As I write this, we are having an unusually warm early March. Just recently, I was basking in the bright sunshine streaming in my windows, musing over the fact that we had such a mild winter this year. Then, like a thunderbolt from the blue, (picture me slapping my forehead with my open palm), I realized that the month of February had slipped by without my noting the “Days of Infamy” that started on Feb. 1st, 1999, with my gynecologist murmuring, during my breast exam, “I think I feel something here.” It was just a routine exam and I was tired after working all day so I didn't grasp the full implications. But subsequent tests and a biopsy confirmed that I did indeed have breast cancer. I felt the world as I knew it was changed forever.

I confess to a fair amount of “wallowing” and a few Pity Parties every February in the ensuing years. Who could blame me? After all, I had suffered the indignity and assault to my body from cancer.

I was dumbfounded! I went to my calendar to see just what had occupied my time this February that had kept me from commemorating the days I thought I would never forget. I discovered to my pleasant surprise that I was living my life to the fullest with all sorts of pleasant activities that included exercise, volunteer work, interactions with my large family, movies and lunches with my friends, book club, knitting/crocheting for myself and others, follow-up health and beauty appointments, etc.

I realized the “secret” to enjoying life after cancer, is to just engage yourself in what gives you great pleasure and satisfaction, what puts a smile on your face. Maybe it is something as simple as knowing you have a favorite show/good book/the person you love waiting for you at the end of the day. You, like everyone else, have a way to bring comfort or beauty to yourself or others which is a great way to forget your troubles. Even our smallest acts can have major effects. So, my dear fellow survivors, be happy and enjoy life to the fullest in whatever way is personal to you. You deserve it! The world is waiting for the unique contributions that only you can make.
Pink Ribbons & Blue Genes

by Norma E. Roth

I will never forget my first pair of blue jeans. It was 1973, I was ten years old, on a family vacation to California. Mom took my three sisters and me to the Levi’s flagship store in San Francisco and bought us each our denim babies. They were a scrumptious, gorgeous shade of blue with the iconic red label flashing in the back pocket. We treasured these special jeans. But it’s my other pair of genes, which has defined my life and my relationship with my sisters and our dead mother.

Over the past 55 years, these genes brought us much heartache and pain. These genes are responsible for mom’s death from breast cancer in 1994. A year later, my aunt, mom’s sister, was diagnosed with it. Auntie learned she carries a BRCA mutation, confirming decades of family suspicion, that something in our DNA caused us to develop breast cancer.

In 1997, I eagerly joined a BRCA study through Cooper University Hospital. This forged my relationship with oncologist, Generosa Grana, Director, Cooper Cancer Institute. I even invited my sisters to join the study. They refused, trying desperately to talk me out of testing. But I didn’t listen. I learned I am BRCA mutation negative. The relief was enormous. I remained pro-active with my breast health.

In 2004, at age 40, I was stunned when I was told I have breast cancer. I was the ninth woman in mom’s family to be diagnosed. And worst, me and two other cousins with breast cancer were BRCA negative. We began wondering what is wrong with our genes?

I had bilateral mastectomies and reconstructive surgery. My sisters finally had genetic testing. One sister tested BRCA2 positive, the same mutation as our aunt. We also learned mom was BRCA2 positive. So much for hand-me-down genes!

My genes brought me back to Dr. Grana. Pathology from my mastectomies revealed one breast diseased with ductile and lobular in situ cancer. Invasive lobular cancer is what killed mom. Mom also had a cousin who died of ovarian cancer.

I’m BRCA negative but felt something was seriously wrong with my genes. Dr. Grana agreed and recommended I remove my ovaries to prevent ovarian cancer.

Oh, how I longed for the simplicity of my Levi’s jeans! But at age 41, I just couldn’t embrace menopause, and instead opted for heavy screening. These past few years, my genes became quite uncomfortable. I was constantly squirming, trying to make them fit properly but nothing worked. I finally had prophylactic oophorectomies. Ah, perfect fit!

My journey has taught me to wear my genes like my favorite Levi’s, with comfort and confidence. I authored Pink Ribbon Journey, a distinct book celebrating breast cancer survivors and the physicians who care for them. I chose to feature Dr. Grana. I knew that sharing her positive energy would bring hope to others in their pink ribbon journey. Writing the stories of these courageous women and men brought me unexpected comfort and healing. I share my genes proudly and offer support to others, so they can feel the same as I do.
YOGA STRETCH FOR CANCER SURVIVORS

Yoga Stretch for Cancer Survivors is especially beneficial for people with flexibility limitations due to a variety of degenerative conditions, as well as those recovering from surgery.

**Dates:** July 3, August 7

**Time:** 12:00 P.M. – 1:00 P.M.

**Location:** Town Square Building
931 Centennial Blvd., Voorhees, NJ 08043

LIVE & LEARN

A New Perspective for the Cancer Patient

**Time:** 11:30 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

**Location:** Town Square Building
931 Centennial Blvd., Voorhees, NJ 08043

- **Thursday, May 24, 2012: Laughter Chair Yoga... Live Life Laughing!**
  Laughter Yoga is a global movement for health, happiness and world peace. It uses laughter as a tool to improve health; memory and social skills... naturally overcome depression, boost morale and self-confidence. Easy and safe for all, dress is comfortable.

  **Facilitator:** Laugh Yourself Philly; Melanie Galioto

- **Thursday, June 21, 2012: “Broadway Moves” Body Movement Experience**
  Come and celebrate your joy and love of Broadway show tunes through this gentle Body Movement class. Ease into the rhythms of the music through simple dance moves. Dress is comfortable; participation from a seated position is optional.

  **Facilitator:** Stacey Covelli; Cherry Hill Racquet Center

Pre-registration is required for all workshops. Please call: 1.800.8.COOPER (1.800.826.6737). You can also register for these classes online at events.cooperhealth.org

Please note that workshops are subject to cancellation due to inclement weather.

World Class Care. Right Here. Right Now.
George F. Norcross, III, Chairman
John S. Davis, Vice Chairman
John P. Sheridan, Jr., President and CEO
Complementary Medicine Program 2012

Therapeutic Massage & Reflexology Days

Attention all cancer survivors: Come enjoy the mind body spirit benefits of therapeutic chair massage and reflexology.

 Dates: May 22, June 19, September 11 & 18, October 9 & 23, November 13 & 27
 Time: 9:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
 Location: Town Square Building 931 Centennial Blvd., Voorhees, NJ 08043

Bonnie's Book Club

A story is always better if you have someone to share it with… what could be better than sharing it with a group of friends who have read it too?

• May 30: Then Came You by Jennifer Weiner
• June 27: Straight Man by Richard Russo
• July: Movie Outing
• September 19: Steve Jobs by Walter Isaacson

Time: Noon – 1 pm
Location: Town Square Building, 931 Centennial Building Voorhees, NJ 08043

This book club is for cancer survivors. If you have any questions or need additional information please contact Bonnie Mehr at 856.325.6646

Location:
Town Square Building
931 Centennial Building
Voorhees, NJ 08043

Time: 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Dates:
• May 23: Mini Herb Gardens
• June 13: Pick Your Project Day

This class is free for cancer survivors and there is no cost for materials. Please register for each class so the appropriate number of supplies can be provided. Please call:

1.800.8.COOPER (1.800.826.6737).
You can also register online at events.cooperhealth.org.
Never Too Young
by Judith Marquez

In November of 2007 while in my dorm room while at college I felt a small hard lump on my right breast. I quickly made an appointment. The doctor said I was too young to have anything wrong. I was denied a mammogram because I was young at the age of 24.

In May the lump grew to the size of a golf ball. It began pressing through my skin and wearing a brassier became unbearable. I graduated from Stockton College on May 12, 2008 and 2 days later went for a second opinion. A biopsy was taken and I received a call telling me that indeed I had breast cancer.

I was staying with my sister until I went away for an internship in Washington, DC. My sister asked me to leave her home and stay with my mother. Unfortunately, at my mother’s house paying rent was of more importance than my health. My circumstances were of little importance to my family and they weren’t as supportive, as I had hoped. I wasn’t going to be a burden and found my own way.

I found somewhere to live with little means, short notice and moved in after surgery. Surgery was on May 26th. I had a lumpectomy. My friends and sisters visited me but my mother was nowhere to be found. My sister went to get my mother but no one ever came back. I spent that night at the hospital alone.

During chemo my hair quickly fell out. I went to the salon alone. I cried as the last of my hair was shaved. I drove home and stared in the mirror all night crying.

That fall I decided to go back to school. I traveled to treatment every Monday and commuted back to school for class. I went to treatment alone and studied. My boyfriend broke-up with me and friends walked away. I walked the halls in pain hiding behind my wig because breathing even hurt. I drove myself to the hospital when the pain became unbearable.

I found something better and was accepted into the 3-year masters program at Philadelphia University with a full scholarship. I had radiation every morning. After treatment I commuted to the college, worked on campus until 5 p.m. and went to class from until 10:30 p.m. every night just to travel back to New Jersey and do it all again the next day. Many advised me to take time off school but that wasn’t an option for me. This experience never defined me but helped me grow and prove how strong I was to myself.

I just graduated Philadelphia University in December and my thesis focused on Breast Cancer. I created a social networking website, interviewed survivors, organizations, and specialists. My creation SurvUnity represents Survivors United to Serve by Spreading Awareness, Encouragement, and Unity. I chose to share my story in a creative manner by developing SurvUnity. I hope to bring an end to the stereotype that only women over the age of 40 are at a risk for breast cancer. Remember to stay encouraged and motivated through adversity. It’s nothing but a temporary roadblock life throws ones way.

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Gurl About Town

Bonnie’s Book Club
by Teresa Kao

One of the things my cancer experience affected me was my loss of interest and enthusiasm in reading. I used to be an avid reader. I always had books, magazines or newspapers nearby. Many times I stayed up late trying to finish a book. Once I was so engrossed in reading that I put sugar instead of salt in the food I was preparing for company. It became a joke among my family and friends.

During my chemo treatment, I was taking Ativan and was always drowsy. I hardly read anything. After I finished chemo and was off Ativan, I still had problems concentrating on reading. I’d read a few pages and then couldn’t keep my eyes open. Gradually I stopped reading completely.

When Bonnie Mehr, Manager of the Dr. Diane Barton Complementary Medicine Program at Cooper Cancer Institute started the book club a few years ago I signed up right away. I figured that I probably needed a push and some encouragement to get back into reading again. After three plus years and many books later, I can say for sure that the book club has really helped me. Even though I still have problems concentrating, I try to read at least the book for the monthly book club meeting. The discussions are always lively and interesting. I’ve gained many insights and new perspectives from the books and enjoy discussions with my fellow club members.

Camaraderie is indeed balm for the soul.

I enjoyed reading The Help, The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society and Half Broke Horses tremendously. The stories and characters gave me a lot of inspirations; The Lost Symbol was a fun book to read. The story and the author’s knowledge and creativity really captivated me; The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks made me very grateful for the advancement in cancer treatment. I’m really thankful for the doctors, researchers, patients, especially Henrietta Lacks, who made the advancement possible. We just finished reading The Paris Wife, a story about Ernest Hemingway and his first wife, Hadley Richardson, and their lives in Paris in the early 1920s. It is a fascinating book. I read The Old Man and the Sea and saw For Whom the Bell Tolls when I was a youngster. But before I read The Paris Wife, my only impression of Hemingway was a white bearded older man. I never thought that he was a young man once. Reading The Paris Wife gave me more understanding of Hemingway as a person.

We will be reading Straight Man, Steve Jobs, The Sense of an Ending and Unbroken in the next few months. We will also have a movie outing in July. I am really looking forward to these activities. Come join us for the fun!
Valuable Lessons
by: Jaime Amorosi

Being diagnosed at the age of 27 years old was a tough reality. Throughout my adventure I have learned some really valuable lessons.

We are taught a lot of things while we are growing up: have patience; be respectful; respect your elders; look both directions before crossing the street; wait your turn; ask questions because there are no stupid questions. We are taught to make friends, not enemies; raise your hand; wash your hands; cover your mouth; help those who are in need; We are raised with values and morals that may differ from one another but all in all we are raised to be well-rounded individuals.

Over the past year there have been many situations where I have to dig deep and think back to when I was a child and what my parents have told me. You haven’t learned it all until you have experienced it all. Experience is the key word here. I have to say you can teach me right out of the book but the only way to truly learn something is by experiencing it.

• The countless hours sitting in the waiting room = Patience
• Watching the people who have appointments after you go first = Take Turns
• The endless tests that have to be run before you can move further through your journey = Patience
• Being your own advocate to make sure you are receiving the best care possible = Ask questions
• Sharing my story with others to let them know they are not alone = Helping those in need
• The cranky nurses that seem to always have a bad day (I found out bring them candy and they will be your best friend) = Make friends, not enemies
• Going through chemo you always have to be careful of germs = Wash your hands and cover your mouth
• Parking lots at the hospital or doctors office are always dangerous – everyone is in a rush to get to nowhere = Look both directions before crossing the street
• The comments of our elders sometimes are not the comments we are expecting, sometimes they do not have a very nice way of saying something or just say something that really gets under your skin = Respect your elders
• The countless times you have to make doctor’s appointments and you need to be put on hold = Patience
• Recovery time from chemo, radiation, surgery = Patience

You will notice a common word throughout this blog and that would be PATIENCE. Many of us can say we have patience but it is not until our patience is tested to the max that we develop

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him though, in fact, she follows us down the block and around the corner when I walk him. His energy and enthusiasm is contagious and rejuvenates me like a beautiful spring day. He’s so happy to play fetch, go for a walk, get a belly rub or just hang out with me. Like all dogs, he has his own funny personality and quirks. He likes to push his bones and toys under the sofa and then look at me to retrieve them for him. He’s good about doing his business outside, not chewing shoes or furniture and coming when called but has had a few lapses. One day I placed my leftovers from a restaurant on the counter and turned my back and woof, they were gone in a second. Of course, he knew he did wrong and hung his head with a look that said I’m sorry, I couldn’t help myself!

One of the first times we left him alone for awhile, he found a piece in the Berber carpet sticking up and chewed at it to entertain himself. I came home to a large pile of pulled fiber and emailed a photo on my Iphone to my husband with just the caption Rug! Luckily, I had an area piece to cover the tear and we are planning to replace it with a wood floor this spring.

Now when my daughter comes to visit with her dog, Kolby, he and Reese are like brothers and I feel like a grandmother in training when I dog sit and act as referee. “Now, play nice and share your toys.” They say kids keep you young and seeing the world anew. Man and woman’s best friend gives me another reason to laugh, love and live in the moment. Carpe Diem! Seize the day.

For Whom the Bell Tolls
by: Marietta Solome

I express in art about what I cannot speak of my healing process at Cooper Cancer Institute, from diagnosis to cure. I begin with preparing my pallet with all of the colors available to me so that I have some control over what may be unmanageable. I do not quite know how my picture will manifest, so I let go and pick up my brush to stroke the first feeling I have with dark, irregular lines crossing each other in an erratic pattern throughout my system, especially the core of my being, depicting the panic and confusion I feel at first. My limbs are weak of a muted gray. My stomach churns with a myriad of pigments, when combined, are muddy and undefined. My heart beats rapidly with crimson red. I choose black for the deep hole I think I will disappear into as I anticipate the arduous journey I am about to encounter.

I take my first step on the road of the medical community, my first test. My foot is dark brown and heavily-clad, suspended off the ground, fearful of taking this step. Nonetheless, I begin my walk and do not look back because I know that the only way to cure is through my trepidation. My walk then begins and a momentum occurs. As I continue onward, my arms and legs contract and release, the path twists and turns, narrows and widens. The dark blue ebbing waters that I create threaten to swallow me up, yet, as it flows, I get carried to shore with great relief. Again, fear, and I paint fallen branches and limbs of trees that I tumble upon, only holding my gait steadily as I reach out to guides who give me direction and family and friends who give me physical and spiritual food for the road. Feeling safer now, I add occasional vibrant pinks and blues and oranges, thoseowers on the sidewalks, allowing me some hope, and I think, I might get through this relatively unscathed. I feel somewhat giddy, so I release my adult authority and become like a child, thrilled by painting a rainbow of which all things seem imaginable. By now, I am feeling more secure, and the billows of powder blue in the sky signify peace and confidence, as I am encouraged by my medical caregivers that I am doing well.

I find out I am cancer-free and I come to a clearing of an expansive lush green field with a blinding yellow sun that is health and freedom to me. I ring the bell of survivorship and dabble on my canvass streams of tears, not on a face of innocence and wonder anymore, yet a contemplative yet colorful one that speak of life, and I embrace my strength that I have lived through the last year. I put away that painting, only to retrieve it for the sake of remembrance, and now I can start a new painting...
My Story
By: Pat Stienes

In March of 2007 I had surgery to replace both my knees. After weeks of rehab and therapy I returned to work and to live my life. I felt wonderful and pain free. In this time frame I had dropped 35 pounds. I was a happy woman.

One night I was turning in bed and I felt a lump in my right breast. I remembered that I was 2 months overdue for my mammogram. I went in to work the next day had my study and because I felt a lump an US was ordered. The radiologist wanted to perform an US guided biopsy and I scheduled it for the following week. I was confident this was going to be negative.

Thursday June 14, 2007 I was at work when I was told at 11:00am I had breast cancer. I was devastated. I was on my way to have lunch with 5 co workers. I remember driving down Route 70 and getting stuck in traffic. I found myself looking around across the street when my eyes locked on the Cancer Foundation wig store. I knew then God was giving me a sign that I would be in for a long haul.

The next week was a whirlwind; office visits, tests, phone calls to relatives and plenty of tears. My head was spinning. I had made my decision to have a bilateral mastectomy and so on June 26th I returned to surgery for the 2nd time in 3 months.

I healed very well from my surgery and on July 16th I started my first round of chemotherapy. I would have 6 sessions and a year of Herceptin. I was very fortunate. I worked thru the chemo. I will admit I did have some days when I was tired however I was determined I could do this.

I also discovered that there is humor in cancer. One day I was leaving work and the first thing I would do is take off my wig and lay it in the passenger seat. This day was a beautiful Indian summer day with a cool wind and as I was driving down Kresson road, the winds had picked up and lifted my wig and it blew right out the window. I pulled over and trudged up the road to retrieve my wig. Cars had slowed down to see what had happened. Imagine the looks on their faces when they see this bald headed woman picking up hair off the side of the road. The looks on their faces is something I will never forget.

I will always be grateful to my husband Charlie, my daughter Trisha, and my co-workers and friends at Cooper for their love and support. At this time I would like to publically thank the physicians in whose care I was entrusted: Drs. Lydia Liao, Lisa Attebery, Jenny Grana, & Ann Leilani Fahey.

There are days when I may think back to that time, however I don’t look back. I have learned not to sweat the small stuff and any time I think I may be having a bad day I remember that dark time in my life and suddenly my day is not so bad.

This June I will celebrate 5 years being cancer free. I look forward to my daughter’s wedding, grandchildren, and getting older with my husband. Life is very precious to me and I am very happy to be in it.

Never Too Young (continued from page 5)

I am now doing better than ever and am cancer free. May 2012 marks my 4 years as a breast cancer survivor. For in-depth details of my story and those of other survivors please check out my website dedicated to all survivors out there at www.survunity.com.

Valuable Lessons (continued from page 6)

an understanding of the meaning of patience.

I am so tired of not being 100% and feeling great. I have learned that things take time to heal and after surgery, you can’t heal over night. You need time and patience to allow things to heal. You need patience for the end result; you need patience with yourself, your body and your mind. So take a deep breath sit back and relax and learn to be patient. It’s not easy, but it is possible.