

JOURNEYS WITH BREAST CANCER

THE WHEEL OF LIFE

By Kathy Santini, Victoria BC



As someone who has gone through a cancer diagnosis, I know that after focusing so much time and energy on treatment and on surviving, once treatment was over, I found myself at loose ends. Family and friends, relieved that "it's over," are usually more than ready to get back to whatever normal was before my diagnosis. Because of the cancer experience, I now know as never before how precious life is. And it begs the question: how do I want to spend the rest of my life? If you also concur and are like many survivors, the answer is "thoughtfully." Survivors often start thinking about what, if any, major or minor changes need to be made. They look at what is damaging to them at a soul and body level and what sustains and nourishes them. I turned to life coaching and became a life coach as a means to move through the process of making these life changes.

A coaching tool that I have used and would like to share with you is called the "Wheel of Life." Divide a circle into eight pie-shaped segments: friends and family; significant other/romance; fun and recreation; health, money; personal growth; physical environment and career. Rank your satisfaction score in each area on a scale of 1-10. There may be a number of areas you would like to improve, or just one or two. Now with a snapshot of where you are today, and using a "realistic magic wand," write down where you would like to be in each of the areas you would like to improve. Now write down all the things that are stressing you out in that area: be it your job, friends, family, your physical environment or even yourself. There are two ways to tackle irritations; both will make you feel more empowered. You can determine the actions and requests needed to eliminate these irritants from your life. This can be as simple as telling the truth. Or you can accept the reality of the situation, let go of trying to control it, or them, and focus on something more rewarding.

Another issue to look at in your chosen area on the wheel of life is time. What are your personal time wasters? Phone conversations, television or the Internet? Write a list of the activities that eat into your time and promise yourself to limit them to an hour a day. You will be amazed at how much free time you suddenly have available.

How strong are your boundaries in the areas you would like to see improvement in? If you are spending too much time doing things you do not want to do, it is probably time to raise some personal boundaries. If your boundaries are poorly defined, it is more likely that you may attract people who think it is OK to expect or demand something from you. We teach people how to treat us.

By being clear about my boundaries, I regained control of my life and have show others how much I value myself. The relationship you have with yourself is the most important relationship you will ever have.

Resource GUIDE

By Diana Hall,

Librarian, Vancouver Centre

These resources are available from the
BCCA Library.

604-675-8001 or 1-888-675-8001, local 8001
www.bccancer.bc.callibrary

Stress, there is no doubt, affects everyone who is dealing with diagnosis, treatment, and life after cancer.

Individual patients, survivors, family members, partners and friends, depending on their particular situation and time of life, may need a variety of methods of reducing their stress and may want to try art, music, exercise, meditation, sharing in relationships, and support groups.

From the great array of new and "classic" resources on coping and relaxing that libraries, bookstores, and the Internet offer, these recent Canadian resources, with their related websites, may be especially appealing.

AUDIOVISUAL

Chor Leoni Men's Choir: healing voices. / Chor Leoni Men's Choir; Loomer, Diane - Vancouver, BC: Cypress Choral Recordings, 2006.

CD's and lyric booklet of sacred and secular songs for "reflection, healing, and peace."

BOOKS

Cancer and the art of healing. / Hundleby, Marilyn; Abbott, Sherry Lynn - Edmonton, AB: Alberta Cancer Board, 2006.

A colourful, inspiring "coffee table book" of patients' works of fibre arts, beading, drawing and painting, photography, and carving.

Picking up the pieces: moving forward after surviving cancer. / Magee, Sherri; Scalzo, Kathy - Vancouver, BC: Raincoast Books, 2006.

A popular book, based on research with survivors, of practical tools to adapt and individualize in shaping one's recovery plan.

Why me? surviving, coping, living with breast cancer. / Roberge, Roger - Moncton, NB: Roger Roberge, 2006.

Readable overview written by a surgeon for patients who may be stressed by the overwhelming detail on the Internet.

Intimacy after cancer: a woman's guide. / Kydd, Sally; Rowett, Dana - Redmond, WA: Big Think Media, Inc. 2006

A forthright practical discussion for women and their partners by a Canadian psychologist and breast cancer survivor.