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**WOMEN'S VOICES MAGAZINE**

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## “Surviving Cancer: Our Voices & Choices” is More Than Just a Book



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Feature**

### Why is this book special?

It's truly amazing how one evening, one experience can influence a life for years to come. During *Breast Cancer Month in 2009*, more than four years ago, our first five authors were part of a panel presenting information relating to breast cancer during the "Image Early" sculpture show at *The Center for Contemporary Art*.



The first presenter, Dr. Toomey, a medical oncologist and Medical Director of Steeplechase Cancer Center gave a thorough overview of what having breast cancer can entail and where to gather additional relevant information for a cancer patient, a caregiver and/or a family member concerned with, "What do we do now?"

Next survivors spoke. With one exception, they were young, in their 20's, 30's and 40's. Pam Adams spoke first. She related what it was like to be far away from home, single (which no longer is the case), and to discover she had cancer.

Meera Bagle described how her mom had died of cancer and how, as a young mom herself, she feared her daughter might be motherless as well. The next presenter spoke about a difficult lumpectomy and how it was resolved, and then I shared my experience.

My kids had persuaded me to get the mammogram that showed a small cancer in my breast. After the initial fear subsided, our family searched to find out what to do next. The process was complicated and occasionally frustrating.

Ultimately, a biopsy confirmed the need to remove the cancer and several lymph nodes. The sentinel node indicated it was a good thing there had been an early mammogram. As a result, I wanted to motivate others to be aware of the importance of early detection.

The idea for the sculptures originated during my first radiation treatment. While lying on my back, I noticed one side of the treatment room was filled with cradles. Each plastic cradle was used only by one patient and never reused. I asked and was given permission to recycle these cradles as armatures for sculptures that could help make others aware of the need for early detection.

Although it's not possible to recall exactly what was said that evening, I vividly remember the impact left by three confident beautiful young survivors. I was, and still remain, in awe of them. The final speaker, Dr. Lanfranchi, a surgeon highly recognized for her work, spoke about Hope and Cancer Prevention.

Next the questions came flowing from the audience. "What is cancer? Are there various types? When should one have a mammogram? What is a BRCA mutation? How does one find the best doctors? What happens when there is no insurance? When should I get a second opinion?" There were many additional questions.



After all the questions were answered and our discussions ended, we walked out of the room to enter the gallery filled with sculptures relating to cancer patients' emotions and experiences. Viewing them stimulated more interactions among the observers.

The entire experience that evening was enlightening. However, the need to reach more individuals than is possible through a single show became abundantly clear. How could one recreate the human interaction that had just occurred and still reach many who wanted and needed answers?

Later the same evening, the idea for a book was born: it would describe the cancer journey by both doctors and survivors.

The following day, I contacted the panelists, and five of us agreed to write articles informed by our presentations. These articles became the beginning of our book.

In her article, Dr. Toomey introduced the concept of a "cancer team" which includes a family doctor, a gynecologist, and a radiologist, medical, surgical and radiation oncologists, a plastic surgeon, a nurse navigator, a patient navigator, a nutritionist, social workers, financial advisors, spiritual guides, organization leaders, and other cancer health care providers. We determined to form our own "cancer team" including all these members.

The search began.

We put up posters to locate survivors. A local Wellness Center, now a chapter of the Cancer Support Community, assisted. We reached out to *Komen®* and *The American Cancer Society*, usually placing emphasis on contacting members in local chapters. Survivors recommended doctors. Doctors recommended other doctors. The circle widened. One cancer specialist was located in Cambodia, where the wife of a U.N. representative, along with a translator, interviewed two cancer victims in their separate villages.

Then another type of search began. Since the publishing of our last book, *Women Working Home: The Homebased Business Guide & Directory*, which changed the concept of "cottage industry" into that of a Homebased Business, much had changed in the publishing world. We had to find a photographer who could convey color as well as dimension. Tom Heller was selected.

He photographed at shows, in my studio, and we delivered sculptures to him. His patience was endless. Our editor, Hanna Fox, not only was extremely qualified, but also a childhood friend.

Sara Angel, a recognized publisher with whom I was familiar, recommended Kelsey Blackwell, our designer, and Amy Hick, our project editor. Sara's suggestions allowed me to feel secure. Equally important, she recognized my demand for quality. Kelsey recommended Mike Tieber at *MIL R.R. Donnelly Press* in Toronto.

Throughout everything, hours were spent every day reading and rereading articles, and communicating with everyone involved. Ultimately our authors came from various places within the United States, Cambodia, Israel, Canada, and India.

Now at last, all of us can say, "We did it!"

*Surviving Cancer: Our Voices and Choices* (268 pages) is a source book written by authors who share their expertise and personal cancer related knowledge. Our book contains articles from 70 authors, including Andrew Schally Ph.D., a *Nobel Prize Laureate* who contributed an article about his research, and Dr. Richard Margolese, who received the *Order of Canada* for his work in the cancer field.

The articles are arranged to correspond with the usual order of cancer team visits experienced by most cancer patients. Their information is interwoven with survivors' narrations, often relating to the doctors' comments, contributing to a subtle dialogue developed throughout.



A gynecologist's article is followed by the narration of a survivor of ovarian cancer, whose life was likely saved by a gynecological examination. Another doctor writes about male breast cancer, which precedes the experiences of a man who survived breast cancer and that of another man whose growth turned out to be benign.

Cancer organization leaders describe how their organizations benefit cancer patients and their loved ones. These articles also follow narrations by survivors helped by the cancer organizations.

Articles on research, clinical trials, financial assistance, as well as poetry relating to cancer experiences, are included in this compilation. Each voice and choice presented provides helpful information to ease a patient's path throughout their cancer journey.

*Twenty percent of the profits from the sale of the book will be given to cancer causes.*