

# flourish

A creative magazine by and for the cancer community



● What nourishes you? How to find nourishment through difficult times

● How you can support someone with cancer by writing a letter

● The power of Black Women Rising

● Artwork that transforms the negative

● What is the integrative approach to cancer and how can it support you?

**THE NOURISH ISSUE**

# flourish

Flourish Magazine is a joint venture between integrative cancer care charity Yes to Life and creative health charity Artlift and funded by National Lottery Awards for All, aiming to explore the benefits of an integrative and creative approach to living with cancer.

The magazine is created with the support of a steering group that includes people living with cancer and partners Macmillan, Macmillan Next Steps and Gloucestershire Health and Care NHS Foundation Trust.

It features a range of creative responses, expert information and interviews in each themed edition that offer support and represent the diversity of the cancer community.

## Artlift

### [artlift.org](http://artlift.org)

Artlift is a Gloucestershire based specialist creative health charity co-producing projects and courses for people living with mental health challenges, long-term chronic pain and/ or who are living with or moving on from cancer.

Twitter [@ArtliftB](https://twitter.com/ArtliftB)

Instagram [@ArtsOnPrescription](https://www.instagram.com/ArtsOnPrescription)

Facebook [@ArtstoMakeYouFeelBetter](https://www.facebook.com/ArtstoMakeYouFeelBetter)

## Yes to Life

### [yestolife.org.uk](http://yestolife.org.uk)

Yes to Life is the UK's integrative cancer care charity, which empowers people with cancer to make informed decisions about their care options. For well over a decade, we have provided evidence-based information to those in need.

Twitter [@YesToLife](https://twitter.com/YesToLife)

Instagram [@yestolifecharity](https://www.instagram.com/yestolifecharity)

Facebook [@YesToLifeCharity](https://www.facebook.com/YesToLifeCharity)

Thanks to Jason Conway, Editor of Steel Jackdaw for his support and to The Cancer Hive for the inspiration.

# The Nourish issue

Hello and welcome to the first ever issue of Flourish Magazine, a brand new magazine by and for the cancer community from integrative cancer care charity Yes to Life and creative health charity Artlift, who are based in Gloucestershire.

This issue's theme is 'Nourish', exploring how we find nourishment whilst living with and beyond cancer. When I began work on the magazine, it was clear to me that there is no 'one size fits all' when it comes to cancer and that it was important the content of the magazine reflected this. A cancer diagnosis is a life changing moment for all involved, its impact rippling beyond the person receiving it to our friends, family and colleagues, but how we feel and respond to it will be different for each individual. Whether it's a support group, a massage, exercise, food or a creative activity like art or writing, cancer in all its bleakness can offer the opportunity to discover how best to nourish ourselves through difficult times.

Through an open call for submissions on this theme, we painstakingly whittled them down to this final selection, which features everything from the hilarious to the heartbreaking, because of course, how we experience cancer is as complex and unique as we are.

Some of the pieces are therefore challenging and we felt it was important not to shy away from this, but have provided content warnings so that readers can choose what they feel able to engage with.

We are also featuring additional content online, such as film and blog posts, released weekly on the Artlift and Yes to Life websites – make sure you head there to check it out.

At the back of the magazine is the open call for our next issue, which is on the theme of 'Connections'. Our submissions are open to all regardless of background or experience and we encourage you to submit. It was an honour to put this magazine together and I hope you find its content as inspiring, thought-provoking and nourishing as I did. We'd love to hear your feedback – you can complete a quick survey telling us what you thought by scanning the QR code on the back of the magazine.

Thank you for reading!

**Natalie Beech**  
Editor-in-Chief

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# What nourishes you?

We asked our contributors and those in Yes to Life's Wigwam Support Groups how they find nourishment in their daily lives for our first issue of the magazine. Here are their answers...

"Nothing nourishes me more



than a walk in the woods

with a full canopy of trees

and birds singing."



"Meeting a friend for tea and cake, gardening and watching comedy programmes."



"Walking or dancing in the rain in Standish Woods"

"My church"



"All things nature nourish me; bird song, colour, patterns, texture and the smell of freshly cut grass."



"Being in nature, being in the moment, being outside, being inside, being here, being there, being still, being busy, being alive, being not dead, being with my breath, being with my dogs, being free, being me, being."

"The unwavering support of my partner, and the furry attentions of our cats!"



"Eating well. The challenge for me is always about getting the balance right for those treats that make me feel good!"



"My daily practice in rain or shine of walking round my very small garden, paying close attention to the inevitable process of life and death as my plants flourish and then decline."



"If I don't pick up a needle most days I feel a bit lost, so definitely sewing, be it cross-stitch, cards for friends or community sewing projects, but always with plenty of tea!"



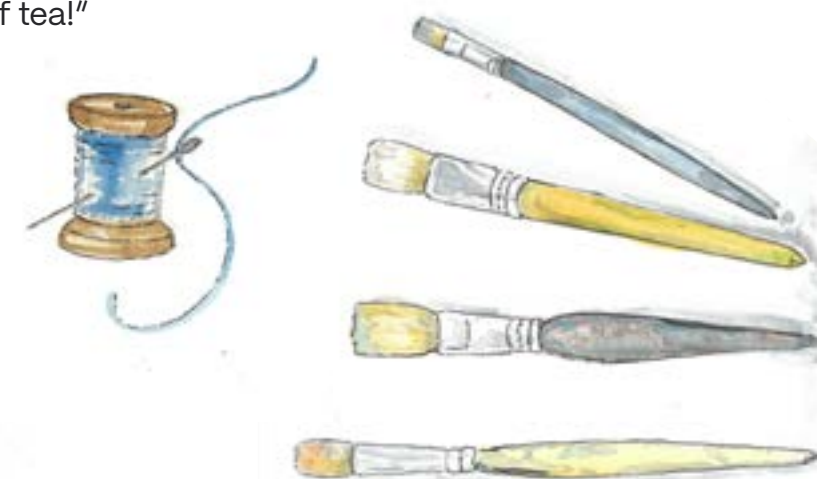
"A good espresso"



"I am nourished by love – be it the smile on a stranger's face, a spontaneous hug from my daughter or the belly laughs that only old friends can trigger."



"My friends and family, exercise, creating my art and craft, empathy, respect and love are the most important things that make me feel nourished."



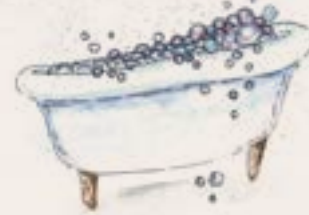
"Grandchildren"



# Healing

By Kirsten Chick

Today I'll stay in bed all day  
It hurts to move, my being aches  
I cannot face the light today  
Of LED bulbs, people, sun  
I'll lie here clammy, worn thin, scared  
My demons heavy on my chest.



Today I'll take a long, long bath  
The sunlight melting through the pane  
To make me smile and wonder at  
The warmth that's constant in the sky  
Not always felt, but always there.



Today I'll walk around the park  
It stings to move, it hurts to rest  
I might as well ache somewhere new  
With birdsong and a gentle breeze  
Or maybe further, to the beach  
Where the sea is rough and challenging



The waves are like my raging soul  
They crash and howl, their despair deep  
I offer mine in harmony  
We rock together, back and forth  
I stagger homeward, dazed and cleansed.

Today I'll make a proper meal  
Slice vegetables and fragrant herbs  
I'll simmer, bake, and take my time  
And let the flavours fill the air  
I'll breathe them in and know  
This nourishment is just for me.

Today I'll ring my lovely friend  
Whose calls I have ignored for days  
Invite their laughter and their care  
Reach out my hand and feel it held  
And this time, feel it really held.



Today I'll stay in bed all day  
And read a novel till I doze  
Drink in the rest my body needs  
Sit up to eat and watch the sky  
Through open windows, open wide  
The sun a twinkle in my eye.

[kirstenchick.com](http://kirstenchick.com)  
Instagram  
[@kirsten.chick](https://www.instagram.com/kirsten.chick)

My name is Jill and I'm originally from the US, but have lived in the UK for 21 years. Having had breast cancer in 2016, it was my family and friends, plus daily exercise, that kept me strong. Although it doesn't define me, the experience is one of many that has changed and shaped me into the person I am today.

This photo is a picture of my son and represents a joyful, cleansing, nourishing and happy moment for me caught on camera.

Image and Words  
by Jill Goehringer



This image was taken on Selsley Common last Spring, whilst walking my dogs. I have a camera, but usually use my phone to take photos when I'm out and about. This image caught my eye as the petal was on the wall and looked like a heart. It felt like a sign of hope and goodness. It made me smile a lot.

Image and Words  
by Karin Ayres



# What is the integrative approach and how can it support you?

An interview with founder of integrative cancer care charity Yes to Life, Robin Daly

By Natalie Beech



For the majority of people who receive a cancer diagnosis in the UK, three treatment options are presented: chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery, or some combination of all three. Beyond this, advice on how things like nutrition, exercise and holistic therapies might support you is limited or non-existent.

Robin Daly, founder of Yes to Life, has been on a mission to change this. His interest in integrative care began back in the 1980s, when his daughter was

diagnosed with cancer at just nine years old.

"It was a total bombshell that just crashed into our family, completely out of the blue," Robin says. "Starting from there, we supported her through cancer three times, the last when she was 22. In between, we experienced a lot of hospitals, doctors and cancer care of all types."

By the third time Robin's daughter was diagnosed with cancer, the internet had arrived – as he describes it – "with a vengeance".

Robin and his family were desperate to do whatever they could to help their daughter and so began researching online, wading through endless blogs and articles claiming to offer cures and solutions.

"It's a minefield, actually," Robin explains. "And you have to find your way through all of this information, to try and make sense of it. You have to learn about cancer, which is one of the most complex areas ever. You have to try to find out who on earth is doing

what, and then, is it a hoax? Or is it for real? Can you get it here? Can you afford it?"

What if there was an organisation you could trust to help you make sense of the information out there? This question sparked the idea for Yes to Life, which Robin and his daughter came up with together before she died aged 23, after being diagnosed with cancer for the third time. They decided to create something positive out of their tragedy, using the knowledge they'd accumulated over the years and money donated towards her care, to start Yes to Life in 2005.

More than 15 years later, Yes to Life has grown into a charity that offers a wealth of resources, from their free helpline to their podcast, workshops, support groups, conferences and life directory, which features a list of providers and therapists around the world.

A quick definition of the integrative approach on their website describes it as 'the judicious combining of conventional treatments such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery, with lifestyle and complementary therapies, to broaden patient choice, increase patient engagement, improve quality of life and extend survival.'

"'Integrative' wasn't really a word that was around when we started this, it was like two warring factions:

one was conventional medicine and the other was alternative medicine. Gradually, the idea of integrative medicine has been introduced, which is actually that it's not one or the other, it's what's going to help most and how could they work together to my advantage?"

The integrative approach has at its core the idea that there is 'no size fits all' when it comes to cancer, not only because of our own unique and intricate genetic profiles and history, but in terms of what each person is comfortable with. It goes beyond the physical by looking at how cancer patients can support themselves mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

"It means giving patients genuine choice and enabling them to find the kind of support they need at any given time."

An obvious barrier to engaging with integrative care is money. As integrative care is not available through the NHS, supporting your cancer treatment with say, a nutritionist, can feel like an unaffordable luxury for many. A big part of Yes to Life's work is offering free resources for anyone to engage with, to help people understand how they can support themselves beyond what's being offered by their oncologist. And in fact, the concept is being supported by more and more oncologists. Yes to Life's podcast is

hosted by both Robin and Senior NHS Oncologist Dr Penny Kechagioglou, and the charity's talks and conferences have seen leading oncologists speak to the benefits of an integrative approach.

Putting aside any opinions on specific therapies or unconventional treatments, there seems to be widespread agreement that simply having a deeper understanding of your condition and how you can help yourself offers cancer patients a degree of control in the face of a disease than can make you feel utterly out of control. It can be as simple as changing your diet, doing gentle exercise or self-care – the beauty of the integrative approach is that it's up to you to decide what's best for you.

"My first piece of advice is that you don't have to do everything on day one. Don't allow the fact that there's so much out there to completely stop you in your tracks. All you need is a little bit of help and support to find the most important things, the things that are most important to you, not what somebody else tells you is the most important. You get started on one or two of those things, keep an open mind, and learn as you go."

**Discover more about the integrative approach to cancer and Yes to Life at [yestolife.org.uk](http://yestolife.org.uk)**



Please note, this piece contains swearing and graphic descriptions of chemotherapy treatment. If you are going through chemotherapy and in need of support, please see the list of resources at the back of the magazine.

# Chemotherapy sucks s\*\*t

By Amabel Mortimer

Let's not glamorise it, chemotherapy sucks shit! It's the treatment that singles you out in the supermarket. The headscarves can look damn cool, but you still look like you have cancer, the bald, shaved or seriously tufty head still draws curious, sad stares. The tilted head and sorrowful eyes from the checkout girl tells you that – despite your near perfect drawn-on brows and lippy – you still look REALLY ill.

For me, it was a three weekly cycle of six different drugs, steroids and saline flushes. The exciting part was wondering what colour my urine would be as I wheeled the chemo machine to the toilet with me, cold cap on my head, steadied by my glorious chemo buddy. We'd gaze down the loo as she hiked my trousers up for me. Red most often, sometimes clear, sometimes even blue!

The less exciting part was shivering, going dizzy or nearly passing out. Wanting to throw up, actually throwing up,

rampant shits, urinary incontinence, hardened veins that corded so much I couldn't straighten my arm, throbbing fingernails that had stripes, splits and eventually fell off, bones that felt like they were turning themselves 360 degrees, a mouth so inflamed I could barely swallow, dead taste buds making food taste like dust, dirt or cardboard. A dripping nose due to zero nasal hair. Palmar-plantar syndrome, that delightful red, throbbing hands and feet condition, led to peeling skin, itching and reduced sensations. Doing up a shirt became hell. In fact, trying to pick anything up became ridiculous. Thrush... oh the thrush! The popular misconception that you will finally get slimmer (it's a lie). On the plus side, no more waxing or shaving – your body becomes silky smooth. Fucking joy!

Chemo is a funny old thing. You sit in a suite, surrounded by other people at similar stages, all having the same treatment. A collective room of horrors, if

you like. For my first chemo treatment, I was told that someone could sit with me. I was horrified to find out I would be on my own for the remaining five. I said to the nurses they wouldn't get me through the door alone... not a fucking hope. Being poisoned every three weeks really wasn't my thing, even if it was going to save my life. They had to drug me to get me into the chair. The staff were big softies and said as long as we were discreet, I could bring someone with me. Two friends, one a nurse and one a doctor, took turns to sit with me.

Generally we would try to behave; they'd bring some work along or ply me with tea. Usually though, we'd end up in hushed hysterics about something. Hearing *Who Wants to Live Forever* by Queen playing on the oncology suite radio was an iconic moment. I'm sure we became the in-house entertainment, we certainly made lots of friends and lightened the mood. No one seemed to mind that I had

company.

The nurses were usually pretty cheery, they sang, smiled and generally did their best to make a shitty situation better. I don't know how they do it, day in and day out. They have to wear special arm protectors so they don't get splashed by the stuff about to go directly into our veins. Comforting! The chairs are numbered but there's no 13, which felt good for someone with daft superstitions like me. I was usually dressed up in loads of layers with gloves, a hat or earmuffs, my lucky chemo socks, a hot water bottle and a big fluffy blanket. I even found it possible to grab some fitful sleep when drugged, warm (despite the cold cap) and left in one spot for five to ten hours.

Chemotherapy sucks shit, but I managed the treatments, despite my fears. For those of you going through it, I've put together a checklist of useful and comforting things to take with you.



## Chemo checklist

- Your appointment letter(s)
- Fluffy socks
- Blanket
- Earmuffs or hat – weather/seasonal/cold-capping dependent
- Hair band and a comb if you're cold capping
- Scarf
- Bottled water
- Something to eat, nourishment is supposedly good even if everything tastes like you've licked dust
- Lollipops or boiled sweets
- Lip balm
- A good friend who has a wicked humour and will bring you tea
- Book (you may never read) or iPad (you may never use)
- Phone
- Chargers
- Courage. Even if it's small or feels non-existent, you will step into that chemo suite because, what choice do you have? You can do this.







## Artwork and Words by Susannah Goulding

When I was first diagnosed with widespread metastatic bone cancer, my oncologist said that she didn't want to show me my MRI scans as it would have "upset me." The truth was that I was not being allowed to own or see the reality of what was happening inside my own body.

Through my practice I want to re-address this. I often use MRI Scans, CT scans and the actual physicality of cancer directly, turning them into art and using them to express and share my emotions and experiences.

On a personal level, this gives me strength and allows me to 'make peace with' and accept the cancer living in my bones. We share my body together; it is now a part of me and has become a part of my identity as a woman and as an artist. I believe I am not a victim if I own who I am.

We are allowed to be angry and use our passion to fuel us forward. I aim for my work to explore how our bodies can be alien and strange to us,

how our mind can twist and distort our corporeality.

My art hopefully opens questions that maybe previously people have been afraid to ask. I aim for it to enlighten people into a new understanding of what living with cancer is like.

I now have a sense of pride when I tell people directly and confidently with a warm smile that I am 'living with cancer'. I watch the surprise on their faces. The word 'living' opens up conversations.

I am no longer a victim, but an artist with a purpose. To my surprise, I have become the artist and woman I always dreamt of being. A whole new world has opened for me... a world I need.





## Q&A: Black Women Rising

Black Women Rising is a project set up by award-winning community champion Leanne Pero, aimed at raising vital cancer awareness within the Black community and providing support for Black cancer patients and those in remission. We spoke to Leanne about why she started BWR, how to get involved with the project and what changes she would like to see in the future.

### Why did you want to set up Black Women Rising?

In my quest to find the right services to help me, I realised that the NHS lacked cancer support packages for Black cancer patients. From there I saw that stories from my community were being excluded from the UK's mainstream media outlets, magazines & perhaps most importantly – from reputable annual cancer campaigns by brands and charities failing miserably at diversifying their campaigns. All this did was further fuel the false narrative that cancer is “not a black disease”.

I began meeting women and men who were either misdiagnosed, not offered mental health support and generally left feeling excluded from communication with their consultants, which echoed the many other health inequalities in the BAME community.

I started running support groups, local to me in South East London, for Black women going through cancer. At the end of the first meeting, there was not a dry eye among us. Finally, we all had the opportunity to meet like-minded people who knew what we were going through. It quickly became clear that there were so many people who would benefit from what we had started, so I decided to found the charity.

### What do you think you've learned about the cancer experience and community from setting up Black Women Rising?

The main thing is that no two people have the same experience, because no two cancer diagnoses are the same. It was so important for me to find a way to provide a sisterhood, a sense of togetherness. Because you need that, you need your cancer buddies.

### What would you like people who are coping with cancer or coming to terms with a diagnosis to know?

That they are not alone. Being diagnosed with cancer can be incredibly lonely but there is support out there. Finding like-minded people to talk to, spend time with and support each other is priceless.

### What do you feel are the biggest challenges for the Black community when it comes to cancer?

Even in 2022, the Black community is plagued with myths and taboos. Black cancer patients are not as willing to speak out as their voices are not as welcomed or supported. This means that raising awareness is that much harder for the Black community. This lack of awareness is what has led to the stark statistics which show that Black cancer patients are being diagnosed later and have worse outcomes than our white counterparts. This needs to change.

### Are there any changes you would like to see in the approach to cancer treatment in the UK?

Sadly I experienced, and we still see first-hand, the racial disparities in healthcare in the UK for Black patients. More needs to be done to educate healthcare professionals. The literature needs to be updated. I would also love to see suitable wigs and prosthetics for Black patients being more widely and readily available.

### How do you find nourishment in your life and how would you suggest those facing cancer can nourish themselves?

For me, nourishment comes from so many different sources... the support of those who love us and taking the time to practice daily gratitude would be top of my list.

### How do people get involved with Black Women Rising's support groups and networks?

Our website has a wealth of information about our projects and support groups.

People can also follow our social media and support us by sharing posts to help us reach others. And of course, all donations are welcome as we rely on these to continue the work we do.

[blackwomenrising.org](https://blackwomenrising.org)

Instagram

[@blackwomenrisinguk](https://www.instagram.com/blackwomenrisinguk)





## Artwork and Words by Trudie Harrod

Following surgery and then chemo I faced long days where I didn't feel well enough to do much at all, but also became frustrated that I wasn't achieving anything.

A few of my friends are 'proper artists' and encouraged me to get creative. I attempted small projects with their guidance and support, things that I could pick up and put down if I got tired.

I don't think of myself as an artist at all, but have enjoyed being creative whilst I've been having cancer treatment and beyond. I think it's helped me stay sane! I love the distraction, relaxation and sense of accomplishment

art has brought me. I pop my favourite music on, drink endless cups of tea and lose myself for a few hours. It has become something I thoroughly enjoy and a new passion.



I have been making copies of my friends' horses who helped me through my cancer treatment to say thank you to them.

I sadly found two sheep skulls walking my dog. I wanted to turn a negative into a positive through art and so decorated them. Now they are beautiful and can be admired once again.



This fold-out contains images of a woman post-mastectomy surgery, which may be difficult for some viewers. We have included the images within this fold-out to feature them sensitively.

If you are going through surgery and are in need of support, please see the list of resources at the back of the magazine.



# Perfectly flawed

By Jacqui Taylor





Photography by Cecilia Costello Photography

The Nourish issue

flourish



# Perfectly flawed

By Jacqui Taylor

There is something strangely liberating about the fact there is nothing I can do to change it. The scar on my chest where my right breast used to be. No diet, magic pill or remedy.

I have developed a fondness for my asymmetry. My self care is focused on nurturing my scar – the tissue, the skin, the surrounding fascia. To regain the length, mobility and strength that I lost through yoga, manual therapy, open water swimming and weight training. Allowing myself to settle into this body. I'm not seeking to return to how it was. It is simply different, yet it is still me.

The decision to not reconstruct was relatively simple. My priority is to move and take part in the activities that nourish me, so using one of my shoulder muscles to make a breast never felt like a viable option.

As a woman, I've never been completely happy with my body, despite always being slim and fit. Yet I now know that how my body is means very little, if anything, about who I am. I accept all the lumpy, bumpy, slightly

saggy bits; the essence of me is not influenced by my physical appearance.

Chemotherapy treatment strips you back to the bare bones. It forces you to see unreservedly who you are. In doing so, I found a place to take so much care of myself that I love me and cherish my body. By listening and paying attention, I am guided to what I need.

Creating these images to capture this new spirit as I was surfacing from the treatment allowed me to witness this emerging self. To the outside world, I can create the impression that there is nothing amiss. However, I wear my prosthesis infrequently, preferring to show up as I am. Almost a badge of honour; proof that I have survived this journey. There is nothing to fix, nothing to change. I am here and I am whole.

## Artwork and Words by Heather Engel

In July 2021, I was diagnosed with a recurrence of liposarcoma – and if that wasn't enough of a blow – in October I was also diagnosed with breast cancer in both breasts.

In 2022, I had both a lumpectomy of my right breast and a mastectomy and reconstruction of my left breast. I am still recovering physically, emotionally and psychologically.

Earlier this year I began drawing doves whilst anxiously waiting to hear whether my ONC scores were high enough for me to benefit from chemotherapy. I used one of these drawings as a template to cut out 23 dove bodies. I then took each of my appointment letters in date order and re-read them, before folding each one and inserting it into a dove's body for her wings. I numbered every dove on its tail and wrote the date and type of appointment on its body.

Turning my pile of appointment letters into a flight of doves has really helped my mind catch up and come to terms with what's happened to me.



I named my flight of doves after all the amazing women and men who are supporting me, hanging them from the ceiling of my studio to remind me just how far I have come.



This is my first Dove – Heidi. Her wings are my invitation letter to make a mammogram appointment. Without Heidi to remind me that a mammogram could save my life, I wouldn't be writing to you now and my tumours would be silently growing.



Please note, this piece contains references to death and depression. If you are struggling with any of the themes raised in this piece and looking for support, please see the list of resources at the back of the magazine.

## Kidding me

By Richard Austin

You must be joking  
You want me to live  
Like this?!  
A shadow  
Not alive or dead  
Passionless and sad  
Saved for what?  
Some daily routine opera?  
You had better  
Come up with something better!  
Or I will leave sooner than later!  
I find something to say everyday  
I still see beyond all this  
I love and feel deeply as ever  
I bow and respect the way and the path  
Yet walking in circles  
With this sad poet going nowhere  
Longing to return to open fields...  
It's all wearing thin...  
This long goodbye!

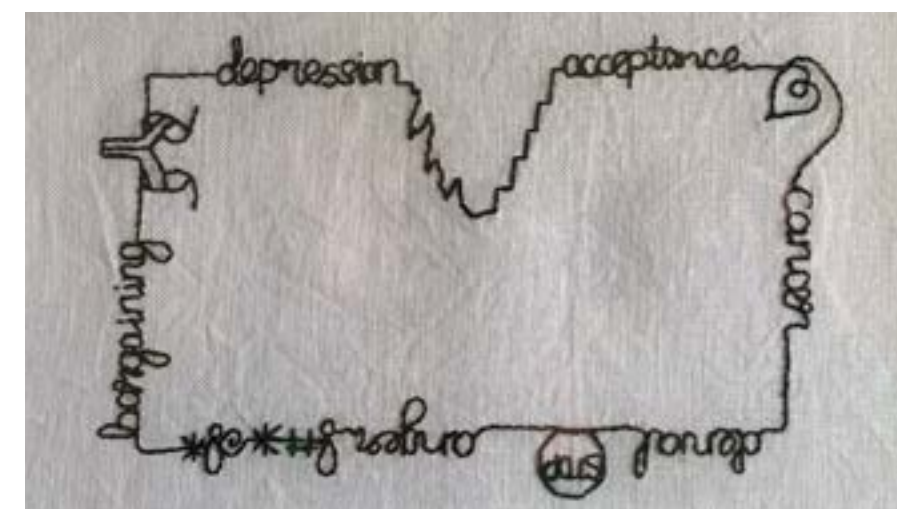


## Cancer any way up

I am a 50 year old woman living with my partner, three cats, and a terminal cancer diagnosis. I have lived in Gloucestershire for almost 20 years now and consider this to be my true home. I spend a great deal of my time now using art and creativity to process my thoughts and feelings about cancer.

I created this piece around the theme of cancer and the five stages of grief – as originally described in the book *On Death and Dying* by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. It was originally worked in ink on paper, which I later transposed to stitching directly onto linen.

The circle linking the



stages describes the endless journey we take through these emotions – sometimes going forward, sometimes backtracking, but always passing through the heart, which

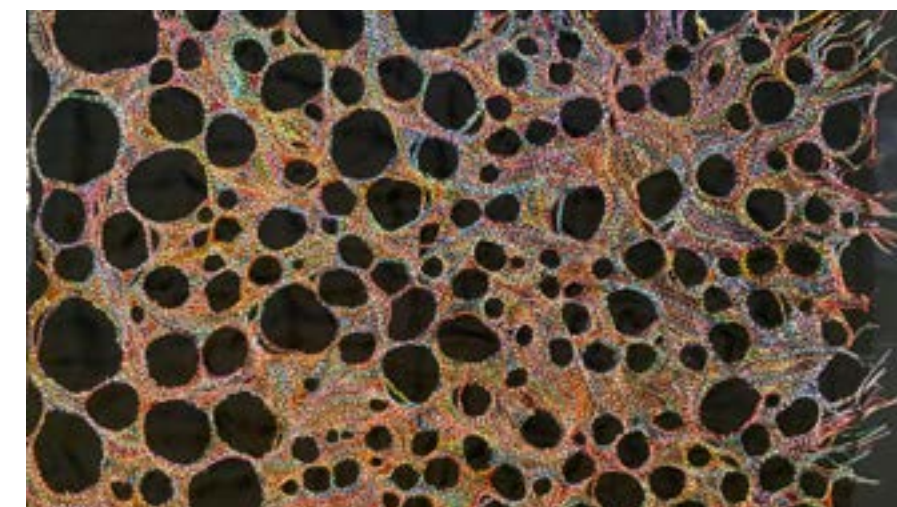
represents our need for love and support through seemingly overwhelming circumstances.

**Artwork and Words**  
by Annie Gotts

## Acquiescence

When I was diagnosed with late-stage clear cell ovarian cancer in 2019 and unable to progress with chemotherapy due to multiple sensitivity reactions, embroidery became one of my primary soothe mechanisms.

Changes to my medication contributed to a worsening of the arthritis in my hands, so I could no longer easily use an embroidery frame. In response, I developed stitching techniques where no frame is used, but instead the textile surface can ripple with and respond to the stitches, evoking the surrendering of control that living with cancer



is teaching me.

I was told that this cancer was deemed quiescent in 2021 and this embroidery: 'ac-quiescence' was my response to help me contain the feeling that I was

hosting an undetectable, unpredictable and untreatable 'bomb' that may go off at any time.

**Artwork and Words**  
by Joanna Wilde





## Not sure what to say? Put it in a letter

**An interview with From Me to You Letters co-founder Brian Greenley  
By Natalie Beech**

From Me to You Letters was set up in 2017 by recovered cancer patient Brian Greenley and his friend Alison Hitchcock, with the hope of inspiring people to write letters to friends and family members with cancer. In just five years this has grown into a truly international community of

5,000 letter writers, who've penned an astounding 25,000 letters between them, sent anonymously to people with cancer across the UK.

Brian and Alison first met at a yoga retreat six months before Brian was diagnosed with Stage 3 bowel cancer in 2010. They'd kept in

touch since, meeting for the occasional drink, but knew each other so little that when Brian got his diagnosis he was in two minds as to whether to tell Alison at all.

"I ended up telling her and the interesting reply I got back was, I'm going to write letters to you to cheer you up. I think she did it because

she didn't know what else to say... Two weeks later, a handwritten letter arrived on my doormat from Alison, and it did cheer me up, it was funny."

That was the first of over 100 letters Alison wrote to Brian during his treatment. Exhausted and struggling to find anything he wanted to talk about, Brian never wrote back, and yet the letters came regardless. He quickly realised this offered him the pleasure of company without the burden of needing to give anything in return.

"I would always make sure to take a couple of unopened letters to take with me to treatment. It was like having her with me, without having to actually take her. I never wanted anybody to have to sit in that room with the blue chair and watch me being unwell. I would feel that I'd have to entertain them, it was like an added responsibility that I really didn't want."

Alison wrote to Brian between his diagnosis in 2010 and him finally getting the all-clear in 2013. With Brian well again, Alison stopped writing. It was years until their experience came up again, when an opportunity to discuss their letter-fuelled friendship on BBC Radio 4's Listening Project arose in 2016.

Fascinated by their story, the programme's producer encouraged them to do something more with the idea. Both were at a loose

end as to what, until a neighbour of Alison's told her he wanted to follow her lead by writing letters to an overseas friend with cancer. Alison helped him get started, and from that conversation Alison and Brian set up From Me to You, initially a charity to encourage and inspire people to write to family members and friends with cancer.

Interest grew and grew, until they realised that there were many people without anyone in their lives with cancer that still wanted to pen letters. They came up with their Donate a Letter campaign, where anyone, anywhere in the world can write an anonymous letter to someone with cancer. With a community of 5,000 letter writers this has become a sizeable undertaking, with a team of volunteers reading, packaging and sending the letters out, supported by donations to the charity.

So, what is it about their idea that's inspired this army of scribblers? What makes letter writing special?

"There is something around putting pen to paper in an environment where we're very much focused on mobile phones, texting and email. In a letter you have more space. You can make it your own creative experience, and because it's anonymous, you don't get any feedback about it. It allows you to be free to do whatever you want to."

For many, the difficulty

of not knowing what to say or how to help someone with a cancer diagnosis can mean they do nothing at all. As Brian explains, this often leaves people with cancer isolated and wondering why.

"My view is that it's not okay to do nothing, it's just not okay, because the person who has cancer won't know what's happening. They're isolated and yet, life goes on around them."

From Me to You has created a space where it's easy to do something. For anyone keen to join their ranks, From Me to You host free online workshops to help people get going, as well as sending new letter writers a starter pack with hints and tips, the backstory of the charity, and even a little piece of stationery.

"What we tend to say to people is keep it simple, you know, don't over engineer it. Often the simple things are the nicest things. So if you're a cancer patient and you're in hospital or in your hospice, you're looking out your window and you can't see very much, and someone writes to you about what's happening in their garden, you know, the daffodils are out, or there's a real smell of fresh cut grass, that can immediately transport somebody to somewhere else."

**Head to [frommetoyouletters.co.uk](http://frommetoyouletters.co.uk) to find out more, donate or sign up as a letter writer.**





**Artwork and Words  
by Susannah Goulding  
IG: @susannahgoulding**

Addressing my cancer through art nourishes me physically, mentally, and perhaps even spiritually.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2015 aged 48 and had what I thought was a successful mastectomy, followed by chemo and radiotherapy. I thought I had 'got away with it' and was cancer free, but widespread metastatic spread to my bones, my spine, ribs, pelvis, and leg in 2018. I am now living with cancer.

I feel passionately that the dominant language and images used to describe cancer need to be challenged and



re-addressed creatively through art.

I take my lead from Susan Sontag's *Illness as Metaphor*. I believe we need to re-define how we see and talk about cancer, so we do not simply use negative, patriarchal military terms like 'battle' and 'fight'. We need to change the conversation, directly address the taboo subject and make it our own by developing a new visual language.

To me, these words are epic and rich, but currently invisible in our culture when we talk about cancer: It's about letting go, being turned inside out, facing

the unknown, finding strength, feeling pain, allowing yourself to fall, feeling the depth of love, feeling loss, screaming, struggle finding strength, allowing for weakness, being cut open, being in limbo, seeing beauty in unexpected places, being invaded, decay, growth, trauma, grieving what I have lost in my soul, the light in the darkness, it's fragility, piecing things together, anger, fear, seeing light where there is darkness, and much, much more.... It's about seeing the world in a new light.





In December 2021, I reached five years since receiving a terminal prognosis. Back in 2016, I was registered at hospice and had not been expected to last 18 months.

I have been NED (no evidence of disease) for years now and told that the cancer has only a 10% chance of returning – I have

been given permission to believe that I can live again.

During those five years, I have had to learn to nourish myself on every single level. Cancer can be a lonely journey, and finding nourishment is critical if we are to survive cancer. These drawings enable me to get in touch with being held.

They connect with the

part of me that is being held by something much larger than the human form. Source, God, whatever you might like to call it, can soothe our hearts, melt the fear, give us faith and help us to believe that healing is possible.

**Artwork and Words  
by Julie Mason**



## Q&A: Macmillan Next Steps Gloucestershire

Macmillan Next Steps is an NHS specialist cancer rehabilitation service which supports anyone living in Gloucestershire who has been diagnosed with breast, colorectal, prostate or a haematological cancer.

You can use the service if you are 18 or above, live in Gloucestershire and/or are registered with a GP practice within Gloucestershire. We spoke to Health and Wellbeing Facilitator Heather Goldsmith and Cancer Specialist Physiotherapist Annie Brown about the service and how it supports those going through cancer.

### What is Macmillan Next Steps and what do you offer?

**A:** Macmillan Next Steps is a wonderful rehabilitation service based in Gloucester, offering hope and advice to people who have been through cancer diagnosis and treatment and their loved ones.

**H:** We are a multi-disciplinary team of people able to offer a range of support, such as one-to-one calls or group workshops, for those who have undergone cancer treatment, providing you with tools to manage your rehabilitation and personalise the recovery process.

### Who can get involved with Macmillan Next Steps?

**A:** Patients, partners, husbands, wives, children, the list goes on! Being a holistic service we try to put the individual and their families at the heart of everything we do.

**H:** We currently see those who have finished

their 'active' treatment, or may also be on maintenance or palliative treatment. Currently, we are open to those who have been diagnosed with breast, prostate, colorectal, gynaecological or haematological cancer. However, this may develop and expand over time, so if you have any questions about this please do give us a ring.

### Do you think creativity can support people going through cancer?

**H:** I think that creativity can be threaded through all different aspects of recovery. In a practical sense, I have seen the relationship with tactile arts and altered nerve sensation. In an emotional sense, I have often gained a greater understanding of how a person is feeling when looking at their art. I still have a poem which was written at the end of one of our workshops laminated and taped to my folder.

### How can people get involved with Macmillan Next Steps?

**H:** You can call us on **0300 421 6586**, email us at [nextsteps@ghc.nhs.uk](mailto:nextsteps@ghc.nhs.uk), or fill out a self-referral form. If you're curious about what we're up to, we also have a Facebook page you can follow.

**A:** No question, no matter how big or small, is a silly one and if the answer helps improve quality of life, reduce anxiety or help shape a healthy lifestyle, then we are always here to help.

# Contribute to Flourish: The Connections Issue

We are looking for submissions of artwork, photography, creative or personal writing, film and audio for Issue 2 of Flourish Magazine, a magazine by and for the cancer community, around the theme of **Connections**.

You do not need any prior experience to submit something to the magazine.

Connection is a vital part of what makes life worth living, whether that's connecting with others, ourselves or our environment. We want to know what connections have supported you through your experience with cancer and invite contributions from those living with or beyond cancer, those living in relation to it, i.e. a friend or family member of someone with cancer, as well as those working with people with cancer such as healthcare professionals.

For this second issue, we would like to feature a dialogue between a healthcare professional and cancer patient based in Gloucestershire, discussing each other's experience of cancer. If you are a healthcare professional or cancer patient and would like to be a part of this, please contact Editor-in-Chief Natalie Beech on [flourish.mag@artlift.org](mailto:flourish.mag@artlift.org).

All submissions must be sent to [flourish.mag@artlift.org](mailto:flourish.mag@artlift.org) by **10pm, 1st August 2022**.

You can read the full submission criteria on the Artlift website at [artlift.org](http://artlift.org). If you have any questions or queries about the submission process, whether you or your submission meets the eligibility criteria, please don't hesitate to contact us on [flourish.mag@artlift.org](mailto:flourish.mag@artlift.org).

**Please note that this is an unpaid opportunity.** Contributors will receive a free copy of the magazine and will be credited appropriately.

If you are a health and care professional, nutritionist or therapist and would like to be interviewed for the magazine, please contact Editor Natalie Beech on [flourish.mag@artlift.org](mailto:flourish.mag@artlift.org).

We will let all applicants know whether their submission has been selected for the print and/or digital version of the magazine by 8th August 2022.

We are particularly interested in submissions from Black, Asian and ethnically diverse communities, d/Deaf and disabled communities, the LGBTQ+ community and those living in the Gloucestershire area.

## Resources

Below is a list of resources and organisations we've compiled to help support you through cancer, from national organisations to Gloucestershire-based ones for those living in the area.

### Beyond Conventional Cancer Therapies [bcct.ngo](http://bcct.ngo)

Comprehensive, online, science-informed source for integrative cancer therapies.

### Cancer Care Map [cancercaremap.org](http://cancercaremap.org)

Online resource that aims to help you find cancer support services in your local area

### Charlie's [charlies.org.uk](http://charlies.org.uk)

Community cancer support and therapy centre based in Gloucestershire.

### Flourish [artlift.org/artlift-programmes/flourish](http://artlift.org/artlift-programmes/flourish)

Artlift's Arts on Prescription programme delivered online and in Matson, Gloucester.

### Focus [gloshospitals.nhs.uk/our-services/services-we-offer/cancer/focus](http://gloshospitals.nhs.uk/our-services/services-we-offer/cancer/focus)

Charitable fund for the Gloucestershire Oncology Centre providing extra care for cancer patients.

### Gloucestershire Cancer Exercise [gloscancerexercise.org.uk](http://gloscancerexercise.org.uk)

Exercise sessions for those living with and beyond cancer in Gloucestershire.

### Great Oaks Dean Forest Hospice [great-oaks.org.uk](http://great-oaks.org.uk)

Gloucestershire-based hospice offering a free range of services for adults with life limiting illness.

### LGBT+ Experiences of Cancer [lgbcancer.wordpress.com](http://lgbcancer.wordpress.com)

[livethroughthis.co.uk](http://livethroughthis.co.uk)  
Personal stories and helpful resources about living with or beyond cancer.

### Longfield Community Hospice Care [longfield.org.uk](http://longfield.org.uk)

Free care and support for adults living with life-limiting illness in Gloucestershire.

### Maggie's [maggies.org](http://maggies.org)

Charity that provides free cancer support and information in centres across the UK and online.

### Penny Brohn UK [pennybrohn.org.uk](http://pennybrohn.org.uk)

UK Charity providing free, integrative care to those living with cancer.

### Sex with Cancer [sexwithcancer.com](http://sexwithcancer.com)

Campaign exploring how people living with and beyond cancer can take agency over their health and wellbeing.

### Your Circle [yourcircle.org.uk](http://yourcircle.org.uk)

A directory of care and support, connecting with people, places and activities in Gloucestershire.

### Yes to Life [yestolife.org.uk](http://yestolife.org.uk)

UK integrative cancer care charity; services include Gloucestershire-based Wigwam cancer support groups.



We would love to hear your thoughts on the pilot issue of Flourish Magazine! Scan this QR code to take our quick survey and let us know your feedback.



flourish



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