

Post-It Fax Note 7672

To *Jeanette Lee*

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Fax # *(317) 844-7089* Telephone #

Comments



No. of Pages

5

Today's Date

6/23/99

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4:30 pm

From

Brooke Lyons

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Fax# (317) 844-7089
Jeanette Lee

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JEANETTE LEE

The Black Widow

A first-generation Korean American born into a bilingual household, Jeanette Lee was nurtured by a unique brand of the archetypal American ideal of opportunity—one seasoned with the richness of traditional Korean values. This coalescence of cultures and value systems with which Jeanette was raised served her well. As a young girl growing up in Brooklyn, New York, she demonstrated intelligence and determination that enabled her to stand out amongst her peers and to earn a place at the prestigious Bronx High School of Science. But before entering high school, she was forced to handle an obstacle that had never been a part of her American dream.

Like many teenage girls, Jeanette had been self-conscious about her body for some time and had avoided wearing revealing clothing or bathing suits. For this reason, even Jeanette's family had not seen what Jeanette remembers as being a "flat-chested and scrawny" figure. At thirteen, though, Jeanette was finally ready to embrace some



self-confidence, to wear a bathing suit, and to cast away some of her early adolescent physical concerns. On a family outing to the beach one day, thirteen-year-old Jeanette sported a bikini—her first ever. Upon Jeanette's removal of her exterior clothing, her mother gasped at the appearance

contorted by the severe "S" curve in her spine. No one had ever noticed this deformity because Jeanette had been so shy about her body and had kept it hidden so well. Jeanette's mother, a registered nurse, quickly recognized the problem with her daughter's spine and promptly took Jeanette to a series of doctors.

Within a matter of weeks, several doctors agreed that Jeanette's scoliosis was severe enough to warrant immediate surgery. Though Jeanette was relatively young and had not yet experienced her adolescent growth spurt, her primary scoliosis curve measured fifty-five degrees. Wearing a back brace would have limited result, so surgery was her best option—not only to correct her scoliosis, but to halt its rapid progression. Thus, at age thirteen, Jeanette underwent a spinal fusion with placement of Harrington rods. Prior to the surgery, Jeanette remembers being "really scared." She did not know how long the surgery would take, what it would entail, how quickly she would recover, or what she would look and feel like post-operatively. Terrified, Jeanette was wheeled into the operating room. The next thing she remembers is waking up after the surgery.

Not only was Jeanette unable to vocalize her discomfort, but she was unable to move; her entire body felt incredibly "sluggish and slow" under the influence of the sedatives in the post-operative period. To this day, Jeanette does not know how long she remained in the hospital after her surgery. Her sense of time was clouded by her post-operative discomfort. After Jeanette had regained her strength and returned home, she was bound for eight months in a post-surgical body cast and then in a back brace. After her surgery, Jeanette longed for someone to talk to, but she did not find anyone who could relate to her.

When Jeanette was eighteen, she discovered something that would alter her attitude, shift her focus off of her scoliosis, and change her life forever. One day, she saw an old man playing pool.

"I was just mesmerized by how beautiful the game was," she remembers. "Each time you break the balls, you create a new configuration . . . a new puzzle to solve. You create your own art."

Jeanette knew at that point that she wanted to learn to play pool. Almost immediately, she immersed herself in all facets of the game. Before she knew it, Jeanette was practicing pool for ten hours each day, reading books on pool, befriending old-time pool professionals, and exploring other billiard games. Along with her budding interest, though, came increased back pain.

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"I probably started playing too much pool," Jeanette says. Being bent over all the time while playing the game created an incredible strain on the instrumentation in Jeanette's back. Yet Jeanette was not about to give up her newfound passion simply because her back hurt.

"For the first time in my life, I was able to focus on something other than my own unworthiness," she says. For years, Jeanette had viewed herself as being a worthless, deformed creature. Now, though, she had found a distinct talent; something that made her feel purposeful, exhilarated, and beautiful. Despite her chronic back pain, Jeanette continued to practice pool and to strive for excellence in her game. And, in a short time, her hard work began to pay off.

The intelligence and determination she had demonstrated since childhood empowered Jeanette to develop unparalleled skill in playing pool. Shortly after her emergence on the pool-playing scene, Jeanette received the nickname "The Black Widow" from her contemporaries in the world of billiards because of what has been called her "tenacious ability to devour opponents and her tendency to wear only black during competition."

Four years after she picked up her first cue, Jeanette turned professional and joined the Women's Professional Billiards Association Tour. Less than a year later, she had become one of the top ten pool players in the world and was runner-up in the world championships. One year after that, Jeanette became the number one ranked female pool player in the world, maintaining that ranking for two years. A strikingly beautiful woman who has taken the billiards world by storm and has glamorized the game of pool, Jeanette has traveled around the world and has become an internationally renowned figure. Her flawless appearance, superior ability in pool, and confident demeanor, though, belie the metal-laden spine that no one can see and the chronic pain that no one knows exists.

Throughout her career, Jeanette has had to deal with the unrelenting back pain wrought by her scoliosis and the Harrington rods that remain implanted inside her. She unfortunately developed pseudarthrosis (failed fusion) in the L3 and L4 vertebrae, has had a piece of her instrumentation come loose, and has needed periodic intervertebral injections of medicine for her pain. Many doctors have told her that she has two choices; she can either deal with the pain, or undergo corrective surgery during which her Harrington rods would be replaced by more modern instrumentation. Ultimately, Jeanette plans to have surgery in order to maintain

her health and improve her quality of life. But she does not wish to have surgery until she has lived out her dream and finished her career.

In the meantime, Jeanette sees a doctor about her scoliosis every two to three months and depends on the intervertebral injections of pain medicine she often receives to alleviate some of her pain. She also swims, stretches, and exercises on a regular basis in order to keep in shape, maintain flexibility, and relieve some of the muscular pain in her back. While Jeanette values exercise and pain medication as means of helping her excel as a professional pool player despite her severe back pain, she hails her husband, billiards professional George Breedlove, as the most helpful agent of all. Jeanette describes George as "the best" and "most supportive" husband.

"God really blessed me with my husband," she says. "He's unbelievable."

Due to back pain, Jeanette is no longer able to practice pool for ten to twenty hours each day, as she has been known to do in the past. She is currently the number two ranked female billiards player in the world.

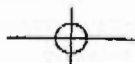
"It [the prohibitive back pain] hurts your confidence as well as your skill and focus," says Jeanette, who would like to practice more without pain and to regain the number one ranking. Though her present condition is detrimental to her ability to play pool, having surgery would fully prevent her from playing the game for an entire year and would permanently alter the range of motion she has in her back.

While Jeanette's scoliosis inhibits her development as a competitor, it is, in part, responsible for her ability to maintain a striking sense of humility despite the fame and accolade she has achieved in life.

"I'm just as human as everyone else," Jeanette says candidly. "I have a scar; I experience pain and depression. . . . [But] when these bad things happen, you have two choices—you can pity yourself, or you can overcome the problem. I've chosen the second." Her actions illustrate her choice, as she has never missed a tournament.

"You just work your way around these things to survive," Jeanette says of her scoliosis and her related back pain.

Not only has Jeanette decided to "work around" her scoliosis instead of letting it overcome her, but she has decided to utilize her fame and skill to benefit others with her condition. She has recently become a national spokesperson for the Scoliosis Association, Inc. Also, in January 1998 she founded the Jeanette Lee Foundation, which benefits two causes—scoliosis research and scholarship funds. Jeanette holds



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events to raise money for scoliosis research. She also raises money for scholarship funds and stresses the importance of education, responsibility, and forming healthy relationships to children.

"When I was a kid, I couldn't talk to anyone about my scoliosis. I didn't know of anyone else who had it or of any support organizations," Jeanette recalls. "I want people with scoliosis to know that they can talk to someone . . . [that] they're just as beautiful as everyone else, and that there are people out there who do understand what they're going through."

I am sure the same determination and optimism that Jeanette has displayed in coping with her scoliosis will serve her well in regaining her title as the number one female pool player in the world.

You can contact Jeanette through her personal website at www.jeanettelee.com. The website includes information about Jeanette's career, the various charities that she benefits, the events (charity or competitive) in which she is participating, the products she endorses, and her media schedule.



Post-it

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