

Open to Being Inspired

Life Stories and Lessons about Cancer

When faced with a health challenge such as cancer, it seems that reaching inward and outward is part of the healing journey. It takes support from many sources, including friends, family and practitioners. It also takes an open mind as the journey unfolds. *Open Magazine* readers share their inspiring stories about their challenges and triumphs with cancer. These stories inspire us to be open to all possibilities for treatment, support and healing. Let these stories engage, educate and enchant you.

From Illness to Invention

You never know what ingenuity lies inside you until life beckons you to find it. I could never have anticipated how overcoming the greatest medical challenge in my life would turn me into an inventor.

In 1995, a routine breast self-examination started me on a journey that continues today. My GP scheduled a precautionary mammogram to investigate an odd dimpling on the side of my left breast. The mammogram and ultrasound led to a surgeon and a stunning diagnosis of breast cancer. A lumpectomy was soon followed by a mastectomy. Determined to lead a healthier lifestyle, I increased my physical activity and developed a proactive attitude toward my health.

When I learned in 1998 that Kathy Levy was forming the Knot-a-Breast Dragon Boat Team for Breast Cancer Survivors, I knew that I needed to be a member. I soon realized that exercising with only one breast had its challenges, particularly when there were no bras to fit the situation. I designed a sports bra for a woman with a mastectomy and then created Janac Sportswear.

Although the bra was fabulous, I noticed one day while exercising that my gel prosthesis did not mimic the actions of the female breast. This realization came while I was stretching over an exercise ball and resulted not only in my landing in laughter on the floor, but in the development of a prosthesis labelled the Been-a-Boob. The Been-a-Boob is a pocket made of a special quick-drying material filled with small pellets. This molds into the shape of a breast when put in the pocket of the sports bra or any mastectomy bra or swimsuit.

In hopes of growing the business, I recently participated in a CBC TV business reality show called *Dragons' Den* where I had the opportunity to show the products to a team of some of Canada's most successful business leaders. I was able to make a deal with two of the Dragons, Arlene Dickinson of Venture Communications and Laurence Lewin of LaSenza and with their help I will be able to expand the business and give every woman who needs a breast prosthesis the opportunity of acquiring a Been-a-Boob.

Janet Cockburn, Burlington, ON



Braz for the Cause

As I was trying to navigate my way through the disjointed breast cancer support system, I was faced with numerous hurdles. My therapy evolved into the creation of a movement that would change the unkind face of breast cancer in Ontario. I surrounded myself with incredible women who embody the concept "team." I was able to draw strength by focusing on others. I was encouraged to bury myself in the creation of a fundraising endeavour called "Braz for the Cause." Over the course of my three year journey, we have raised over \$200,000 to provide short-term financial aid to those undergoing treatment. Through love, laughter, tears, volunteerism and the strength of sisterhood, I was empowered to stay focused on wellness.

Nancy Noble, London, ON

Personal Treatment Choices

A few years ago I experienced a fast-growing breast lump initially noticed by my massage therapist while working on my shoulder/pec area. The therapist was adamant that I get it checked immediately. It was about the size of a pea and within a couple days it was like a golf ball. In a short time frame of 30 days, I visited my doctor and had an ultrasound and was given the results. I was extremely pleased with the efficiency of 'the system'. I chose not to have a mammogram, much to the specialists' chagrin, based on the test results. They suspected that it wasn't cancer, but suggested a mammogram as the next step. Personally, I do not believe in mammograms so I opted out. I followed up by doing extensive research on possible causes and solutions, and chose to utilize alternative therapies including: infrared thermography (which I now have done annually), breast massage and lymphatic drainage massage every other week for 3 months; consulted with a naturopathic doctor and made small adjustments to my diet. The lump dissipated over time and I kept a vigilant eye on it for the next year or so and randomly thereafter. I am one of the lucky ones as it has not reoccurred. I would highly recommend infrared thermography as a pain-free, non-invasive early detection screening for all women.

Susan Crutcher, RRPr, CPTN-CPT,

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