Discovering creativity

I understand that the Chinese have a character for crisis; it is the same as the one for opportunity. None of us can change the fact that breast cancer has come into our lives, and while most of us would choose that it hadn’t, my sense is that few people would say that the experience was all bad.

In this issue, our readers have written to share their experiences of discovering creative pursuits after their diagnosis with breast cancer. Some have grabbed the opportunity to take up a long-planned ambition to paint, to write, to plant a garden, to photograph or sculpt … concepts that they’d put on hold because their pre-cancer lives were too busy. Other women used their cancer experiences to encourage a new sense of creativity, or to discover they were in fact creative as they had never allowed themselves to feel before. Women have also told us their creative pursuits have in fact helped them get through tough times.

We are thrilled that acclaimed film director and writer Sarah Watt was happy to share her thoughts with us on the role of creativity and her own breast cancer experience. Again, I am reminded of the generosity of women in sharing their own personal experiences. This is, of course, one of the great joys of being a woman, that we can reach out to and learn from each other.

So, if you are someone who’s always had a passion to discover your creative side, I would ask ‘What are you waiting for?’ Go with the flow, take a risk, and you might well find an exciting other dimension to your life.

Lyn Swinburne
Chief Executive Officer

New BCNA Chair

BCNA welcomed Marg O’Donnell as our new Board Chair on 1 June, replacing Patricia Edgar, who has retired after 10 years in that role.

Commencing her professional life as a qualified social worker, Marg has a long and distinguished career across a range of areas.
She was the inaugural Legal Ombudsman in Victoria and Director-General of three Queensland government departments. She was also the Queensland Director of the Commonwealth Government’s Office of Status of Women.

She has chaired the boards of a number of companies and statutory authorities.

Marg lives in Brisbane where she works as a consultant, and is Chair of Legal Aid Queensland, and a member of the Playing Australia Committee.

Marg was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2003 and joined the BCNA Board in 2006.

BCNA’s Patron, the Governor-General Ms Quentin Bryce AC, showed her support to BCNA delegates at our National Member Group Summit. See report on page 2. To read the Governor-General’s speech and to see photos from the Summit, go to www.bcna.org.au > Latest news

BCNA Chair Marg O’Donnell
Summit brings women together

We were thrilled that BCNA’s Patron, Governor-General Quentin Bryce AC, officially opened our National Member Group Summit in Melbourne in August.

Each of our 231 Member Groups was invited to send a representative to Melbourne for the two days of the Summit. It was a wonderful opportunity for these women to meet with other breast cancer survivors from across Australia and to share their thoughts and ideas.

The two-day program was packed with a range of speakers, including breast cancer medical specialists, BCNA staff, and motivational speakers.

Presentation topics included personalising breast cancer treatment, living well with the physical and emotional effects of breast cancer, and the role of exercise and diet in breast cancer recovery.

Workshop sessions offered delegates an opportunity to share useful information to take back to their Member Group. How to keep groups motivated and running, how to attract more members, how to manage dynamics within a group, and how to use local media to promote a group were some of the areas addressed.

An additional day was held for women from rural and regional parts of Australia to address their particular issues as community leaders. We were pleased that the Federal Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Service Delivery, the Hon Warren Snowdon, was present to open this day. The day was funded by the Australian Government under the Supporting Women in Rural Areas Diagnosed with Breast Cancer program.

Since the Summit, we have received fabulous feedback from delegates letting us know they made wonderful connections with women in similar roles across the country and are feeling better equipped to support women in their own local communities.

Senate Inquiry into Gene Patents

BCNA was invited to make a presentation on behalf of Australians personally affected by breast cancer to the Australian Senate Inquiry into Gene Patents in August.

It was an outstanding example of the power of the personal story to effect change. There was not a dry eye in the room as two of our members, Kristi Smith and Heather Drum, spoke about the enormous impact of genetic testing, and their results, on themselves and their families.

The senators had spent the day hearing from researchers and people with commercial interests in gene patenting and they told us that to hear about the personal impact in such a real and moving way brought them all a real sense of perspective. Our presentation also included the results of a survey we had conducted with some of our women who have a familial cancer link.

To view a copy of BCNA’s written submission to the inquiry and the results of our survey of women, go to www.bcna.org.au > Policy and Advocacy > Submissions and Reviews.

A final report from the Senate inquiry will be available at the end of the year.

New funding to support rural women

BCNA is pleased to announce that the Australian Government has provided us with funding of $1.4 million over three years to help support women with breast cancer in rural and regional areas of Australia. BCNA will roll out the Supporting Women in Rural Areas diagnosed with Breast Cancer program in conjunction with the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre (NBOCC), which has received similar funding. The program will allow us to, among other things, present more information forums for women in regional areas. We also have exciting plans around using technology to better connect and inform women.

More information about the program will be provided in future issues of The Beacon.

The creative is the place where no one else has ever been. You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. What you’ll discover will be wonderful. What you’ll discover is yourself.

– Alan Alda
Getting started – the creativity journey

Many women want to do something creative but are not sure where to start. Here are five tips for honouring your ‘creative side’.

- Make a list of the creative things you enjoy (or enjoyed) doing.
- Choose one interest and make a start by borrowing a book from the library, booking into a class or buying the materials you need.
- If you are interested in writing your story, we provide some tips on our website. See: www.bcna.org.au > Information > Resources.
- Get together with like-minded friends for an afternoon each week to pursue your interest.
- Remember to let yourself go and see where it takes you – there is no right or wrong way in creativity!

Issue of concern

The creative journey

In a recent survey of BCNA’s Review & Survey Group, over 65% of women said that one or more creative outlets had helped them through their breast cancer experience. From scrap booking to sewing, from journaling to journeying, from music to mosaic, women with breast cancer told us they are using creativity to help them on their way to wellness.

‘Writing helped me to say thank you and goodbye to my breast.’

‘I always had the desire to do patchworking and cross stitch. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, that desire became most compelling.’

Of the 384 respondents to the survey, most stated that craft, writing and painting were their preferred pursuits, comprising 83% of responses. Other interests included music, gardening, meditation, yoga, dance, cooking and floristry to name a few. The survey confirmed that creativity takes on many forms for different individuals.

Forty per cent of women said that their creative outlets held meditative or therapeutic benefits, 28% said it helped them deal with anxiety or depression, 27% said creativity helped celebrate life and 21% said it helped to express the experience of breast cancer.

‘Sewing and craft helped to take my mind away from breast cancer and gave my brain a break …’

‘Music evokes many emotions and this has been a positive way for me to deal with my inner self.’

The findings are in keeping with evidence that meaningful creative activity can help people deal with cancer both psychologically and socially.

‘I think creativity plays an essential role in healing and remaining an active participant in life, and is therefore a positive force in the breast cancer journey.’

‘A whole new world of painting and drawing has opened up to me. I feel free to express myself and have found it wonderfully therapeutic.’

We also asked women about the outcomes of their creative outlets. Twenty-seven per cent of respondents said that they had created work that had been meaningful at a personal level, such as writing journal entries and drawing.

‘The actual [creative] process has been beneficial, more than the work created or the end result.’

‘Creativity doesn’t have to be a tangible product at the end of the day. For some people, it may be imagining themselves in a more pleasant place than sitting through a chemo session!’

Thirty-five per cent of respondents stated that they had created work that they had shared with those around them, especially family and friends.

‘I created a rose garden in memory of my sister.’

‘Cooking has been creative and challenging, and an opportunity to share something good with family and friends.’

Sixteen per cent of women surveyed said that they had created work shared with a broader audience. This included musical performances and having their stories included in magazines such as The Beacon or breast cancer anthologies such as HeartSongs in the Key of C.

Nearly 40% of our respondents said that the support of family and friends had helped them to pursue their creative outlet. A small number of women (11%) found participating in a regular class helpful, and some women (5%) were inspired by submitting their work to a competition.

Importantly, making the time for creativity and prioritising were issues that were also raised.

‘Giving myself permission to explore quiet reflective time [was helpful].’

‘It was helpful to allow myself the “me” time to concentrate on creativity.’

While women had many different creative outlets, the survey clearly illustrated that these outlets are good for wellbeing, helping women cope with a diagnosis of breast cancer and beyond.

Getting started – the creativity journey

Many women want to do something creative but are not sure where to start. Here are five tips for honouring your ‘creative side’.

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- Choose one interest and make a start by borrowing a book from the library, booking into a class or buying the materials you need.
- If you are interested in writing your story, we provide some tips on our website. See: www.bcna.org.au > Information > Resources.
- Get together with like-minded friends for an afternoon each week to pursue your interest.
- Remember to let yourself go and see where it takes you – there is no right or wrong way in creativity!
Sarah Watt on creativity and cancer

Writer, director and animator Sarah Watt lives with actor husband William McInnes and their two children in Melbourne. Her latest film, My Year Without Sex, screened earlier this year to wide acclaim. Sarah’s first feature film, Look Both Ways, won numerous awards, including an AFI award for Best Direction and Best Original Screenplay. While editing the soundtrack for the movie, Sarah was diagnosed with breast cancer. She spoke candidly to The Beacon about the role of creativity in her journey.

At the time, I joked that chemotherapy distracted me from the horror of the film-making process, and that the film-making process distracted me from the horror of chemotherapy. They both finished up at around the same time, and you would think that would be the best thing. But then I went into a bit of a slide. I think when you’re having the operation and the treatment, you rise to that challenge. I had to cope, and I had to keep doing the best I could. When that big challenge was over, what was left was my not knowing if the cancer was going to come back or not. This was really hard and scary. Having breast cancer really made me reassess my life and whether I would I do anything differently if I only had five years. I sat down for a year and panicked about it.

I started writing My Year Without Sex once I recovered from this panic. It was through the process of writing that I came to my own philosophical conclusions about how to treat everything that had happened. Writing the film was about celebrating normality within extraordinary circumstances. It is not an autobiographical film, but all the ideas and themes came out of my experience of breast cancer. One of the lines in the film is ‘All you can do is hope’. I have to take my own advice. I don’t want to ruin the life I’m having now in the anxiety of what might come. I came to the conclusion that I am living the sort of life that I want to have, whether it goes for five years or 50 years.

I’m one of those people who has always felt the need to create something. It doesn’t have to be about making films or something big like that. I’m often just as happy planning a little garden bed, or doing a mosaic on my pot plant, or painting our kitchen wall. Some people say that ‘I can’t do anything creative’. It’s like someone saying that they can’t play an instrument, as if it’s not something learnt. I was not a natural drawer or writer. I started writing in animation school at the age of 30, because it was a requirement. I’d never voluntarily written anything creative before that.

I’ve got friends who like to cook and that is their outlet. Whatever the outlet, there is a feeling that you are creating something, and that’s really therapeutic. For me, creativity is as much a life requirement as taking care of children, and doing housework and other jobs. If you’ve always had an idea, then I would say to people, grab it and honour the time it takes to do something meaningful with it.

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Five creative ‘sisters’

1. Eighteenth century novelist Frances Burney provides one of the most compelling early accounts of a mastectomy in a letter to her sister in 1812. She was conscious through most of the operation, as it took place before anaesthetics were used.

2. Actress Bette Davis clocked up more than 100 film, television and theatre roles, continuing to work despite ill-health following treatment for breast cancer at the age of 75.

3. Singer Anastacia wrote the song ‘Left Outside Alone’ while she was recovering from treatment for her breast cancer. She says ‘It shows the tender, vulnerable side of me that breast cancer helped me to express. And I don’t ever want to lose touch with it again.’

4. Actress Christina Applegate says of her learnings following a breast cancer diagnosis at age 36: ‘At the end of the day none of it matters but your own joy, your own spiritual journey that you go on, God, your loved ones, your friends, your animals. These are the things you’ve got to cherish and love and embrace.’

5. Singer Marianne Faithful said shortly after her treatment for breast cancer that ‘having cancer has been one of the most terrifying experiences of my life. But life goes on – and it’s up to me to make the most of it.’
Creating memories

We had just moved to Brisbane and my diagnosis shock came as I was unpacking. Friends and family were interstate or overseas and I did not know my way around. I phoned a friend in Adelaide who had had breast cancer nine years earlier and she told me she had been rediagnosed and was now in palliative care. This made my diagnosis more devastating as I wondered how long I had to live.

I started creating a garden and making crochet blankets for spare beds. I felt everyone I cared about should have a memento of me when I died so I crocheted blankets for my grandchildren and wrote a family history so they would know the family legends.

My birthday came and a dream was fulfilled with an embroidery machine. With the machine came lessons and membership to the sewing club. The club became my support group. I was amazed by the things I learned to do, and laughter came back into my life as I learned heirloom sewing, machine and freehand embroidery, making lingerie, t-shirts, tracksuits, a halter neck bikini to hide my scar, many gifts and a beautiful handbag.

A new breast cancer support group started at the local hospital and I went to the Brisbane Field of Women where I collected information and dedicated a white silhouette to my Adelaide friend. I asked for information about BCNA and BCNA Community Liaison Lyn Moore spoke to our group. We then held a Mini-Field of Women. This was poorly attended because of lack of communication, so I started writing a newsletter.

I went to craft shows and found a new world. I decorated things with wallpaper, covered ceramics with rice paper, did punch embroidery, painted plaster ornaments, painted with stencils, made cross stitch pictures with buttons and charms and fabric pictures with lace. I completed four quilts, including one for BCNA, and a tapestry.

I am learning calligraphy, beading and quilling, but I am busiest making greeting cards. I have a stash of fabric and craft materials so big it needs its own room and I will have to live to a very ripe old age to use it all. Most importantly, all of my family and friends have plenty of those mementoes I was so worried about at the start.

Jurina, Queensland

Expressing myself

Journal writing is a well-known tool for the outpouring of thoughts and emotions. It’s something most people have heard of, even if they have not used it themselves.

Visual journaling is a lesser known tool for self-expression. I was introduced to it by a friend who had booked a course called Art’N’Soul and suggested I might like to join her.

Taking the first step was terrifying for me. I hadn’t attempted to draw or paint since my youth and felt quite inadequate. However, I soon discovered that the ability to draw is not a requirement for creative self-expression; anyone interested in learning more about their inner self can do it.

Our teacher provided all the art materials and a huge selection of all sorts of bits and pieces for collages such as objects from the garden (dried flowers, leaves, seeds), the kitchen (dolories, toothpicks, hundreds and thousands) and all colours of glitter!

Each week we covered a different topic of soul-searching questions, which we answered using images instead of words. One of the first was how we think the world sees us, and how we see ourselves from the inside. Another week we drew ourselves as a tree.

When we had finished our artwork the group sat down in a circle and we discussed our own effort and the work of others. The differences in self-expression were fascinating. We were able to share our inner imagery and what we learned from it in a safe environment.

As a means of releasing anger and conflict, and reducing stress, I can highly recommend expressive art.

Jenny, NSW
Living the dream

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in January 2007. I had a full mastectomy (on the right side), and all lymph nodes and ovaries removed.

I was lucky enough (as year of the Dragon) to be born an eternal optimist and I took my diagnosis as a challenge. I didn’t want to know the details of my diagnosis, or a prognosis, I just wanted to move on and do what I had to do to live.

I have always been the ‘arty’ one in my group of friends. You know, the one who writes in all the cards, creates the invitations and quirky poems for all occasions. That’s me! In my final year of school I did Art and Design, but as a typical teenager and wandering Sagittarian, I never completed anything – too busy moving on with the next challenge.

However, once diagnosed with breast cancer, I felt like it gave me permission to live the life I always thought I would as a free-spirited, artistic and creative person. Before diagnosis, apart from being a full-time mum and wife, I worked four days a week as a recruitment consultant. Anyone who has been in this line of work will know it is all about sales and budgets and supplying or delivering people. Although I enjoyed it at the time, once I stepped off that merry-go-round I soon realised how stressful it all was.

During chemotherapy, a friend told me of an art class where you could just paint, draw or do whatever you felt like, with the guidance of two amazingly talented women, Kat and Jo, who were there to teach the technical side of colour and shape.

I went on to paint six canvases. Some are in my home, some in others. I am now working up the courage to gather enough work to show in a cafe or something of that scale (small and intimate). It is an exposed feeling, showing your work to strangers. It is like someone is looking into your soul. I have been told that my work is fabulous – very kind people my friends are! I use paint on canvas backgrounds and charcoal to draw with. I love working with charcoal; it is both forgiving and pliable. I think I hide behind it. For me it is a form of meditation (which I try to do on a regular basis).

Painting the positives

I was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer in March 2008. After three operations and then the commencement of chemotherapy in June 2008, I finally made a phone call to Bloomhill Cancer Care at Buderim on the Sunshine Coast. I attended the art group on Fridays having never picked up a paint brush before. I found for the first time in my life something I feel passionate about and something that was very therapeutic – it was so exciting and fulfilling. It took me until December 2008 to finish my first painting as I could only attend every third week due to the debilitating side effects of the chemotherapy.

I have attached a photograph of the ‘New Me’ (someone I still do not recognise, either on the outside or on the inside), together with my paintings (see page 10). What a wonderful positive I have been able to take out of my cancer journey.

Kerry, Victoria
Flying high

My early stage breast cancer was diagnosed in 2008, when I was 50. Shortly afterwards, I had a lumpectomy followed by radiotherapy and am now on hormone therapy. With tremendous support from my husband, a dedicated medical team and a huge dose of positive thinking, I believe I’ve travelled the first year of my journey relatively unscathed.

Six months after surgery we attended an open day at the Sydney Trapeze School so our seven-year-old son could try out the flying trapeze. I was offered a turn and, albeit a little hesitantly due to surgery scars and healing tissue, I agreed.

The adrenalin soared through my body as I swung eight metres above the ground. Terrified, I tumbled into the safety net and onto wobbly legs, swearing it was the scariest experience of my life. Just 30 minutes later, once my feet were back on terra firma and the adrenalin rush had ended, my feelings changed. I loved it.

For my birthday two days later my husband surprised me with a voucher for three two-hour trapeze classes. What a gift. Mentally, I was up for it; however it was several months before I felt physically ready for this strenuous challenge.

Around a year after my breast cancer diagnosis I completed my three classes. I can now successfully perform a knee hang, exit with a back flip into the net and execute a mid-air catch with the instructor. I’ll never know whether it was the experience of surviving breast cancer that allowed me the courage to fly on the trapeze but I do know it is so far the most exhilarating experience of my life.

While I won’t be running away to join a circus anytime soon, I will continue flying the trapeze as I continue my journey.

Shelley, NSW

Keeping the blues away

Towards the end of my chemotherapy treatment I became ill with depression so I turned to my watercolour painting to lift my spirits. If I am upset about something and need to calm down, the process of mixing colours is very relaxing. An extra bonus is that I can sell a painting or give it to someone as a gift. I have been asked to enter a painting in a competition, so I am excited about that. It has to be my own composition, but I have two months to do it.

I paint nearly every day and add something material to all my pictures. I have added shells and imitation pearls to my painting ‘Under the sea’, and lace and pearls to my ‘Dancing elephant and crocodile’. I guess you could say that the paintings I am doing at the moment would only appeal to children, but I will go on to paint more adult pictures eventually. I have written several children’s stories, and will also do the illustrations for them.

I have gone from not being able to get out of bed in the morning, to jumping up as soon as I wake to get to my painting.

Anita, Queensland
Finding the words

When I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2005 at the age of 38, I had already begun writing poetry through a course at Deakin University. What I hadn’t realised was how important it would be for me to write poetry about my breast cancer experience. I wrote many poems during and after the year of diagnosis. Somehow it was cathartic and transforming to be able to turn a painful experience into a poem. When I turned 40, a friend, Monique, offered to turn my poems into a book to celebrate the occasion. It was very moving to be able to give my poems to family, friends and my breast cancer group. I had cried writing some of them, and some people told me they cried reading them. I think the poems allowed me to communicate things about my experience that I could not communicate in any other way.

At the end of 2005, I happened to hear about a ‘Moving Galleries’ project to put poetry and art onto Melbourne’s trains. I submitted a little poem which came from my experience of finding a seashell from the summer before diagnosis:

Winter – forgotten seashell
in my japara pocket
spills sand

I was thrilled when it was accepted. The launch, even in the haze of chemo fatigue, was a kind of coming back to life for me. Since then, I have had poems in each of the Moving Galleries seasons. For me, creative work in both poetry and music has been a way of giving to other people, transforming my experience, and experiencing the fullness of life.

Cathy, Victoria

When passion becomes life

My creative journey started when I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2005, 12 days before my 41st birthday. Within the week I had a lumpectomy, followed by chemo, radiotherapy, Herceptin and a year of physical and emotional healing.

The next year was all about me! I moved house, travelled, got a puppy, enrolled in an art course and embraced life. Art was by far the best ‘therapy’ of all!

When an art friend suggested I open my own art school, I initially dismissed the idea. However, as I had left my old job I needed to plan for the future. My career path had been in the arts, museums, festivals and events, and opening my own art school became the most perfect merging of my professional skills with my passion for art.

So I took my post-cancer foray into creativity to the extreme!

I wrote my business plan, found a fantastic warehouse in Leichhardt (NSW), and Art Est. Art School was established. We opened in February 2008, and while it sometimes still feels surreal it’s the best thing I could have done! I often wonder why it takes a crisis or a health scare to effect positive change in your life.

I just love the creative process that establishing and growing a business like Art Est. requires. To be surrounded by artists and people discovering or rediscovering art and pursuing their passion is incredibly satisfying. It’s also amazing the number of women who, like me, have reconnected with art as part of their journey recovering from breast cancer. It has enabled me to do a little fundraising for BCNA too.

More than 900 students (adults and children) have now attended our classes and I can relax a little and enjoy some art workshops again myself. And did I mention I bring my dog Pablo to work with me every day!

Jennifer, NSW
Prior to cancer I had been a hobby songwriter and musician for many years, but had never taken it seriously. However, suddenly I couldn’t do my ‘normal’ job and treatments took their toll. Gigging with my band was on hold.

My old computer packed up and I bought a Mac with a free music software package. Suddenly, I had my musical hobby available to me. I found myself buying and learning to use new technologies and gradually taught myself to produce and mix a wide genre of songs which would hopefully not just represent, but also appeal to, people of various ages.

Surgery recovery meant that I could research music via iPod/TV while in bed, and chemo sessions became writing opportunities. When I felt up to it, I recorded instrumentals and vocals, and produced songs in my spare bedroom. Whenever I got too tired, I simply clicked ‘save’. I was able to convey my feelings onto paper and transposed these into different genres as I went through my journey.

My membership of the BCAUS online forum reassured me that my feelings were ‘normal’. We blogged the good, bad and humorous moments and we shared matters that only ‘we’ could understand.

Diagnosis became ‘orchestral rock’. Fear of chemo equalled ‘alternative’. Jazz, swing, motown, pop and country came along to tell my story. I had a mini-musical on my hands. My hobby was turning into a passion. Friends listened and said that they had no idea I felt like this.

There were many late nights and early mornings thanks to chemo.

Brain and I swear that I have no recollection of mixing some of the tracks, but they came out okay so I have no complaints!

My band pitched in to help out and on the final song of the album we had 15 people squashed into the spare room recording vocals!

One year on, I can’t perform yet, but I have started a small business as a composer/musician. I’ve had two pieces picked up for government information films, my band is finishing an album and my mini-musical has web feedback from across the world. I want to donate as much of the profit as I can afford to genetic research.

Creativity through treatment gave me focus. It helped get me through. Cancer has finally made me pursue my love of music after 25 years! I’m following my dream and if I can help raise funds to find a cure at the same time, that’s a real bonus.

Dee, Queensland

Creative journal writing

One of the most rewarding things you can do for yourself is to keep a personal journal. A journal is about far more than just writing. It is about keeping a creative life log. Not just in words, but however you choose to express it. Words, sketches, drawings, quotations, images cut from magazines, ticket stubs, a poem or list of promises – anything that is an expression of you.

In her book Creative Journal Writing, BCNA Ambassador Stephanie Dowrick notes some guiding principles for journal writing:

1. Your life is a work in progress. So is your journal.
2. Write your journal for yourself – not for anyone else.
3. Journal writing is a sublime way to learn to reflect and make something of your experiences; to ‘read’ your own life – as well as to write about it.
4. In journal writing, process matters much more than achievement.
5. Revel in language, rediscover it. Play with it and let it reveal new worlds to you.
6. Retire the inner judge. Journal writing is for pleasure.

Writing and self-expression can be personally healing. Keeping a journal can focus, support, and enhance our lives and wellbeing. Whether we laugh or we cry, whether through sorrow or joy, we can understand more about ourselves, and each other, by keeping a journal.

If you are keen to share your story with others, we have prepared a tip sheet for you which can be found on our website at www.bcna.org.au > Information > Resources.
Ode to Hot Flushes

On a cold winter’s night
When you’re snug in a nice warm bed
The rain pouring down outside
When out of nowhere it hits you
HOT FLUSHES
Off come the covers
On goes the fan
Sweat pouring out of every pore
HOT FLUSHES get you again

You’re being romantic
Having a cuddle and more
The lights are low, the music soft
When
HOT FLUSHES
You scamper to the window
And throw it open wide
Out go the candles
So much for being amorous
HOT FLUSHES

In the supermarket
Going down the aisle
You feel the beads of sweat starting to form
HOT FLUSHES
You race to the freezers
Wanting to climb in
Instead you just lean over so you don’t cause a scene
HOT FLUSHES

To all the women out there
Who have HOT FLUSHES
Live long, sweat hard and remember
Lots of Sisters are sharing
HOT FLUSHES

Gayle, South Australia

Ode to Chemo

They could hire me out for hauntings,
I give people quite a scare,
I’m missing bits I used to have,
And now I have no hair.
I have no brows or lashes,
I got a Brazilian for free,
I throw up almost daily,
It’s not from booze but tea.

It hardly seems very fair,
That I’m this awful mess,
I used to go out to town,
And I always looked my best.

I often used to curse my bra,
And let my breasts hang free,
Now I take them off at night,
But there’s something no one sees.
They said I would get hot flushes,
It’s the chemo running around in me.
I said you must be joking
I’m only 42!

I know I should be grateful,
Believe me I truly am,
But I wish I could have one more night,
To dress up really glam.

I’m very lucky to be loved a lot,
By my Robbie, my kids and family,
And also my best friend, Michelle
My little Frenchie
If I didn’t know they all cared so much,
I’m afraid I’d cease to be.

So keep a sense of humour,
When life deals you a blow,
It’s mostly through life’s challenges,
We have the chance to grow.

Nikki, Western Australia

Kay Benjamin, NSW
Jeanne Magis, Queensland
Jacinta Bobos, Victoria
Barbara Fahey, Victoria
Raelene Arnott, Queensland
BCNA around the country

BCNA has been around the country in the past three months holding information forums for our members in Adelaide, Perth and Darwin. These are a great opportunity for women to hear what BCNA is up to, learn about the latest treatments and to network with other women in similar circumstances. To see an overview and photos of these forums, go to our website www.bcna.org.au > Events > BCNA Forums. Forum dates for the Gold Coast and Geelong are listed in the Upcoming Events section on page 16.

BCNA Forums are not all gloom and doom – there are plenty of laughs shared

A packed house listened intently to our speakers at the recent Adelaide Forum

Linking together

We are thrilled to welcome 27 new Member Groups to BCNA:
- Pink Links (Fairbairn), ACT
- Ballina Breast Cancer Support Group, NSW
- Young Women’s Breast Cancer Support Group – Jacaranda Lodge, NSW
- B’Friends Narooma, NSW
- Living with Cancer Support Group, Cooma NSW
- Armidale Pinks, NSW
- C’Word Group, NSW
- Birds of a Feather, Kingaroy QLD
- Dragons Abreast Brisbane, QLD
- Cancer Support Sisters, QLD
- Breast Friends Breast Cancer Support Group, SA
- Secondary Challenges, Unley SA
- Women’s Support Circle, Unley SA
- Barossa Area Fundraisers for Cancer Inc, SA
- Friends in Pink, Balaklava SA
- Dragons Abreast Adelaide, SA
- Inglewood & Districts Cancer Support Group, VIC
- Daylesford Breast Cancer Support Group, VIC
- Brave Hearts on the Murray, Wodonga VIC
- Bendigo Boardwalk Coffee Group, VIC
- The Young & The Breastless, Leederville WA
- Armadale (Heritage) Breast Cancer Support Group, WA
- North of the River Breast Cancer Support Group, Heathridge WA
- South of the River Breast Cancer Support Group, Jandakot WA
- Secondary/Advanced Breast Cancer Support Group, Bassendean WA
- Women’s Cancer Support Group, Padbury WA
- Dragons Abreast Fremantle, WA
Reviews

Cancer Vixen: A True Story
by Marisa Aoccella Marchetto,

Marisa Aoccella Marchetto has used her expertise as a cartoonist to write the story of what happened when, at 43 and about to get married, she discovered a lump in her breast.

At first I thought the book was going to be too 'American' for me and I didn’t think I would take to the cartoon style of writing, but I found it very easy to read and even though I had breast cancer nearly 16 years ago, I could relate to everything that happened to her.

I found myself at the end of the book wondering how she is now. She brings to life her family and friends, especially her boyfriend Silvano, and tells how they coped and helped her through this time.

She tells what happened to her very truthfully and honestly, but in a humorous way that I’m sure will give hope to newly diagnosed, younger women as well as to women like myself who are a long way down the track.

Her accounts of treatment together with her expressive and colourful drawings do not in any way trivialise what is a very challenging time. I’m sure this book will give hope to anyone touched by breast cancer.

Helen Bent
BCNA Review & Survey Group Member

One Thing in Common – Real People Tell Their Stories of Living with Cancer

This 304-page paperback was published in 2008 by Cansupport, a support group that operates in the Royal North Shore Hospital in Sydney. It has been edited by one of the contributors, Mel Cain, who is a volunteer with this organisation.

This book is a collection of short accounts of a range of people’s journeys with cancer, either diagnosed personally or as a family member or carer of someone with cancer. Many of the contributors to the first edition of the book have added postscripts to their original story to report on their progress ten years on; others in the book are new contributors telling their story.

The stories in this book cover different types of cancers affecting a range of age groups and both genders as well as differing family situations. They are honest, well written short stories that allow you to read for as long or short as you like, as most of the stories are only a few pages long. They tell the individual’s story of living and sometimes dying with cancer, but there is a similar message carried through the book – one of showing us the indefatigable human spirit.

I think this book is suitable for anyone who has been diagnosed with cancer as well as those close to them. I am sure they will find that they can relate to at least one of the stories while gaining the sense that they are not on their own in their journey and that others have travelled a similar path. While not all the contributors have survived their cancer, their story is still a valuable insight into their thoughts and actions during their treatment.

The book is also an excellent advocate for seeking support and comradeship through the various groups and organisations that are there for people diagnosed with cancer, as well as the families and friends of those who are affected by cancer.

Cathy Harper
BCNA Review & Survey Group Member

To order a copy of One Thing in Common – Real People Tell Their Stories of Living with Cancer phone CanSupport on (02) 9926 7810. Cost is $20 including postage and handling.

Dying to Know

Dying to Know is a celebration of life through inspiring illustrations and insights about our most shared yet unspoken experience: death.

BCNA members reviewed the colourful book, saying:
‘Dying to know is not at all a depressing book. Rather, I felt it was uplifting with some sensible tips and advice – typified, for me, by the last page which reads “you are not dead – yet”. This, to me, suggested living every day to its fullest. It is certainly a book that I would add to my bookshelf, both for reference and to keep me grounded.’
– Sandra

‘I felt a range of emotions whilst looking through this book. It could bring a tear to the eye on one page and maybe a chuckle with the next! It is definitely quite a challenging and at times confronting look at something we are all going to do one day. Equally, it shares some wonderful ideas, attitudes, beliefs and wisdom’.
– Angela

Dying to Know is available from our online shop www.bcna.org.au>visit our shop. $5 from the sale of every book will come to BCNA.
In keeping with the ‘creativity’ theme of this issue of The Beacon, we profile the Moreton Region Breast Cancer Support Group, located in Brisbane’s northern suburbs.

Convened by BCNA Advocate Jurina Demaine, the Moreton Region Breast Cancer Support Group has around 320 members and, along with its regular meetings, runs a variety of craft and other activities.

The knitting group meets fortnightly to make scarves, beanies and lap rugs for cancer patients. The items are left at oncology units at two local public hospitals and distributed by nursing staff.

Another group makes ‘Bottles of Hope’, empty hair treatment bottles beautifully decorated in polymer clay, to be given to cancer patients as a symbol of hope.

The stunning ‘My Journey’ quilt pictured was made by Jurina to reflect her personal breast cancer journey. ‘I chose fabrics that depicted my journey,’ Jurina said. ‘Bald ladies, pink symbols and things that helped me along the way, such as herbal tea for relaxation.’ The quilt was raffled by the Group, raising more than $2,600 for BCNA. The winner was an 11-year-old boy from Queanbeyan, NSW, whose mother had bought tickets for herself and her son. ‘I told him to keep his win a secret and then wrapped the quilt in Christmas paper and posted it to him,’ Jurina said. ‘He gave it to his mother on Christmas Day and she was hugely surprised.’

The Group also likes to fundraise ‘creatively’. They organise theatre nights, recently seeing the musical comedy Breast Wishes. After the show, the group was joined by cast members for supper and Jurina took the opportunity to speak about the My Journey Kit and BCNA.

‘We never miss a chance to promote the My Journey Kit and BCNA,’ Jurina said. ‘We run information tables at local events and in shopping centres.’ One such outing resulted in nine local women with breast cancer subscribing to The Beacon.

‘None of them had heard of The Beacon before,’ Jurina said. ‘It is so important to get word out about it and BCNA’s other resources.’

Jurina said the Group’s activities are a wonderful opportunity for members to get to know each other: ‘We learn much more about each other through working together than we do at our monthly meetings,’ she said.

The Group runs two regular monthly meetings, one a morning meeting and one in the evenings. There is also a monthly lunch and weekly aqua exercise classes.

A monthly newsletter with information on the Group’s activities, other events of interest and issues of concern for local women with breast cancer is distributed to about 400 people, including local politicians. Jurina says it is a good way to keep politicians informed on issues affecting local women. ‘Our latest newsletter included an article about long waiting lists for breast reconstruction surgery,’ Jurina said. ‘I had a phone call from a politician who read the article and had been unaware that this was an issue for women. He has now forwarded the article to the State Health Minister.’

Jurina says she enjoys the busy life associated with her work with the Moreton Region Breast Cancer Support Group and with BCNA. ‘It validates my cancer experience and has been part of the healing process for me. I wouldn’t be where I am today without it.’
Thank you

We appreciate the financial support given to us by individuals, clubs, organisations and companies around Australia. We would especially like to acknowledge the help of the following recent outstanding supporters:

- Albury Tigers Football Club, NSW
- Anh Quang Du & Phoai Hoa Phung, SA
- Balranald Junior and Senior Football Club, NSW
- Balranald Netball Club, NSW
- Boort Football and Netball Club, VIC
- Camden Survivors of Breast Cancer, NSW
- Central Highlands Football League, VIC
- Coles Group
- Diane Grady, NSW
- Dunlop Flooring
- DWWWWW Netball Club, VIC
- Eastlake Seniors Football Club, ACT
- Elly Squire, QLD
- Frankston and District Junior Football League, VIC
- Geelong and District Football League, VIC
- Goulburn City Swans Football Club, ACT
- Graeme Johnson, SA
- Green Acres Golf Club, VIC
- Grosby Footwear
- Heather Emmett, TAS
- James McGregor, NSW
- Joan Staples, NSW
- Kiewa Sandy Creek Football Club, VIC
- Kmart Australia Ltd
- Koondrook Barham Football Club, NSW
- Margaret Illman, SA
- Merbein Football Club, VIC
- Merlvc Schrank Pty Ltd
- Mininera and District Football and Netball Club, VIC
- Mornington Peninsula Football League, VIC
- Moulamein Football Club, NSW
- NRG Solutions Pty Ltd, NSW
- North Warrnambool Eagles Football Club, VIC
- Olive McMahon, QLD
- Ovens and Murray Football League, NSW
- Panton Hill Football Club, VIC
- Peter Madsen, ACT
- Peter McInnes Pty Ltd
- PricewaterhouseCoopers
- Queanbeyan Tigers Football Club, NSW
- Ron Bonighton, VIC
- Running for Kerryn – The Sydney Morning Herald Half Marathon participants and donors
- Sea Lake Nandlay Tigers Football and Netball Club, VIC
- The Berlei Group
- The Panel Christmas Wrap Limited
- Toshiko Budgen, QLD
- Trudy Harris, NSW
- Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia Bundaberg & District Sub-Branch Inc., QLD
- Western Victoria Football League, VIC
- Yates Australia
- Yarram Netball Club, VIC
- Yvonne Carrick-Allan, NSW

Memorials

We pay tribute to the lives of:

- Ann Town
- Carmel Norah Berglin
- Dorothy May Swaffield
- Jeanne Rosemary Halliday
- Rosary Joan Perham
- Vera Sutcliffe

We are very grateful for the donations we received in their memory.

Celebrations

Thank you to those who celebrated a special occasion and asked for donations to BCNA in lieu of gifts.

Happy birthday to

- Carolyn McKellar
- Heather Fazldeen
- Jennifer Nixon
- Madeleine O’Donnell
- Vivien Brass

Congratulations to Margaret and Ray Eaton on their recent wedding.
Turning pink in October

October is Australia’s Breast Cancer Month and there are plenty of ways to mark this. This issue of The Beacon includes a listing of the Mini-Fields of Women being held around the country. These events are a powerful way to bring together all those affected by breast cancer in your local community.

We would love you to attend your local Mini-Field. For the latest events in your area go to www.bcna.org.au > Events > Mini-Field of Women 2009. BCNA’s partners are also turning pink in October.

Sussan

The Sussan team, recognised for their beautiful sleepwear, have designed a stunning sleepwear range for BCNA. Proceeds from the sale of this specially designed range will come to BCNA. Look for the Pink Lady logo on the swing tag!

We will still be able to purchase BCNA’s Pink Lady pins instore, so friends and family can show their support. The team at Sussan has been supporting BCNA since 2005, so when you are next shopping at Sussan, you may like to introduce yourself and thank them for their great support.

Berlei

Berlei’s popular ‘Barely There’ range can be found in BCNA’s hot pink this October. Last year the range sold out in record time. The range can be found in leading retailers and specialty stores, with $5 from the sale of every bra coming to BCNA.

This is yet another way Berlei and Pacific Brands are helping women. Through our partnership with Berlei, more than 9,000 women each year are given a free specially designed bra post surgery in their My Care Kit. In partnership with Breast Care Nurses, this program is helping women come out of hospital with greater comfort, support and confidence.

Our corporate supporters PaperlinX and Linfox will celebrate Australia’s Breast Cancer month by holding a Mini-Field of Women with their staff. There are so many things happening in October. For great events to attend in your local community, check out the Upcoming events on page 16 of The Beacon. Our events and Mini-Fields are always on the increase so for the latest, visit our events pages at www.bcna.org.au > Events > Upcoming events.

Seeking your stories

The Autumn 2010 issue of The Beacon will focus on intimacy and sexuality issues.

The side effects of treatment, the cosmetic results of surgery, and the emotional impact and stress of a diagnosis can all cause changes and problems in our sexual lives.

We know this is a very personal matter, but it is a big concern for many women. We are hoping our readers will share how their breast cancer experience has impacted on their sexual lives. Are you single and facing the challenges of trying to meet someone new? Have your ideas and approach to sexuality changed? Maybe you have some tips for others about how to talk about sexual problems, or deal with challenges?

Please email articles of 200-300 words (about half a page) to beacon@bcna.org.au by late January 2010.

If you would prefer not to supply a photo or use your real name, we can publish your story under another name.

Sussan CEO Colleen Callendar (left), and People and Development Manager, Robyn Batson were thrilled to recently present BCNA CEO Lyn Swinburne (right) with a cheque for $50,000 as part of Sussan’s ongoing commitment to BCNA.

BCNA gratefully acknowledges our partnership with Bakers Delight.
Upcoming Events

**September 16**: BreaCan Morning tea and reflexology session for women with secondary cancer. 11am-12.30pm, Queen Victoria Women's Centre, 210 Lonsdale St, Melbourne. Bookings 1300 781 500

**September 20**: Blackmores Sydney Running Festival, raising funds for BCNA. Registrations and fundraising details at www.sydneyrunningfestival.com.au

**October**: Mini-Fields of Women will be held around Australia. Visit www.bcna.org.au to find a Mini-Field near you

**October 1-3**: Australasian Society of Breast Disease 7th Scientific Meeting, Surfers Paradise Marriott Resort, Gold Coast. Details/registration at www.asbd.org.au


**October 4**: NBCF/BCNA/NBOCC Melbourne Church Service. 2.00pm, St Michael’s Uniting Church, 120 Collins St, Melbourne. Information at www.bcna.org.au or call 1800 500 258 (freecall)

**October 7-1**: Tickled Pink 2009 Art Exhibition, raising funds for BCNA. Artereal Gallery, 747 Darling St, Rozelle, NSW. Opening night 6–8pm Wed 7 Oct. Contact Artereal (02) 9818 7473

**October 10**: Make Breast Cancer History Gala Evening, raising funds for BCNA and NBCF. Royal Brighton Yacht Club, 235 The Esplanade, Middle Brighton, VIC. Information at www.makebreastcancerhistory.com.au

**October 12**: BreaCan ‘Breast Reconstruction – what you need to know’ workshop. 12pm–1.30pm, Queen Victoria Women’s Centre, 210 Lonsdale St, Melbourne. Information/bookings 1300 781 500

**October 13**: NBOCC 2009 Melbourne Pink Ribbon Lunch, 12.15pm-2pm, Park Hyatt, 1 Parliament Sq, Melbourne. Information at www.nbocc.org.au

**October 17**: A Touch of Pink – A Gala Fundraising Dinner, supporting BCNA. Lincoln of Toorak, Level 2 Trak Centre, 455 Toorak Rd, Toorak, VIC. Enquiries/bookings Jillian Lawrow on 0411 535 253 or jillian@lawrow.com.au

**October 18**: NBCF/BCNA/NBOCC Sydney Church Service. 3pm, St James’ Church, King St, Sydney. Information at www.bcna.org.au or call 1800 500 258 (freecall)

**October 24**: BreaCan Young Women’s Forum. Queen Victoria Women’s Centre, 210 Lonsdale St, Melbourne. Information/bookings 1300 781 500

**October 25**: Pink Lady Art Show, supporting BCNA and NBCF. St Andrews Hall, cnr St Andrews & Church Sts, Brighton, VIC. Information at www.pinkladyartshow.com.au

**October 25**: Perh Annual Church Service, 12 noon, St George’s Cathedral, Perth. Light lunch follows. RSVP by 22 Oct to info@perthcathedral.org or 08 9325 5766

**October 26**: Australia’s Breast Cancer Day

**October 26**: NBOCC Sydney Pink Ribbon Breakfast, 7.15am-9am, Westin Hotel, 1 Martin Pl, Sydney. Information at www.nbocc.org.au

**November 14-15**: The Gawler Foundation ‘Profound Healing - Sustainable Wellbeing’ Conference, Hilton on the Park, Melbourne. Information/registrations 03 5967 1730, email info@gawler.org or www.gawler.org


**6 December**: Susan Women’s Fun Run, supporting BCNA. St Kilda, VIC. Register at www.supersprint.com.au; Raise funds for BCNA at http://swfr09.gofundraise.com.au

Visit our website www.bcna.org.au > Events for information about recent and upcoming events held by or for BCNA in your state or territory.