

Life Force Foundation is a non-profit organisation providing emotional/psychosocial support for people dealing with the experience of cancer, through group therapy and meditation, counselling, special workshops and retreats.

# Life Force Foundation

CFN 15707

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# NEWSLETTER

## Happenings 2001

Here we are well into 2001 already, and we need to say 'hello and welcome back' to all of you our readers and supporters, and let you know what future happenings are in store this year.

**NEW INITIATIVE FOR CANCER SURVIVORS** commencing end of April - a Life Force/TAFE collaboration.

In April we look forward to commencing our new initiative in collaboration with Ryde TAFE outreach program - a 9 week course, "Life Skills for Cancer Survivors". The needs of people facing life after cancer acknowledged. You will read in this issue an article by Jane Cruickshank - page 2-3 "Redefining One's Self after Cancer", which highlights the importance of a better understanding of the issues that arise in the aftermath of cancer. The LFF/TAFE project will be one way of addressing some of these issues. (See article page 4 "Where do we go from here?" ).

**ANNUAL FUNDRAISER - EVENING OF POETRY & PROSE**

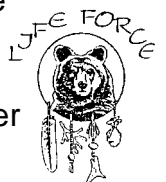
Also on April 22 we will be holding our annual Evening of Poetry & Prose at the Wharf Theatre. (See flyer enclosed). It is important to

book early as we had to turn away many people last year - don't miss out this time!

### REPRESENTATIVES NEEDED

More and more cancer consumers are taking places on various committees and boards offering their expert advice on health care issues. This is a welcome advance and we thank those committed people who give their time on behalf of all cancer patients to endeavour to ensure that improvements are made at every level of cancer care. Many are making important contributions in this way. However more representatives are needed from our ranks if progress is to be made and the burden of representation does not rest with just a small band of stalwart folk - call CANCER VOICES - 02 9948 1577 if you are interested in becoming involved in this way.

Individuals and groups are welcome to become members of the consumer organisation CANCER VOICES. Consumer advocacy training courses are planned for those who are interested in becoming consumer representatives.



MAR  
2001

Please do not throw this newsletter in the bin. Pass it on to someone who may benefit from it, or give it to your doctor, dentist or other health professionals. You may wish to put the support group information up on a noticeboard. In this way you may be able to help someone in need. Thankyou.

## *"Redefining One's Self after Cancer" - Jane's words of encouragement*

I believe that the thrust of one's endeavours to heal the sick should be poetic as well as scientific. In this article, I wish to offer both, and share with you my experience of surviving survival after cancer. All my Life Force Foundation member colleagues have known the benefits of medical science and technology. Advances in medicine and surgery will have contributed to your survival. However, these interventions have forever altered your body and your sense of identity. I am a survivor of breast and bowel cancer and I imagine like me you feel that you have been through an extreme experience. We have been physically altered in a way we wish had not been so disfiguring, making us functionally different from the way we were before our diagnosis of cancer. Permanent changes to one's body certainly sheds a new light on our sense of identity. I wish to speak of the adjustments necessary to aid in our recovery as we travel along the pathway to redefine our "new" selves.

Here also I want to consider what it takes to recover and enter back into the mainstream of family and societal relationships. It seems that it takes much more than either the health professionals who care for us or the public at large generally understand. For many of us victory over cancer is not the end of the journey but the beginning of an extended journey into redefining and restructuring our lives after a rather nasty interruption. How do we adapt to our changed circumstances and find a pathway to enhance our new existence. One that allows us to feel comfortable in our relations with others and not feel this burden of uncertainty in everything we undertake.

We are all familiar with the "drama and pain" of what we have experienced and we are only able to share that extreme part of our illness with those who have had a similar experience. This is the part Art Frank calls the Remission Society and all of you reading this article are now members of a growing number of extraordinary folks from all walks of life who share my anxieties and my dreams for the future. Initially I was only able to make short-term goals but now (five years after my mastectomy and two years after my bowel surgery followed by six months of chemotherapy) I am finding that my horizons are expanding to medium and almost to longer-term goals.

Survivorship certainly comes at a price. I have journeyed through a period when I struggled with my reaction to the illness and then other people's reaction often left me feeling pretty isolated and disengaged from the maelstrom of everyday living. Being encouraged to "forget it happened and just get back to work" was not the panacea I needed though I dare say the intentions of those who recommended this particular coping skill were honest enough if

somewhat misguided! I recall sitting outside the radiology department of a major hospital repeatedly staring at the request form utterly unable to believe that it was my name at the top of the form! The cacophony of emotions we have to experience and deal with are many and varied. From the aforementioned disbelief, through fear, grief, loss, anger, despair, and guilt. These in turn caused a loud clanging in my head, which translated more into a Chinese opera heard through western ears than marching forward to the beat of a fine brass band!

Having negotiated my way out of the medical domain I was confronted with a veritable mountain of so called helpful advice from friends and family from all corners of the world - books on diet, pamphlets on the latest research, new medications and it seemed every newspaper I picked up had yet another conflicting article on the latest remedy for cancer. I finally decided they could all be stored under my bed - in other words I took the sensible step of sleeping on them first and I have to admit they are all mostly still under the bed!

My next port of call was accepting the challenges I faced. How to come to terms with the daily reminders of my altered body image and functions. Even at age 52 years, I thought of myself as a "sexy chick" but all of that was to change with two lots of chemotherapy. Five years on I now accept my sex life has taken a severe set back but with regard to the bigger issue of surviving a life threatening illness such as cancer it does not seem to hold as the high priority status I would have accorded it pre-cancer. This may not be so for all cancer patients. As Professor Little mentioned in the recent Four Corners programme the "vast majority go on to lead greatly enriched lives but I am acknowledging that for some life can be somewhat less happy than before." Over time, it has become evident to me that the cancer label sticks and that repeated follow-up checks with my medical team are going to be a lifelong reminder of my status as a cancer patient. I am also aware that some survivors have had to face discrimination in the work place and in some areas of the insurance industry.

We have all been set apart from the mainstream but how are we to survive survival? There is little doubt that we have all had to evaluate where we have been and how will we proceed from here given our acute awareness of our own mortality. Some of you will have returned to work, to control of your business, to continuing domestic management or have chosen the path of more creative pursuits and more or less recreational time. Perhaps you have chosen to give back to others something of your new wisdom or maybe you have remained isolated and alone. Adapting to changed circumstances is not static. It is

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## *"Redefining One's Self after Cancer" (Cont'd)*

a dynamic process and it is constantly evolving just like human development generally. We have a special need to reassess our boundaries and be willing and free to adjust them accordingly on an individual basis. Loved ones or the community at large does not always understand this process and it is my desire to bring about a clearer understanding of these issues. Whatever stage you have reached in the continuum of your recovery let me say that I believe we all cope in our own legitimate and unique way. There is little in life that cannot be made more meaningful and I trust that my words may replenish the minds of all Life Force Foundation members. We need to acknowledge the importance of giving magnification to the value we now attach to our lives. We are not heroes nor do we wish to be shunned for getting cancer. We are courageous and feisty survivors whose narrative should be given hospitality. It is the public awareness of the issues inherent in surviving cancer together with a community of understanding on the part of all those who manage our health care that will ultimately serve to enhance our recovery and normalize our changed existence

for the better.

I am now able to move on from my somewhat confined notions of my changed self to greener pastures where I am finding the nourishment to flourish and flower again. Having spent the last five years on a trajectory not of my own choosing I seem to have broken loose from the harness and set myself free again. In rural terms, I have made it out of the barn into the paddock and I am once again peering over the fence to the farther horizons. All Life Force Foundation members who have traveled this path should be unashamedly proud of themselves and their achievements to date. It is no longer necessary for us to remain silent to the issues we face after surviving cancer - medical treatment, research, and statistics are one thing but understanding the difficulties we face as survivors is the key to better management and outcomes for all concerned in our care and recovery.

**Jane Cruickshank**

February 2001

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### *Evening of Poetry & Prose*

Our annual fundraiser has become an extremely popular event and what a line-up we have for you this time. (See enclosed flyer)

To be held on **April 22, 7pm at the Wharf Theatre**, it is always a terrific night out, so mark the date in your diary now and book straight away: 02 9389 3834. You will also find enclosed, raffle tickets and a reply paid envelope for return of stubs.

*Special Thanks:* to our wonderful team of Life Force Angels who have put so much effort into setting up our Poetry & Prose Evening. It will be a beauty!!

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#### **"TIME BOMB"**

##### **A PLAY EXPLORING BREAST CANCER**

This powerful Play was devised by three women in the UK about breast cancer. Both women who act in the Play have undergone a mastectomy. The Play explores the issues that surround the disease, such as body image and its effect on the family, ending on a positive note. There will be ample time for discussion after the performance.

Venue: YWCA Darlinghurst  
No. 5-11 Wentworth Ave, Sydney 2010  
Date: **Wednesday 28th March** 7-9 pm.  
Contact person: Sue Jennings  
Ph: 02 6649 3202 fax: 02 6649 3778

Venue: Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre  
55 Thornley Street, Leichhardt  
Date: **Tuesday 27th March** 7-9 pm  
Contact: Roxanne Cameron - Ph: 02 9560 3011

### **A SPECIAL REQUEST**

**from Arthur Dignam**

Arthur is seeking that very nice woman who asked him about a poem called "Alaska" on the occasion of our last Evening of Poetry & Prose on July 23, 2000. If she or anyone else who can help, reads this, please contact Arthur with the first line of the poem and any other information about it. You may leave a message for him at the LFF office: 9389 3834.

#### **ENCORE:**

After breast cancer gentle exercise program. The Encore program is for women who have undergone breast cancer surgery at any time in their lives, gentle pool and floor exercises help strengthen and tone your arms, shoulders and chest.

A series of 8 week programs (Feb, May, August, October) now held in the following locations - Sydney CBD, Five Dock, Parramatta, Penrith, Nowra and as of May - Wollongong. For more information call Claire Treadgold: 9285 6225.

#### **BCAG NSW:**

The next meeting of the Breast Cancer Action Group will be held on 27 May 2001. To join BCAG NSW call Sally Crossing on 02 9436 1755

## *"Survivors - Where do we go from here?"*

### **A NEW INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT CANCER SURVIVORS**

The end of treatment does not mean the end of cancer's effect on your life. The most critical stage of recovery is often overlooked - what happens when you leave the hospital to get on with your life? The expectations of society are that you will put it behind you and get on with life as though nothing has happened. However following an extreme event in life such as the experience of cancer, and the traumatic effects of surgery and other treatments, it is not uncommon for cancer survivors to find themselves floundering as they try to pick up the pieces and resume life once more. The whole identity is affected. As Jane Cruickshank says in the article above, it is necessary to "redefine one's self", and in a sense, as I see it, begin again, embarking on a journey of self discovery or recreating one's identity.

An area of particular difficulty for cancer survivors is that such a huge trauma in one's life invariably puts one on a new path because of the enormous changes experienced. These huge changes can lead to a gap in understanding, so that the impact of cancer on personal relationships is profound.

In addition, worries about resuming work, or difficulties in the workplace are common, as well as concerns about family and children.

The Life Force Foundation in collaboration with Ryde College of TAFE Outreach program will offer a new course in April 2001 to assist cancer survivors adjust to life after cancer. The course "Life Skills for Cancer Survivors" will begin in Term 2 at the Telopea

Centre on the Ryde Campus.

Life Force facilitators, Jilly Pascoe and Sabina Rabold are excited about the initiative which they believe will be of great benefit to those people who are struggling to deal with the many issues which arise in the aftermath of cancer.

Julie Fitzhardinge and Col Eglinton of TAFE, recognising a need in the community for a program such as this, have arranged for participants to use the Telopea Centre, a delightful meeting place set in the leafy grounds of Ryde TAFE.

Commencing on April 30th, the course will address personal, relationship and work issues, and teach skills that aim to assist those who have been through an extreme experience in their lives to recover their sense of self and re-engage with life. The course will be run over 9 weeks at the Telopea Centre. There is no fee for the course, it is offered free of charge to those interested in exploring this area - another stage of development in life after cancer. For more information and to register, phone the LFF office on: 02 9389 3834.

#### **WORKSHOP DATES:**

Facing Death, Embracing Life Workshop,  
March 17 and 18 and June 5 and 6.

**SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATORS' WORKSHOP,**  
Oct. 19 to 21. For more info. phone: 9389 3834.

**FURTHER RETREAT DATES FOR 2001:**  
May 18 to 20 • August 17 to 19 • Nov. 16 to 18.

## *Life Force Foundation Support Groups*

### **2001 Term Dates**

**Note:** It is important to register for all support groups, before turning up, in order to check on numbers and confirm that details are correct. Telephone the LFF number: **9389 3834**.

#### **Eastern Suburbs**

meets weekly at:

**St. Joseph's Parish Centre  
10 Albert St, Edgecliff**

Monday evenings: 5:45pm - 7:45pm

Term 2 May 7 to June 25 (8 weeks)  
Term 3 July 16 to Sep 3 (8 weeks)  
Term 4 Oct 15 to Dec 3 (8 weeks)

#### **Northern Suburbs**

meets weekly at:

**Chatswood Church of Christ Hall  
365 Victoria Ave, Chatswood  
Jane Gillespie: 9960 3213**

Friday mornings 10.30am - 12.30pm

Term 2 May 4 to Jun 22 (8 weeks)  
Term 3 July 20 to Sep 7 (8 weeks)  
Term 4 Oct 12 to Nov 30 (8 weeks)

#### **Inner West**

meets weekly at:

**Annandale Neighbourhood Centre  
79 Johnston St, Annandale**

Thursday evenings: 5:45pm - 7:45pm

Term 2 May 3 to June 21 (8 weeks)  
Term 3 July 19 to Sep 6 (8 weeks)  
Term 4 Oct 11 to Nov 29 (8 weeks)

#### **Family & Carers Group**

meets weekly at:

**Annandale Neighbourhood Centre  
79 Johnston St, Annandale**

Thursday evenings: 5.45pm - 7.45 pm

Term 2 May 3 to Jun 21 (8 weeks)  
Term 3 July 19 to Sep 6 (8 weeks)  
Term 4 Oct 11 to Nov 29 (8 weeks)