to clinical education and decision-making in patient care.](#)