

When ordinary people do extraordinary things

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Currently, the world is abuzz with news of Michael Jackson's death. When a superstar like Jackson dies, it becomes difficult to find a news agency that isn't covering the story 24/7. We can't hide from it. Our voyeuristic fascination with the rich and famous sometimes makes us miss the more poignant, heartwarming, heroic tales of people like us--ordinary people who do extraordinary things.

Take the story of Dr. Jerri Nielson Fitzgerald. She's the doctor who discovered and treated her own breast cancer while stationed in Antarctica in 1999. Her base was closed for the winter when she detected a lump in her breast. There was no way for her to be airlifted to a hospital until the weather improved. When the lymph nodes under her arm began to swell she realized that if she didn't do something drastic she might not make it out alive.

With the help of a welder she performed a biopsy on herself in order to confirm that she did indeed have cancer. She said that she'd work on herself until she got tired, then he'd do it, then she'd do it, and so on. Once the cancer was confirmed, she had supplies airdropped by a US Air Force plane and taught the welder how to administer chemotherapy. Three months later when the weather improved, she was airlifted out.

Dr. Nielson Fitzgerald wrote a book about her harrowing journey called *Ice Bound: A Doctor's Incredible Battle for Survival at the South Pole*, and was in remission until 2005 when her cancer returned. She spent the final years of her life inspiring cancer patients worldwide, saying that her experience with the disease gave her life "colour and texture." She also said that she used to think adventures were a thing of the past and that no more were to be found. Her time at the South Pole taught her that adventures are all around us. "The adventure is now", she said.

Dr. Nielson Fitzgerald died on June 24th--one day *before* Michael Jackson.