



# Changing Normal: How I Helped My Husband Beat Cancer

By Marilu Henner

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*New York Times* bestselling author, memory expert, radio host, and beloved actor Marilu Henner delivers an intimate account of how she and her husband stood together in the face of cancer and triumphed—without chemotherapy or radiation.

Marilu Henner was moving on with her life after a divorce when her old college classmate Michael Brown, whom she had not seen in over twenty years, called her out of nowhere. Within days of their first meeting in 2003, they were planning a life together, and soon they were inseparable as Michael became ever more integrated into Marilu’s family. But after only months they were thrown the ultimate curveball: Michael was diagnosed with bladder cancer, and then lung cancer.

Marilu refused to lose the love of her life so easily. With the knowledge she had gained on her own health journey, chronicled in several of her bestselling books, Marilu set about finding a path for Michael that would use the best of Eastern and Western medicine to beat his cancers and return Michael to optimal health. Michael eschewed most traditional treatments and with Marilu’s help—aided by knowledgeable and sympathetic doctors—he forged his own path.

In this moving and informative book, Marilu tells the story of their fast-paced romance and how this contrasted with the day-to-day battle for Michael’s life. Michael tells the story from his point of view: the search for the cause of his cancer, the mental anguish he felt as he realized how responsible he was for his condition, the physical and mental hardships that he had to overcome, and the triumph of love that made it all worthwhile.

Not a “how-to” book in the traditional sense, *Changing Normal* is a book of empowerment, a call for all those facing similar challenges to take responsibility for their lives, to search for the causes of their illness and address them directly. Written with an engaging voice, a sense of humor, and life-changing wisdom, *Changing Normal* is a personal and touching look at how Marilu and Michael faced down a cancer diagnosis and came out the other side happier, healthier, and

more in love than ever.

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### Editorial Review

Review

#### Praise for *Changing Normal*

"A moving memoir about true love and how they managed to stare death in the eye and beat it together. An inspiring love story wrapped in a serious call for new ways to treat disease." (*Kirkus Reviews*)

#### Praise for Marilu Henner

"*Changing Normal* should be required reading for anyone interested in maximizing their health and living life to the fullest. Marilu Henner knows more about the wisdom of the body—and its incredible ability to heal—than most of the doctors I know. This wonderful book is a source of inspiration and education that will change your life." (Neal D. Barnard, MD, FACC, Adjunct Associate Professor of Medicine, George Washington University School of Medicine and President, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine)

"We have known Marilu Henner for years, well before *The China Study* became so well known among the public, and have admired her principled advocacy of a plant-based diet. We invited Marilu to join our advisory team at PlantPure Nation because we feel a kindred spirit with her, and we look forward to working with Marilu and others like her to launch a new grassroots movement around one of the most important ideas of the modern age." (Dr. T. Colin Campbell and Nelson Campbell)

"She's dropped 54 pounds and kept it off, transformed her health, and inspired thousands of others to do the same—so it's no wonder we've always admired Marilu Henner." (*Woman's World*)

"Marilu is my mentor. Her philosophies about health changed my life." (Fran Drescher)

"It is always most impressive... when in today's culture of dependency on 'experts,' an individual chooses instead to blaze their own path to health and healing. Ms. Henner is just such an individual, and as her impressive track record of books old and new attests she gets remarkable results." (*New York Journal of Books on TOTAL MEMORY MAKEOVER*)

#### About the Author

Marilu Henner is a *New York Times* bestselling author and actor best known for her roles in *Taxi* and *Evening Shade* and for her participation in *The Celebrity Apprentice*. Her life-changing books include *Total Memory Makeover*, *Wear Your Life Well*, *Marilu Henner's Total Health Makeover*, and *Healthy Life Kitchen*. She lives in Los Angeles.

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Changing Normal

## CHAPTER ONE

Marilu

I grew up in Logan Square on the Northwest Side of Chicago in a typical two-flat, but our family was anything but typical. My mother's love of dance prompted our father to turn our garage into a dance studio so that she and five of her six kids could teach dancing to two hundred students between the ages of two and eighty, including the nuns from the Catholic church next door who came over for stretch classes. Each week the students showed up to learn ballet, tap, jazz, ballroom, and social dancing. The Friday night teenage classes were particularly popular, with raging hormones and wafting pheromones. I'm sure that most kids in my neighborhood had their first kiss somewhere on our property.

Everyone loved my parents. My dad was the guy you called if you were in trouble; my mom was the mom you called when you had a problem. She always said that he was book smart and she was people smart. It was a winning combination. Because of the popularity of the dancing school, we were the epicenter of the neighborhood and thought of ourselves as the Kennedys of Logan Square. But the dancing school wasn't enough for my mom. She also ran a beauty shop out of our kitchen, where twenty-five women from the neighborhood would come for cuts, perms, and dye jobs. The kitchen was set up like a hair salon to the point that the refrigerator was on the stairway to the basement, and in its place sat a blue hair-drying chair straight out of *Steel Magnolias*.

Besides having a dancing school in our garage and a beauty shop in our kitchen, my mother's brother, our uncle, lived upstairs with ten cats, two dogs, two birds, a skunk, 150 fish, and his boyfriend, Charles. "Uncle," as everyone in the neighborhood called him, also taught art at the Catholic grammar school next door and held art classes after school while the dancing school and beauty shop were in full swing. He was also the neighborhood astrologist and ran a cat hospital on our roof in a structure that was once a small homemade greenhouse.

Needless to say, my family life was very special and different, and my parents' and uncle's creative and entrepreneurial spirits were an integral part of my growing up that continues to inform my life to this day. The Henner house was not only colorful and somewhat eccentric—with six very smart siblings vying for space and time—but it was also academic and highly competitive, thanks to our father's intelligence and salesmanship. I was also born with an unusual memory—now called HSAM for Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory—that makes it possible for me to remember every day of my life and everything that ever happens to me. So it was never a question of whether or not I would go to college; it was only a question of where.

I FIRST FELL IN LOVE with the University of Chicago on Sunday October 6, 1968, when, as a Madonna High School junior from Chicago's Northwest Side, I represented my school at a communications event. As soon as I walked on the campus, saw the ivy-covered Gothic buildings, and felt the gravitas of the university's rich intellectual history, I knew this would be my college. It may have been my first visit to U of C, but the school already held a special place in my heart due to the fact that my father had gone there for a six-week course after serving in the Air Force during World War II.

Being a good student with four scholarships to prove it—including having been named Outstanding Teenager of Illinois—I knew I could probably get into any college upon which I set my sights. But because I also had this burning desire to be an actress—as a teenager I had always been performing in a play somewhere in the city—my choices upon graduation were either to go straight to New York to become a professional actress or to go to the best school in Chicago and continue taking advantage of my community theater contacts. But after my father passed away during Christmas break of my senior year in high school, I knew there wasn't really a question. I was definitely going to apply to the University of Chicago and stay in my hometown. When the large acceptance packet arrived on Wednesday, April 15, 1970, I felt that my father had arranged it from afar.

My father's death and the way he died—a heart attack during an argument with one of my brothers at our dancing school Christmas party—was such a shock to all of us that I found myself eating my feelings and putting on a lot of weight, especially during the summer between high school and college. In September 1970, I started my freshman year at the University of Chicago with my weight at an all-time high. I was not anywhere near feeling my best and would catch myself constantly telling people, “This is not what I really look like.”

Never one to feel sorry for myself, until I could get back to looking like the real me—which ended up taking several years—I decided to throw myself into being very colorful and theatrical from the If you can't hide it, decorate it school of life. I ran around campus during freshman orientation wearing an enormous figure-hiding black-and-rust-colored cape, which somehow, despite my insecurities, landed me on the cover of *Women's Wear Daily*. I guess big, dark, and oddball were in that year.

In 1970, the University of Chicago was unlike any other school in the country. My dorm, Woodward Court, was not only one of the first coed dorms in existence, its bathrooms were also coed. You could take a shower with your boyfriend or end up in a stall next to your crush from the down the hall—not my favorite thing about coed dorm life. I found it so uncomfortable, in fact, to use the bathroom next to guys that when my dorm held what they intended to be an anonymous ballot to determine whether or not they needed to make one of the four bathrooms women only, I raised my hand and said, “No need to make the ballots anonymous. You can put that non-coed bathroom right near my room.” And they did. I can't tell you how many female dorm mates thanked me for what I didn't even consider a brave move. I'm a girl who loves options, and the idea that I could have my privacy in a stall or go down the hall to shower with my boyfriend in another bathroom seemed like the best of both worlds. I've never been one to back off from voicing my opinion, even when it's not the popular one.

The University of Chicago had several residential halls and, just like Hogwarts, each one seemed to house a different type of student. Woodward Court was located a block from the main part of campus, known as the Quadrangle, and it was divided by six houses: Upper and Lower Flint, Upper and Lower Rickert, and Upper and Lower Wallace. Being the only coed dorm at U of C, with its sterile, modern rooms—cinder-block walls, casement windows, orange-and-green chenille bedspreads—it was inhabited, for the most part, by atypical University of Chicago students. In other words, the fun kids. The unofficial motto of the school at that time was “Where fun goes to die,” but few of us living in Woodward Court acted like it. There was one pretty vivacious blonde named Linda with whom I hit it off immediately because she seemed like someone who would have been my friend no matter how we met. She and I bonded over our outgoing personalities, similar senses of humor, and definite boy craziness. When we first connected, she was very excited about having already met someone the first week of freshman orientation, and she was absolutely crazy about him. When our resident head and his wife invited Linda and me and four of our other dorm mates to a Friday night dinner, Linda arranged for her new boyfriend to pick her up so that we could all meet this mystery man.

I was feeling particularly vulnerable that night because of my weight but tried to hide it by pouring my then size 14 body into a size 12 dress that friends nicknamed the “bowling-ball dress” because of the way my cleavage looked. (I'm one of those people who get cleavage for free, just like Tina Fey. We also both have pointy eyeballs and can't wear contacts. It must be a Greek thing!) This dress was so Kardashian, long before there even was such a thing, that at the dinner the headmaster's slightly tipsy wife came after me waving their daughter's pull toy, screaming, “Homewrecker!” when her husband and I were just talking. I was shocked, embarrassed, and afraid of getting clocked by a Fisher-Price ball popper because nothing could have been further from the truth. I wasn't a homewrecker; I was just a self-conscious, overweight eighteen-year-old freshman girl wearing a too tight dress, trying to fit in. (Literally and figuratively!)

So imagine my relief when I could excuse myself to answer the doorbell.

And there he was.

Michael.

Tall, with shoulder-length hair and piercing blue eyes, and definitely the handsomest guy on campus. He filled the doorway and took my breath away. I adored Linda and, of course, didn't dare twinkle in Michael's direction, but I couldn't help but wonder, If I lost the extra weight, would there be any more guys on campus like him?

OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS I watched Linda and Michael's relationship grow from cute campus couple to raging sex maniacs. Once she walked the well-worn path from the freshman dorm to Billings Hospital to get birth control pills to lose her virginity to him, they hung a yellow ribbon around the door handle at all hours of the day and night to signal to her roommate, Kathi, and me to keep out! As a woman of experience who had lost my virginity the night of Neil Armstrong's moonwalk the year before, I was only too happy to give advice and share stories of my eighteen-year-old sexcapades. My neighborhood boyfriend, Steve, and I would often double-date with Linda and Michael. They even came to see me in an off-campus community theater production that took me away from school most weekends during the winter and spring quarters that year.

A former castmate of mine from Chicago community theater, Jim Jacobs, called me one day and said, "Henner! I've written this show. It may never get off the ground. We're going to perform it in a converted trolley barn on Lincoln Avenue called the Kingston Mine's Company Store. I wrote it about the kids I went to high school with, and even though you're younger, you've always reminded me of one of those girls." I showed up for the first read-through, and Jim handed each of us two stacks of papers nine inches high. One was a stack of music, and the other of scenes depicting high school life: the Book Report Scene, the Polio Shot Scene, the Lunchroom Scene, the Pajama Party Scene, the Rumble Scene, and so on. We workshopped the show for several weeks and on Friday February 5, 1971, ninety people saw the very first performance of Grease.

BESIDES OUR CONNECTION THROUGH LINDA, Michael and I also shared a required science core curriculum class every Tuesday and Thursday. For whatever reason, we had both chosen a physics class taught by Melba Phillips who, according to U of C legend, had been mistress to Enrico Fermi—the man who built the first nuclear reactor. (This was quite hard to believe, considering she looked nothing like a mistress and more like Eleanor Roosevelt's less attractive sister.) She was the only teacher in my entire school career who just plain hated me and told me I was too flamboyant for a college student. After our class, Michael and I would walk across campus together so that he could eat at our dorm cafeteria with Linda, because his no-frills dorm didn't have a meal plan. He and I would talk about the class and Linda and Chicago and our lives, but I held back from asking any really personal questions he would be reluctant to answer, as Michael is not one for idle chatter, whereas I can babble about everything. And I didn't want to come off as silly or not intellectual enough to be U of C-worthy. Besides, he made me nervous, and I never wanted to cross the line into flirting.

When Linda and Michael broke up during our second year, he, of course, became the enemy, so we never really hung out again. But whenever I would see him across the Quadrangle, I would wave, still thinking he was the handsomest guy on campus.

Michael



I met Marilu for the first time in October 1970. She remembers the exact date, of course. I remember that I had been invited to a party at my girlfriend's dorm, a party thrown by the resident master. The resident master was a faculty member who lived in a nice apartment in the dormitory and who served as a counselor to the students. Since this was just a couple of weeks into my first year of college, I did not know many people and was only getting used to being in college and living on the South Side of Chicago. I lived in a dorm far away, more in the city and less on the campus. I liked to feel that there was a big difference between my inner-city Boucher Hall and my girlfriend's dorm, Woodward Court. We were more serious over at Boucher and also more worldly, or so we thought. I was riding high having found a girlfriend so soon after getting to campus, and I practically floated through the streets toward the dinner party.

My family on both sides is from Mormon stock; my father and mother were both raised in southern Idaho in or near a town called Preston. Despite the facts that my father was in the Air Force, that I was born on an Air Force base in southern Illinois, and that I lived in many other places when I was young, I always considered Utah to be my home state, and indeed, Bountiful—where I went to high school—to be my hometown.

My family lived in the DC suburbs of Virginia between the time I was in the fifth and eighth grades. This gave me some sophistication compared to the other kids when we returned to live in Bountiful at the start of ninth grade. My twin brother, Marc, and I caused quite a stir when we showed up at South Davis Junior High School and then later at Centerville Junior High School. Being tall, smart, identical twins with attitude and a veneer of East Coast education set us apart from the other kids in our school.

After we began school, my twin and I realized that it was fine being in Bountiful, but my older brother, Rob, did not find the transition as easy. My little sister, Julie, who was only five at the time, acclimated as any young child would. But I can say that Bountiful was a very distinct place, a closed community of Mormons, and many of the kids were quite sheltered. Moving back to a small town in Utah from the rock-and-roll sixties of the east coast was quite a shock.

The upheavals of the midsixties shaped me as a person. The Vietnam War generated so much angst in society and led to the flowering of a genuine counterculture dominated by the young. The drugs and the music were the obvious manifestations of this culture, but the civil rights movement, female liberation, and sexual awakening were all part of it. Watching all of these forces play out in small-town Mormon Utah was fascinating, as the kids revolted not only against conformity and the Vietnam War but also against their parents, religion, and an insular way of life. And I was a willing participant, having turned fifteen the year of the Summer of Love. From this contrast, living an interesting life became more important to me than money or career and, along with wanderlust, led me to stray far away from Utah.

When we first moved back to Utah from Virginia in 1966, I was fourteen and still went to church. The Mormon Church encouraged social activities such as dancing, even though they also enforced a strict code of morality on their children. Devout Mormons tend to marry very young, with those still single in their early twenties considered practically over-the-hill. Even now my cousins tend to marry at nineteen or twenty years of age, both the boys and the girls. The only thing that slows down the mating process is the two-year church mission that begins at age eighteen. By the time these young men return from their missions, their girlfriends have waited for two years for their return, and they almost inevitably get married as soon as they get back.

Despite a strict morality and taboo on premarital sex, the young Mormons are very active in sizing up their prospective mates. At age fifteen I quit going to church and fell out with the strictest of the Mormons, but in high school we all were thrown together and had to tolerate one another. So my dating life began with girls who looked at each guy as a prospective husband (even more than usual), and I became very cautious not to get too involved. I was also a shy young man who was awkward around girls, as I had been raised in a male-

dominated household with three boys and a girl who was much younger. I did not properly date until I was almost seventeen and only lost my virginity when I dated an older girl from Salt Lake. And so when I got to Chicago, I was not that experienced and still a bit shy and awkward.

All the moving around had given me the ability to adapt to any situation and to make friends easily, which helped in the move to college in Chicago, so different from high school in Utah. It helped me in my long career in shipping and, later, business. And maybe it ultimately helped me to adapt to so many toxic and harsh environments and made me more readily accept stress. I believe that people can get used to just about anything, and I did get used to problems in the family, the pressures of new situations, and the hazards inherent in working manual jobs in trying conditions. Inevitably, this tolerance of stress led me to accept things that I should not have accepted, including the chemical exposures and emotional strains that led to my cancer.

DURING MY FIRST DAYS AT the University of Chicago I was very alone and disoriented. No one in my family had ever graduated from college, and my family was not involved in my choice of a college, nor my preparation for leaving home and matriculating into one of the most demanding academic institutions in the world. When I left home in early September 1970 for Chicago, my parents had been on an extended golf and drinking excursion for half of the summer. Marc had left for college some weeks before, Rob had married and left for New York, and Julie was with my parents. I had arranged transportation through a ride board at the student union of the University of Utah and so set off with a duffel bag and the money I had saved during my summer job for my new life in Chicago.

I got to U of C earlier than the other students and had to talk my way into the dormitory, since I had no other place to stay. As I looked out my dorm window onto the South Side I felt like I was in for a great adventure. I was so excited to be away from home and, finally, at the college of my choice and in control of my own destiny. Once the other students arrived, I soon became friends with my dorm mates and began to haunt the campus where I would spend four years.

A few days into the school year, I went to the college bookstore to get my textbooks. As I was walking through the stacks I spotted a cute blond girl, who spotted me at the same time. After playing a bit of hide-and-seek we finally met at the checkout lane. Her name was Linda, and she was a first-year student from Ohio, starting out in college just like me. She was flirtatious and friendly, and I was ready to make a new friend. We started to date, sweetly and innocently. In fact, she was still a virgin, and I might as well have been, given my lack of experience. She lived in a coed dorm near campus, where I saw how the rest of the first-year students lived. I was in a graduate student dorm with one floor of undergraduates and only a few first-year students. Though we all had single rooms, they were small and used and tattered. It was far from campus and has since been torn down. Linda, on the other hand, lived in a coed dorm with mostly first-year and some second-year students. Her dorm was very different from mine. The kids seemed younger and more superficial. But on the other hand, the guys there were getting laid, and that was what I wanted, too. I began to hang out at Linda's dorm and mooch food off her dining contract at the cafeteria.

One day Linda invited me to a party at the resident master's house. I rang the doorbell and a voluptuous redhead answered the door. She said, "You must be Michael," and called out for Linda. I was surprised that she knew my name, and then she turned and introduced herself as Marilu. She was a big girl. I will always remember that meeting, and not only because I later got to know her so well. The energy and friendliness poured out of her. But by then Linda was next to me and sped me away to meet our hosts.

Linda's and my courtship moved very quickly, perhaps too quickly. Linda wanted to control me, and at first I mistook that for love. Meanwhile, I got to know Marilu better as a friend. I saw the contrast between her

honest and loving personality and Linda's possessive behavior. By this time, though, Marilu and Linda were best friends, and I was not strong enough to break up with Linda.

So Linda and I double-dated with Marilu and her high school boyfriend, Steve, who was a nice guy but not the go-getter Marilu was. It seemed natural that Marilu would begin to date other guys on campus and in the city. She talked constantly about the family dance school, something I wish I could have seen back then. The way she talked about her family, I could tell that she loved them very much. She did not depend on college for her social life, which made her very different from the rest of us. But since she was in the dorm with Linda, I would see her often.

In the first bloom of our relationship, Linda and I were close like only two young lovers on their own for the first time can be. After a month or so of dating we decided to go all the way, and so, with some urging from Marilu, Linda went to Billings Hospital and got birth control pills (still quite a new invention at that time). We made love the first time in my dorm room, far away from the prying eyes of her roommate, Kathi, and the gossip ring that was her dorm. It was sweet and loving. I will always be grateful to Linda for our good times together. I tried to be a good boyfriend, but I liked my friends and I liked to party, and this doomed our relationship from an early stage.

I could not help but have a roving eye, as there were many girls on campus and in the city. But I stayed true to Linda through this time and got to know Marilu quite well. Linda and I went to see Marilu perform in the show she was putting on with a friend of hers at the Kingston Mine's Company Store, Grease. She talked incessantly about this show, but I am afraid I did not appreciate the importance of it then, or the importance of theater to Marilu. She had friends from all over the city, but she always had time to speak to me, to share things with me, and to make me feel like I was special to her. In our introductory physics class it was clear that we didn't feel like the types to be University of Chicago students. Chicago students were working hard in school, so many on the track to go to graduate school and become professors. Dreaming of theater like Marilu or dreaming of adventure like me was atypical in that time and place. We laughed about the professor after class as I walked her back to her dorm. I was going to see Linda, but wondered why, really. It was easier to talk with Marilu.

What I remember most about Marilu at that time was her energy. Any surprise? She seemed to burst with energy, flying into dance numbers or Broadway show tunes on any pretext whatsoever. So smart, so sassy, so confident! And I remember how much she spoke about her family, her siblings, and her mother. When I heard about the death of her father, who had been gone only ten months when we met, I could not even relate to it. But Marilu was resilient, determined, driven. I think what has made Marilu memorable to so many for so long is her genuine interest in others, her open and direct midwestern nature. Marilu was formidable then, an imposing girl who carried her weight well, with big boobs and bright red hair, set off by blue-green eyes. Anyone could see the beautiful girl working through the loss of her beloved father. And I could feel some energy coming my way from Marilu, as hard as I tried not to feel it.

I came back from summer vacation to my second year of college determined to split up with Linda. I did it right away and with a horrendous show of emotion on her part. I wavered as she screamed and cried and pleaded and cajoled. But I was determined. As was always the case for me, no friendship remained after the breakup, and so I became the enemy for Linda and her friends, including Marilu. Though we saw each other on campus and would wave, Marilu and I respected the girlfriend code. Who knew the code would last thirty years?

By the end of our second year in college I landed with the girlfriend I would date until after college, when the call of the sea made me abandon all my connections. I saw and spoke to Marilu a few times that next

year, when she had moved to an apartment with Linda and Kathi. I still remember a crisp fall day on Drexel Avenue when I walked Marilu to her apartment and said goodbye. Little did I know that I would not see her again for eight years.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Daniel Miller:**

Here thing why this particular Changing Normal: How I Helped My Husband Beat Cancer are different and trusted to be yours. First of all looking at a book is good but it depends in the content of computer which is the content is as delightful as food or not. Changing Normal: How I Helped My Husband Beat Cancer giving you information deeper and in different ways, you can find any guide out there but there is no reserve that similar with Changing Normal: How I Helped My Husband Beat Cancer. It gives you thrill studying journey, its open up your personal eyes about the thing this happened in the world which is might be can be happened around you. You can actually bring everywhere like in park, café, or even in your approach home by train. For anyone who is having difficulties in bringing the paper book maybe the form of Changing Normal: How I Helped My Husband Beat Cancer in e-book can be your substitute.

#### **Homer Smith:**

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#### **Michael Burnette:**

Spent a free time for you to be fun activity to try and do! A lot of people spent their free time with their family, or all their friends. Usually they doing activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic inside park. They actually doing same task every week. Do you feel it? Do you want to something different to fill your own free time/ holiday? Might be reading a book may be option to fill your free of charge time/ holiday. The first thing that you will ask may be what kinds of e-book that you should read. If you want to test look for book, may be the e-book untitled Changing Normal: How I Helped My Husband Beat Cancer can be great book to read. May be it could be best activity to you.

#### **Lauren Veach:**

Changing Normal: How I Helped My Husband Beat Cancer can be one of your beginning books that are good idea. We recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary which could

increase your knowledge in vocab, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nonetheless delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to put every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing Changing Normal: How I Helped My Husband Beat Cancer but doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource details that maybe you can be among it. This great information could draw you into new stage of crucial considering.

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