

# Nothing to hide

Burlington breast-cancer survivor's sports bras help her and other women reclaim their bodies

BY LESLEY SIMPSON

Some women might have been mortified. Some women might have blushed like a beet. Janet Cockburn saw comedy. "Look at these boobs!" she giggled.

Women in her Burlington exercise class turned around and looked. They had been arching their backs over an exercise ball.

Cockburn's back was arched around the ball. Her natural breast lay flat, but her gel prosthesis was pointing up to the ceiling.

The "boob" in question was not behaving. No problem with her natural breast, still attached to her chest wall.

No, the problem was with that misbehaving prosthesis sticking up, like a gently pointed rocket, defying gravity.

A malfunctioning falsie is not new. Women have shared stories of "breasts" floating out of bathing suits, falling out of V-necked tops, and migrating east, west, north and south. Usually in front of a crowd.

But searching for a good sports bra became more pressing (no pun intended) since the thinking about exercise after breast cancer surgery had changed.

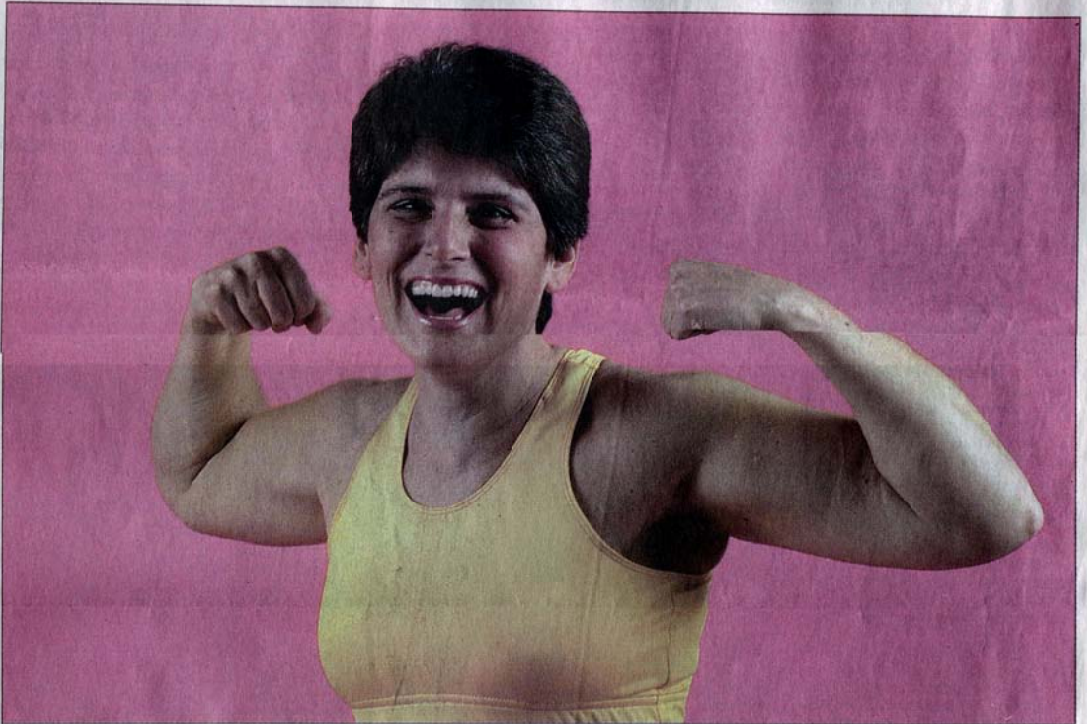
Sports bras were not made for women who had mastectomies, says Donna Reise, a facilitator for Wellwood Resource Centre's breast-cancer support group.

Historically, women were not encouraged to do strenuous upper body exercise because there was concern about lymphedema - swelling in the arm, back and chest. The thinking was that exertion might increase swelling.

But that theory got blown out of the water with an investigation from a sports medicine physician named Donald McKenzie in the late 1990s.

The B.C. professor of sports medicine tested the theory on women in a dragon boat, measuring their arms before, during and after exercise.

There was no increase in swelling.



PHOTOS BY CATHE GOWARD, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

The Dinah, a sports bra made for women who have had a mastectomy, is one of a number of specially designed sportswear for active women.

There were huge physical and emotional benefits. Across the country, women dipped oars in water.

Flash forward to Cockburn. She was diagnosed with breast cancer when she was 43. That was 11 years ago. She had a mastectomy and could not find a sports bra.

Neither could the other breast-cancer survivors on her dragon boat team, Knot-A-Breast.

They nagged her to do something. "I always wanted to do something to make a difference," said Cockburn, a bookkeeper who did not sew.

Thus began research into what be-

came Janac Sportswear, her company selling "breast-cancer survivor sportswear." Sales began in 2003.

Her line includes sports bras (\$80), a bra tank (\$95), sport shorts (\$45) and capris (\$57.50) as well as the bean bag-like prosthesis called Been-A-Boob. It is placed where a breast has been. The

idea is to help women reclaim their bodies.

"Why do we need to hide?" asks Cockburn, now 54. "Why can't we look the same in an aerobics class?"

lsimpson@thespec.com  
905-526-3207

## Sports gear for active women

Janet Cockburn tested prototypes on her dragon boat team. The traditional gel prosthesis was too heavy and too sweaty. A mastectomy bra did not have the support, stability or comfort of a sports bra.

"I thought, I might not be able to sew but I know what we need," said Cockburn, who found Hamilton's Niko Apparel Systems to make the gear.

Teammate Margaret Eldson suggested changing the prosthesis pocket from the side to the top.

Women found it easier to pop the "Been-A-Boob" in from the top rather than navigate sideways.

The bras on this page are modelled by Tracy McInnis, 39, assistant supervisor at a Mississauga daycare, who had a lumpectomy in 2004.



Aggie

Aggie offers maximum coverage under the arms and has a higher neck. Some women are self-conscious about scarring after surgery, Cockburn suggested. Each bra has been named after a woman on the Hamilton-based dragon boat team, Knot-A-Breast.



Dinah

The Dinah bra has a lower front and side, with a narrower racer back.



Anna

The Anna bra is the same as Dinah, except that it has a zippered front.

## Been-A-Boob Prosthesis

"My grandchildren play with them like a bean bag," says Cockburn of the flesh-coloured prosthesis in her Burlington basement. She still does fittings for customers who want privacy.

She sold her first Been-A-Boob and bra in 2003 to a woman whose breasts had never developed. She emerged from the change room, beaming at her new secrets in the mirror.



## Were to buy Janac Sportswear

■ **Dell Pharmacy**  
1119 Fennell Ave. E.  
905-383-3386

■ **Greta's Flair**  
252 Ottawa St. N.  
905-545-9124

■ **Reflections**  
426 Concession St.  
905-574-3373  
(Only carries Been-A-Boob)

■ **The Running Company**  
118 Thomas St.  
Oakville  
905-815-1952

■ **Shapings**  
570 Plains Rd. E.  
Burlington  
905-637-4773

■ Also available online at  
[www.janacsportswear.ca](http://www.janacsportswear.ca)