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## Cancer, Congo and caring: Getting better is focus of Eve Ensler's new book

Posted: 5:40 p.m. Tuesday, May 28, 2013

BY JILL VEJNOSKA - THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

A less driven Eve Ensler? It defies belief. Surely nothing could slow down the activist/feminist/playwright who took "The Vagina Monologues" from a one-woman, off-off-off-Broadway show (it launched in a Greenwich Village cafe basement in 1996) to "V-Day," a global movement to end violence against women and girls. Yet in her new book, Ensler, 60, describes how she learned to stop and smell the roses — or, more accurately, to really look at the tree outside her hospital window — as she battled uterine cancer.

"In the Body of the World" doesn't gloss over the gruesome details of Ensler's illness, anymore than it airbrushes the details of the violence she bears witness to in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo, not long before her initial diagnosis. But in finding a connective arc between those and other seemingly disparate examples of trauma, Ensler not only gains strength to fight back against cancer. She also realizes that being more fully connected to one's own body — and by extension, the body of the world — is the best way to stop the cycle of violence and trauma.

Cancer-free for three years, Ensler will discuss her book here Friday. We spoke to her by phone last week:

**Q: The book is cleverly separated into brief chapters called "Scans," which go from your initial diagnosis to being cancer-free for 18 months. Were you writing throughout this whole ordeal?**

**A:** I wasn't, but I feel like my body was taking notes the whole time



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Eve Ensler, who created "The Vagina Monologues," is back with an alternately harrowing, humorous and inspiring memoir about beating uterine cancer — and gaining greater understanding of her own life and the world in the process.

and after the treatment was when it all came out. It's like my body was holding it, like it was an imprint.

Eve Ensler introduces her memoir 'In the Body of the World'

**Q: So you weren't aware of the cancer connecting to other themes in your life until later as well?**

**A:** Actually, I think I knew that that bigger arc was there, as it was happening to me. The idea of cancer being a metaphor for other things kept playing in my mind.

**Q: In one chapter, you run through all the possible causes of your cancer, including "the exhaustion of trying to change." In another, you tell yourself that your drive to prove yourself is "how you got sick." You don't blame yourself for your cancer, do you?**

**A:** I am certainly not going to blame myself or *anyone* for how we get cancer. We live in a carcinogenic world, after all. I will say that I think there is a link between trauma and violence and cancer. It's a very unexplored link that needs to be explored more.

**Q: Even at your sickest, you kept calling the Congo to check on the construction of City of Joy, a UNICEF- and V-Day-supported "sanctuary" where some of the thousands of women who have been raped and tortured during 13 years of civil war could heal and learn to become leaders. Why?**

**A:** It was actually the thing that was keeping me alive. I was living for the day of City of Joy's opening. Even when I felt my most terrible, if I could hear Christine's voice (Ensler's translator and guide in the Congo and a key figure in the drive to complete City of Joy, which opened in June 2011) ... . We both pretended we were better off than we were. Her in the hell of building, me in the hell of cancer. It was good for both of us to do that for each other!

**Q: Did having cancer change you?**

**A:** Definitely. The biggest thing that's changed in my life is this kind of drive thing, the "I'll show you, I'll *prove* it to you" thing I had. Of course, to some degree, it's always lurking there, but it's not the central motivating thing anymore. So much of the time now I feel incredibly connected — looking at trees, having a cup of coffee and just being alive. That is, when I'm not on tour, going to 18 cities in two weeks (laughs). I don't really like this pace anymore. I want a life where I can feel and take in.

**Q: In a theme- and detail-rich book, what's the key thing you want readers to take in?**

**A:** When we are coming back to our bodies, when we're *in* our bodies, we're connected to things that matter and are agents of change. When we're disembodied and disassociated from ourselves, we don't know what's going on and we *don't* become agents of change.

## MEET THE AUTHOR

Eve Ensler will speak and read from "In the Body of the World" from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Friday at the Buckhead Theatre, 3110 Roswell Road, Atlanta. 404-843-2825. \$30 general admission, plus handling fee (includes a book), \$15 students, plus handling fee (does not include a book). To purchase tickets: [eveensleratl.eventbrite.com](http://eveensleratl.eventbrite.com)

\$1,000 sponsorship includes one VIP ticket to an intimate dinner with Ensler that's a fundraiser for the V-Day global movement. For information, contact [nikki@vday.org](mailto:nikki@vday.org).