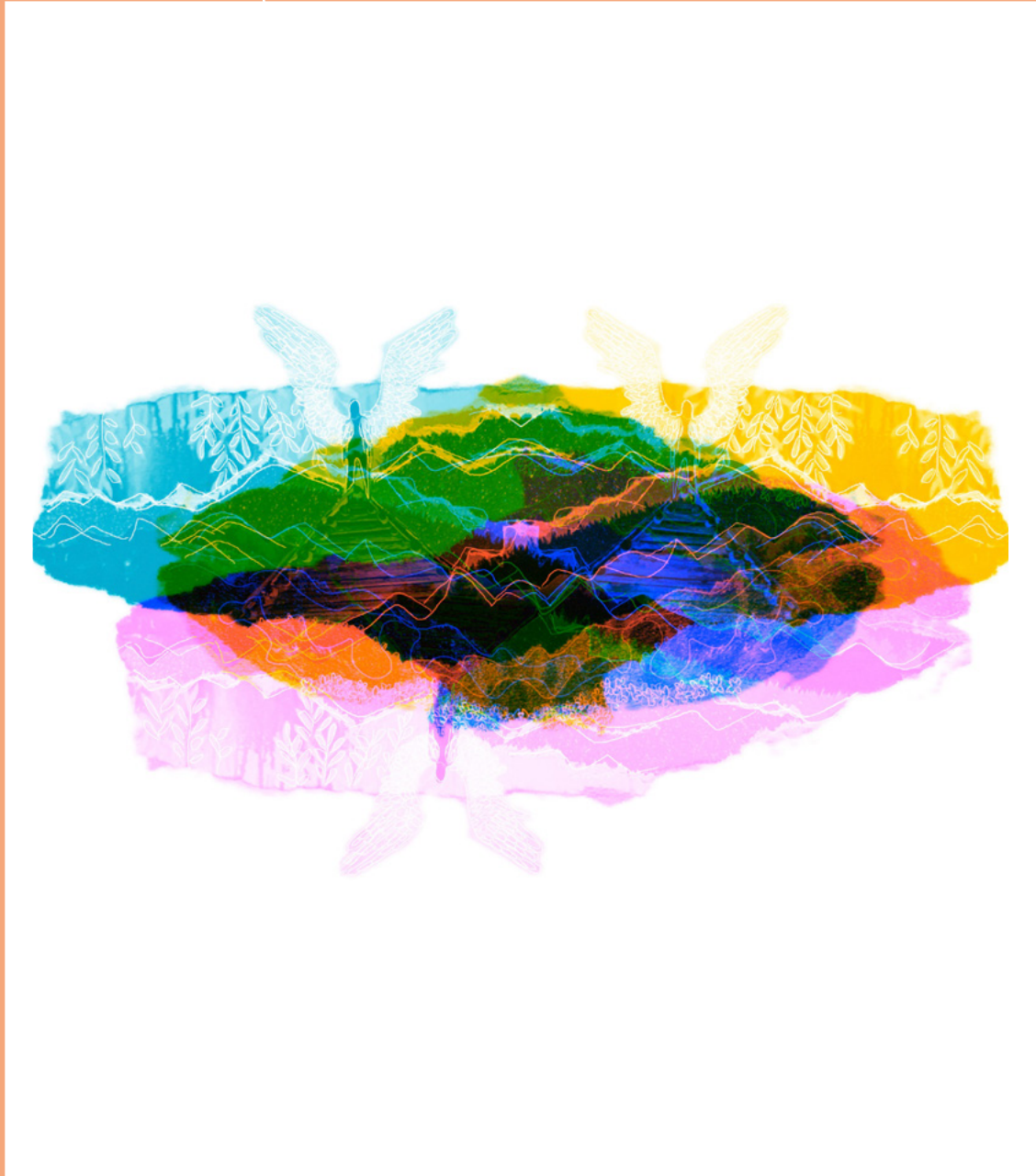


flourish

A creative magazine by and for the cancer community



● The power of community to save lives

● Why creativity should be part of standard cancer care

● How do you find connection? Our contributors answer

● Art that brings us together

● You are not alone: resources and support

THE CONNECTIONS 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

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

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-informed 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 Connections Issue

Hello and welcome to the second issue of Flourish Magazine, a 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.

In this issue we explore the theme of 'Connections', inspired by Yes to Life's September 'Finding a Deeper Connection' conference, looking at how we connect to ourselves, our communities, our bodies, our minds and our environment in the face of cancer.

For each issue of the magazine we run an open call for submissions from people with lived experience of cancer around our theme and – much like our first edition – we received an incredibly creative and inspiring range of responses. From meditation to Morris dancing, the submissions we chose show the true scope of the cancer experience and highlight the importance of connection in our lives.

Receiving a cancer diagnosis can isolate us at exactly the moment we need to connect. The weight of the word 'cancer' and its implications might feel like a heavy load to impart,

encouraging us to remove ourselves from our usual activities or try to manage on our own. Yet if this issue is anything to go by – making connections is as vital as eating, sleeping and breathing.

You'll see how creative projects and support groups can empower us to find friends, joy and expression through cancer treatment and recovery, how community work can provide an essential lifeline for cancer patients, and how connecting with our minds, bodies and nature can bring us peace and improve our overall wellbeing. At the back of the magazine you'll also find a list of resources, which includes support for those going through cancer. Let this issue be a rallying cry – you are absolutely not alone!

We aim to show a diverse range of responses to the cancer experience and as such have included submissions with dark and challenging themes, all of which come with content warnings.

Make sure you also check out our online content, such as music and blog posts, released weekly on the Artlift and Yes to Life websites. If you have a moment, please take our short survey on the magazine by scanning the QR code on the back cover. Thank you for reading!

Natalie Beech
Editor-in-Chief

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Editor-in-Chief

Natalie Beech

Graphic Designer

Adam Pickering

Illustrator

Sean Battle

Artlift Project Coordinator

Helen Crocker

Yes to Life Project Coordinator

Philip Booth

Steering Group

Annie Gotts, Heather Goldsmith, Helen Crocker, Helen Sainsbury, Kathy Tasker, Jacqui Taylor, Philip Booth

Cover Image

Nina Moore

"I find connection through shared learning and discussion with others. My book club and Artilift course have been particularly helpful examples."



"For me, my friends have kept me feeling connected to the world."

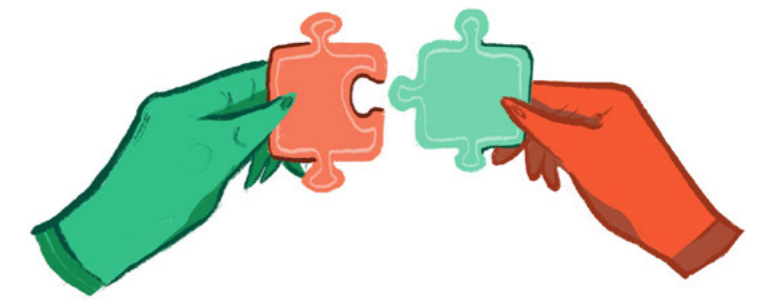
How do you find connection?

We asked this issue's contributors how they find connection in their daily lives. Here are their answers...



"I find connection in all things creative. Creativity is my life force and the golden thread that connects me to everyone and everything in this beautiful world."

"Talking with my family and finding out that we have more things in common than I previously realised!"



"I find connection through my art – my hands are often better able to express my emotions towards my loved ones than my voice."

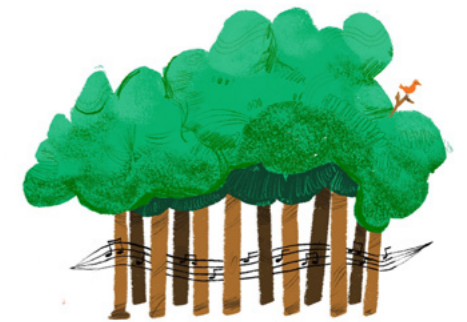
"Connection is anything that makes my heart skip a beat. Being in nature or listening to music do it for me. There's nothing like dancing around the woods with my headphones in!"

"I've found connection through vulnerability. The more I shared my authentic and sometimes painful truths about cancer, the more people I found who understood me."

"Music and fragrance often connect me to precious memories."

"Connection for me really starts with the land beneath my feet, and then my body, and then I can connect in a deeper way with the people who come into my day."

"Sharing experiences, stories and happiness with the people I love the most."



"I walk regularly in landscapes that I know well, responding to the time of day, the light and shadows, the season and the weather. It keeps me calm and nourishes me. These are the places and views that I go to and paint."

"Be open to the new. Just be yourself and let others give you the welcome they want to."



"I sit down... take a deep breath in... and a deep breath out... and listen."

**Artwork and Words
by Amanda Lee**

I live on my own on a farm in Victoria, Australia, 500 metres from the beach. Geographically, I feel very disconnected from the world.

Art therapy is my way of connecting with my surroundings, whilst releasing all the emotions that cancer brings up. I've been told that journaling releases adrenaline and I believe art therapy does the same for me. When I spend time in nature, I feel connected to the earth. I don't feel so alone.

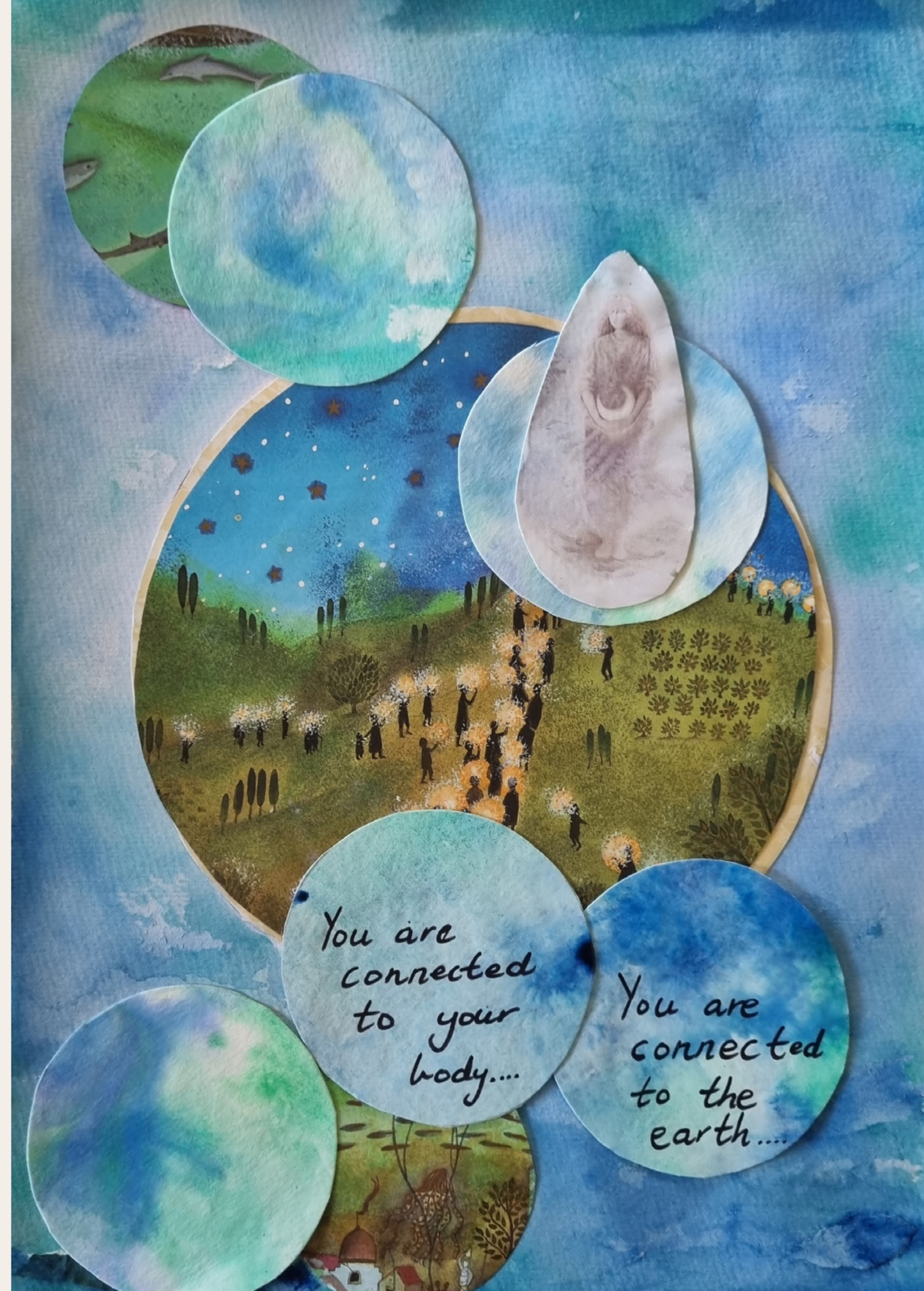
In 2016 I was studying Art Therapy. I had been an art teacher for over 10 years. During the course my mother became unwell and I made the decision to defer the course and become a full time carer for my mother.

After my mother's death, family trauma and upheaval, I never got back to my course, and then I was diagnosed with cancer. I was unwell for a year before I was diagnosed, in and out of hospital. The doctors could not work out what

was wrong with me. I saw so many specialists and had about five other diagnoses before I was finally diagnosed with cancer. A radical hysterectomy and radiation depleted my already sensitive body. It took me six months to recover from the radiation, I still suffer side effects from it and I'm not in the clear yet. I'm now Stage Four.

Art therapy connects me to myself and the environment and strengthens my desire to be here. I'm not physically strong enough to create accomplished art pieces, whereas art therapy brings a freedom from worrying about the outcome of the creation. It keeps me connected to myself on difficult days.

**Follow Amanda on
Instagram at
[@amandawalksandwrites](https://www.instagram.com/amandawalksandwrites)**





How connecting through creativity is helping us through cancer

Birds of a Feather is a collaborative effort between Laura, Sarah, Amanda, and Annie – a group of women who meet online and in person specifically to make and create art in any way or shape or form that inspires them. They work under the group name Kintsugi*.

We initially came together through Artlift, which was running a short and simple Arts on Prescription course for people living with and beyond cancer. We bonded closely over those 10 weeks and, with the guidance and encouragement of our amazing tutor Susie Walker, started to connect (and reconnect) with our creative selves.

Art has given us back our voices and identities. It allows us to switch off from being ill. We can focus on our art, rather than our latest scan or symptoms. Meeting in the company of others who understand what we are each going through provides another outlet for the complex emotions that

serious illness can provoke – we can celebrate, mourn, connect and even find closure through our creativity.

The 'birds' in the title refer to us, the women who made them, while 'of a feather' relates to our shared experiences as women living with cancer. Some of the birds clearly reflect the maker's direct, individual experience of cancer and their treatment, while others represent the creator's feelings and emotions in a more abstract way. Nevertheless, these birds flock together as we their makers do.

We came together because of our diagnoses, but we choose to stay together because of our

shared love of art and creativity. We are connected in a way that is far beyond that which we think Artlift will originally have intended, or could have imagined. As a group, we're immensely grateful for the friendship and connection that Artlift has brought into our lives. We hope that future Artlift groups will find their connections and their creativity too.

*Kintsugi – After the ancient Japanese craft of piecing together broken ceramics with layers of lacquer and gold. This not only makes the piece functional again, but often even more beautiful – not in spite of the repair, but because of it.



Connection to Self

By Jo van der Molen

The world of cancer is so enormous, at times we may feel worlds apart; what type, what stage, what prognosis, what treatment? We compare doctors and diets... how many, how big, how long? But the truth is that we are all connected.

As my beloved mentor, author, speaker and activist Sophie Sabbage said, "We are all terminal". Even if we aren't diagnosed, as folk who have all heard the words, "You have cancer", we're experiencing the same hopes, fears, scars, pressures, dark spaces and

rays of hope.

I don't want to know what you do for a living, what treatment plan you're on, or which supplements you're taking. I want to know what keeps you getting up in the morning and how you navigate those days when it's all too much. I want to connect there, because I've been there too.

I'm all about living with love, realising we're all doing the best we can and that the most important connection is with yourself. Our loved ones can only support us if they know what we need, and we can only communicate that to them if we know how we're feeling.

We depend on our

oncologists to treat us with medicine, but the healing journey is so much more complex. To navigate that requires connection with self, looking inwards and being in tune with what is happening inside us. I believe we need to heal from the inside too, and how can you heal if you're tired, stressed and living in fear? Life doesn't stop because you're ill. Being in touch with how you're feeling and what you need can help you manage the stresses and demands of everyday life.

Self-love is easier said than done when you have cancer. It can make you feel weak and hopeless, a failure because you can't do

what you used to, a burden to others, or otherwise ugly because you have no hair or eyebrows, or you're stick-thin. But part of the healing journey is coming back to yourself and learning to love and nurture yourself like an old friend. Learning when you need to rest, for example, is critical to healing. Accessing that quiet space through prayer or meditation, away from the busy-ness of life, can help you breathe deeper, reflect and find some perspective.

Take a few moments to check in with how you are feeling, start a journal, or just sit and be for a few minutes. Smell the flowers, as they say! Acknowledge how far you've come, rather than berating yourself for what you haven't accomplished. Recreation and hobbies are another way to feed your soul - nurture yourself with nourishing food and friendships.

Now, that's not to say you have to ignore the dark days, or walk around in complete denial (although denial does have its place in the coping process) singing, "Don't worry, be happy!" That's just toxic, aka "Toxic positivity". Be honest with yourself, aware of what you're feeling, show yourself kindness and practise self compassion. Go forth with self-love, and stay connected!

Follow Jo's Facebook Page [Metsters Alive at facebook.com/metstersalive](https://www.facebook.com/metstersalive)



Why creativity should be part of standard cancer care

GP and founder of Artlift Dr Simon Opher explains why creativity should become an integral part of cancer care.



Creative arts are rapidly becoming a mainstay in the treatment of cancer, both in recovery and in improving the quality of life for patients who are palliative.

For years, cancer care has embraced creativity as a way of unlocking the often very complex feelings associated with a cancer diagnosis. In fact, it is only recently that other healthcare sectors have cottoned onto the restorative nature of the arts, pioneered in palliative care.

What is exciting about the arts and how they can therapeutically help people is that they allow



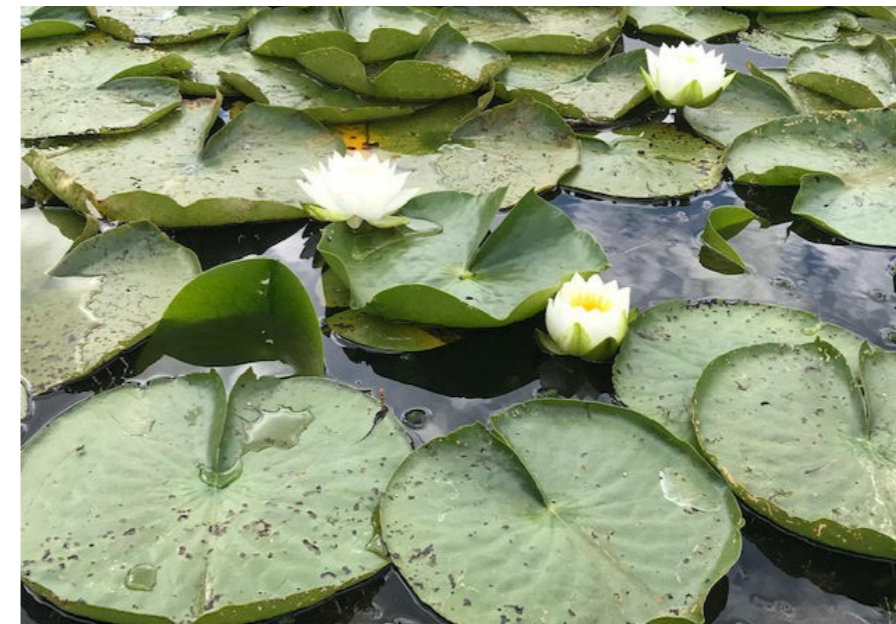
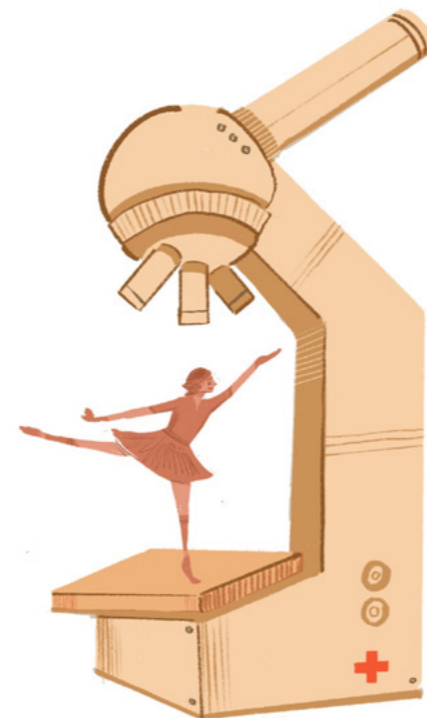
for a wider adjustment to the sudden imposition of illness. All the trips to the doctors, surgery, chemo and radiotherapy – it's all a rush and a blur. Allowing yourself to be immersed in art, be it painting, writing words, crocheting or pottery, gives the mind a state of "flow", whereby your mind becomes looser and less stuck on worries about care and mortality. In addition, there is sometimes a loss of beauty when we become ill, and beauty, if we notice it or try to reproduce it, restores that sense. It can therefore be transformative.

There are many different methods of incorporating arts into cancer care. Flourish, a programme pioneered by Artlift with Macmillan support, involves creative sessions for people who are living with or beyond cancer. It's a remarkable group

that always amazes me in terms of the quality of both their artwork and their interaction.

Another project local to Gloucestershire involved a ballet dancer who had undergone breast cancer surgery, Katherine Macinnes, devising a series of ballet positions that could help relieve contractures and reduce swelling post operatively. Moreover, both projects were fun, and cancer care is very often not fun at all.

In the future, we need to embed arts and creativity into cancer recovery pathways so that all patients can be offered arts sessions as part of standard care. This can be done in hospital wards, outpatient clinics or community settings. Creativity should now be seen not as a fancy add-on to cancer care, but integral to a full holistic recovery.



The lotus flower represents purity as its beauty emerges from murky, muddy waters, and has been revered for its resilience, as well as its exquisite nature. The flower also represents connection, which has an indirect relation to the Buddhist idea of the universal soul.

Image and Words by Jill Goehringer
Follow Jill on Instagram at [@illbag](https://www.instagram.com/illbag)

Dusk at Cranham Common



I did this painting whilst I was having chemotherapy as I had breast cancer. It helped me focus my mind and stay positive to do a series of small paintings locally. They look both peaceful and melancholic to me now. It was 12 years ago.

I studied Fine Art back in the 80s, I continued to paint and ran workshops in the community. When I was diagnosed with breast cancer I had to mostly stop working, but found focusing on a series of landscapes helpful during my treatment.

Artwork and Words by Louise Spira
See more of Louise's work at www.louspiracom



The power of community in saving lives

An interview with Hash Norat
By Natalie Beech

Hash Norat has become somewhat of a local legend in Gloucestershire, so much so that he was chosen to become the Mock Mayor for Gloucester in 2021, a non-political position still involving much mayoral work – opening events, awarding prizes and generally representing and supporting the community.

The role is the result of his community and charity work, which covers so much it's hard to imagine how he has the hours in the day. Hash rose to Gloucestershire notoriety through his volunteer-led organisation Gloucester Feed the Hungry, which provides everything from meals to clothes to free haircuts. Alongside this, he's done extensive work in the cancer space raising awareness of the illness among Black and Asian communities. The cause is close to home after Hash lost his younger sister to breast

cancer at just 39 years old, followed by two more of his sisters being diagnosed with the disease.

"When visiting one of my sisters, I'd asked if she'd been for a mammogram recently. She said, 'Any letter that comes through the letterbox with NHS on it, I literally put it in the bin.' I'm like, 'What?!' And she's coming on to 64, I'm the youngest in the family now. I said 'Why?' and she said, 'I'm always petrified, what if? What if something's not right?' I said, 'No, no, no, just because you may find yourself with an illness, doesn't mean you can't be fixed.'"

Hash started to work with Gloucestershire Royal Hospital and their Macmillan Cancer Hub due to his community connections, in an effort to improve the accessibility of these services. He quickly realised there were obvious barriers preventing people from Black and Asian

communities seeking help for cancer symptoms.

"I looked around the Macmillan Hub and I could not see one leaflet – and there were hundreds and hundreds of different leaflets – where the face on the front of that leaflet was anything other than a white male or female.

"Since then, in two years' time, the most amazing few things have happened. Leaflets have changed, we've had leaflets done in Bengali, Gujarati, Urdu, and about six months ago we did a range of videos in different languages that can be shared on social media. One of the biggest changes I've seen is that we now also have a Muslim woman working at the Macmillan Hub, which is a life changer, isn't it?"

The videos have been shared widely, reaching beyond the UK to countries such as South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Poland, India, Pakistan, America and more. More locally, GRH and Macmillan set up an event at Gloucester venue and halal coffee shop The Friendship Cafe in July this year, where hospital staff offered informal conversations about cancer. Advertised across social media, it was a huge success with many in attendance, showing the lasting impact of Hash's efforts.

"We can improve the support systems in place drastically. Drastically. I'm

just doing my little bit. The main area of Barton where I'm the Mock Mayor, there's over 80 languages spoken in that area, so it's not just about the Black and Asian communities."

One solution Hash is proposing is community champions; people that have been through cancer supporting those recently diagnosed or undergoing treatment and raising awareness among their local communities.

"We need to have people within boroughs, wherever you are, going into schools, businesses, hospitals, sitting in on meetings and ensuring that the wider community knows of the support structure that's out there.

"And have people who have gone through cancer and lived to tell the tale buddy up to someone who's just been diagnosed with cancer. I believe that would be a life changer. They could be the person to pick that person up and take them to their appointment, or be with them through their treatment. It's all about the support network isn't it? Ensuring that people don't feel their life is over, that there is help out there."

Exploring his idea of community champions, Hash recently put out a social media post asking who would be interested in befriending someone ill in hospital, resulting in hundreds of responses.

"That tells me there's people out there who want



to help."

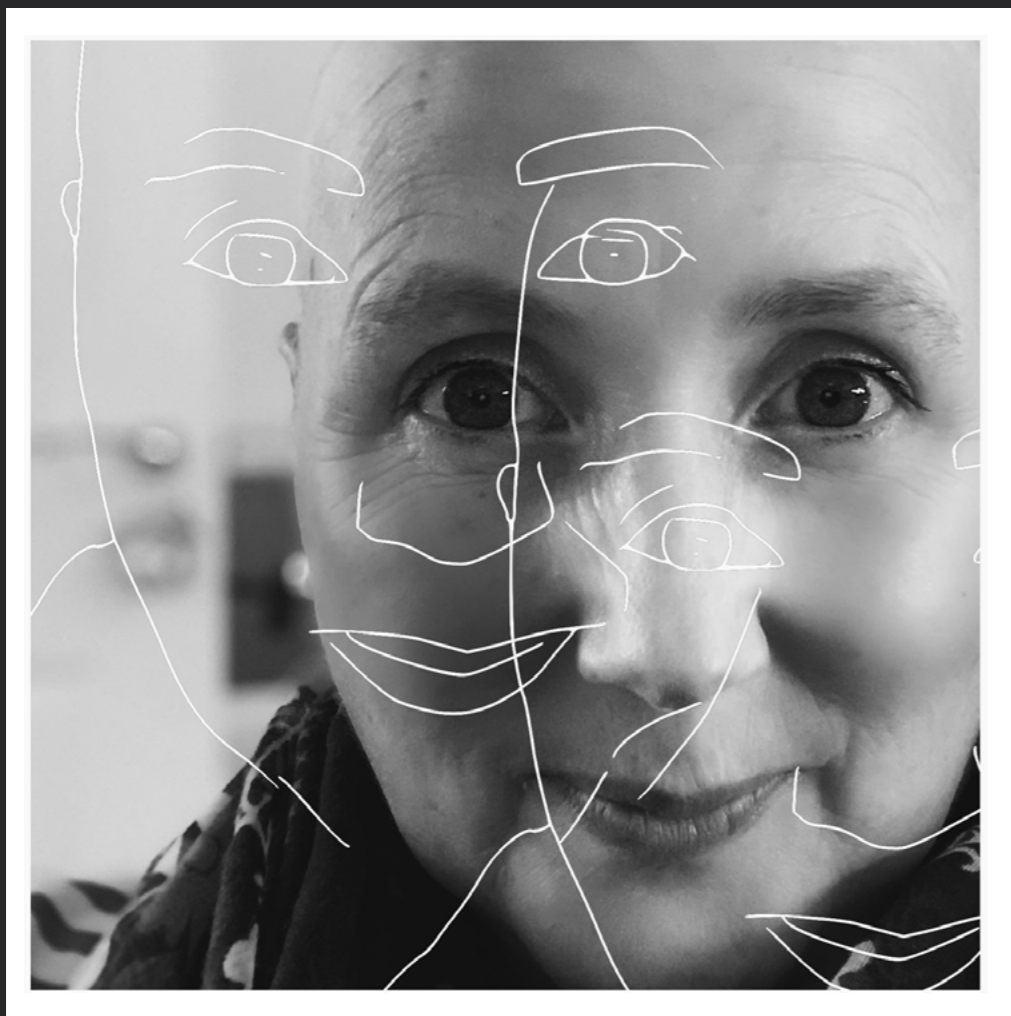
Much of Hash's work is a battle against helplessness, both in caring for those who feel helpless, but also in showing that there is something each of us can do to help, that taking action does make a difference. Hash works day to day as a Production Technology Leader at Unilever (which he somehow also manages the time for) and started his charity work simply because he saw the need for it. Through this desire alone, he has achieved incredible things. So if you're thinking of helping out or volunteering your time, Hash has this advice for you:

"I would say to anyone wanting to go down the route of some of the little bits we've done, just do it. There's nothing more important."

You can see more about Hash Norat's work on Gloucester Feed the Hungry's Facebook Page. Discover Gloucestershire Royal Hospital and Macmillan Hub's services in our Resources page at the back of the magazine.



Please note: this piece contains references to chemotherapy and 'battle' language, which some readers may find difficult. If you are going through chemotherapy and need support, please see the list of resources at the back of the magazine.



Artwork & Words by Nina Moore

I was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer in November 2019 after finding a lump in my breast.

I went through chemotherapy, radiotherapy and surgery during the pandemic and embraced conventional treatment whilst also doing everything in my

power to learn about nutrition and alternative therapeutic healing. I have been in remission for two years now and I am absolutely loving life and thriving.

Throughout my cancer journey I felt an overwhelming desire to write poetry and to express myself artistically as a means of connecting with

and making sense of my story and stitching my past, present and future narrative together with a thread of hope. Through cancer I found myself in the midst of an extraordinary creative tsunami. It is such a privilege to share some fragments of my creative connection with a deeply transformative journey here with you.

From Struggle to Sparkle

By Nina Moore

Broken and frightened,
I arrived at your door,
An injured songbird,
Confused and distraught,
Seeking hope and reassurance,
Treatment,
A cure,
For the cancer residing
deep in my core.

The monster of darkness
residing within,
Would now meet its match
with a chemical toxin,
EC,
Carboplatin,
Paclitaxel,
A Picc,
Through which an elixir so
strong,
Would make me sick.

As I arrived for my
treatment,
You were always there,
With a smile,
A warm welcome,
A display of genuine love
and care.

An oncology angel,
Compassionate and strong,
You wrapped your wings
around me,
As we approached each
furlong,



And as we journeyed
together,
You helped me to belong,
To a community of women,
Connected and united by a
thread of hope,
To kick Cancer's butt
through treatment bespoke.

You helped me to inhale
courage,
To breathe and exhale fear,
You guided and supported
me,
And held my personal health
dear.

My future has been
rewritten,
A new chapter of life begins,
The pause button has been
lifted,
I rise,
I have new wings.

This songbird sings again,
To the beat of my own drum,
Not defined by cancer,
But with a second chance,
To be a mum,
A wife,
A daughter,
A friend and sister,
A wild force with ambition,
Oh how I have missed her.

From struggle to sparkle,
We have journeyed together,
As our paths now divide,
I will hold you forever,
In my heart and my
memories,
An angel indeed,
That took me in injured,
And with love set me free.

The Letter C

By Nina Moore

Dear Alphabet,
Why have you chosen to dress the ominous 'C',
in shrouded darkness and sinister ambiguity?
The Big 'C' is an aphotic and unwelcome visitor,
A curse.
Waltzing carefree into our lives at an unpropitious moment,
Shattering life's fragile equilibrium,
And propagating fear and alarm in its deathly wake.
It started with Cancer,
Then Coronavirus.
What is it with this corrupting and contagious letter?
The preferred alphabetical choice for all things carcinogenic and
cruel,
To candidly describe candescent cellular catastrophe and carnage,
Corrosive and cold-hearted,
Creating calamity at best,
Chaos and Cataclysmic terror at worst.
But like all letters,
I can now see,
From dark to light the colour of 'C' can represent hope,
From charcoal to cherry-blossom pink, chartreuse and sky blue cyan,
A CURE maybe?
A future,
Conjuring canty cheerful images,
Of clouds and candy,
Chocolate and cream,
Creativity, curiosity and cake.
Community with compassion,
Connected,
Ceaseless,
Alive and Care-free,
Can-do,
Courageously wild and cosmic,
Calm,
Clinquant,
A champion and survivor of the letter C,
With all its curative qualities.





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

Final Dialogues

Words by Rose Maher

Final Dialogues is a series of paintings first shown at Lansdown Gallery in Stroud in September 2019. The work was inspired by the death (and life) of Carry Franklin who was a great friend and artist (and many other things besides), who died of cancer on June 4th 2019 at the age of 47. The paintings were a response to what happened before she died and the process that I went through to connect to her. I began these paintings on the day that I thought would be the last time I would see her, however, sadly she was not well enough for my visit (luckily I did get another chance to say goodbye).

I came home and painted for hours using the same paintbrush and black Indian ink. There was really nothing else I could do and there was no thinking involved. I was in a very deep state, facing the reality that she was going to die, that it was likely to be very soon and that I would never see her again. I contemplated my own loss, as well as the journey that she was about to embark on and how that might unfold for both us. We had spoken a

little about death and she was largely unafraid.

Our connection and friendship had been very strong from the day we met during Freshers Week at Leeds University in 1993. Carry was a maverick and a soulmate. We could always pick up from where we left off or start from somewhere completely new. We had separate lives, living in different places, but remained very close friends, always having fun when we saw each other, exploring ideas, having adventures, laughing, crying and encouraging each other. The last point was very important for me; she had total faith in me.

Her death remains a mystery and there are still no words to express what she meant, or how touched I was by her and her life. All of that continues, but just in a different way – as if a baton has been passed on. Even this morning in the garden doing my morning movement, I could feel her and the tears rolled down my face as if she was standing next to me. I can hear her voice now and her laughter and her presence very clearly. Her

irreverence and depth and usual genius sense of the left field and the unexpected. I am so grateful to have known her and to have had her in my life. She was adored by so many people and her courage and enthusiasm lives on in all of us.

This work feels like a co-creation between the two of us. I could not have done them without her and I feel very much that they came through me. I realise now that despite the title, there is really nothing final about it, although I could not have known that at the time. It was profound to share this work in an exhibition and to have people talk about their responses to it. It took courage to show them and to reveal something so personal and raw. It was only when I came to put them on the walls for the exhibition that I realised there were 47 paintings, the age Carry was when she died.

Rose Maher is an artist living in Stroud. She is currently in the second year of the Advanced Studies Program at the Barbara Brennan School of Healing based in Oxford.



This is what makes my heart sing

By Amanda Harper

"Happy Birthday!" Along with the traditional breakfast in bed, there in front of me was a HUGE box, beautifully wrapped and frankly demanding to be opened immediately. The shiny black and chrome melodeon that I lifted out was exhilarating and terrifying at the same time, but I had the strongest feeling that this was something that could become a powerful force in my life and could actually save it.

Curious? A melodeon is a diatonic button accordion. At that very moment, I couldn't even get a note out of it. Like all perfect presents, there had been a lead-up to it. I wasn't big on folk music at the time, but there was a melodeon track that got played a lot in our house by Andy Cutting – *Le Gabier de Terre Neuve* – a soft and haunting track about the hardships endured by seafarers in the last century – which made me want to (uncharacteristically) weep for the hardships of all humanity, my own being at the centre of it.

In the previous six months I had been diagnosed with breast cancer, which had spread to the lymph nodes. I had undergone three operations in six months, with no certainty that I was cured. I was at a critical point faced by so many cancer patients, wondering just how long I had actually got.

Up to diagnosis, family and work had been the focus of my life. Much as I loved both, I'd had no time for things that were quiet, personal, meditative or restorative. Learning a musical instrument offered me all of these things – and that Andy Cutting track –

well, if I could ever learn to play that! So, as the birthday approached, I dropped some heavy hints.

Family reasons led us soon after to move to another city and the friend who had given me a few melodeon lessons advised me, "The best way to learn this instrument is to join a Morris side." What?! I had always smirked at the old guys in whites and flowery hats, waving their hankies at festivals. I couldn't see myself joining anything like that! And yet, I really did want to play with others, and Morris tunes seemed fairly simple to learn. I looked up Morris sides locally and found a women's only side that looked like a lot of fun. Their Facebook page showed them to be about my age (over 40!) but still energetic and a little crazy.

I rang the contact number. The friendly voice said, "Yes, of course, you'd be welcome to play with us, but we have a rule that all musicians must also



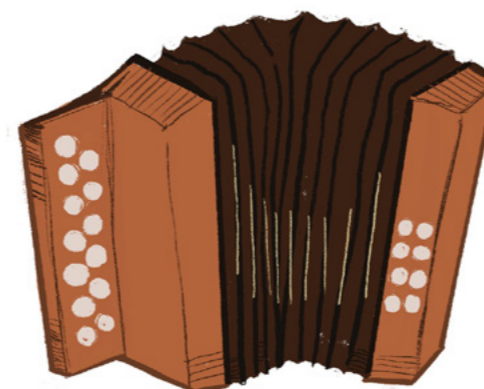
be dancers." I hadn't expected that. But hey, I had been a dancer in the past, ballet and tap lessons as a child, Indian dance lessons as an adult – I could give it a go?

Someone turned up to take me to the practice hall (no getting out of it then). I took a deep breath and just did it...

It's been six years now that I have danced and played with this wonderful group of women. Several of them have also been cancer patients and heartbreakingly, we have even lost one to the illness. We have danced out in pouring rain, baking sun and freezing weather. We have worn our bells and bright kit

with pride in city streets all over the country. We have camped outside and inside halls together, drunk gin and sung silly songs at night. We're not huggers and we sometimes irritate each other, but our fundamental love for one other is fierce and we always help each other out as best as we can.

I have learned a lot on my melodeon and it's still a pleasure and a therapy to practice it. I can competently play for the side when our main musician is absent. I can't yet play that Andy Cutting track, and probably never will. But if you see any photos of me dancing, I'm always smiling. That's because my heart is singing, and I'm still cancer-free.





This poem references mastectomy surgery, which may be difficult for some readers. If you are going through surgery and are in need of support, please see the list of resources at the back of the magazine.

Boobage

By Sheran Joy

There's a fundamental problem
With havin' to lose a tit,
It leaves you feeling bereft, yes
But it's also pretty shit!

Never has the phrase 'boulder holder'
Been so very apt,
As when you load your empty cup
To make you feel intact!

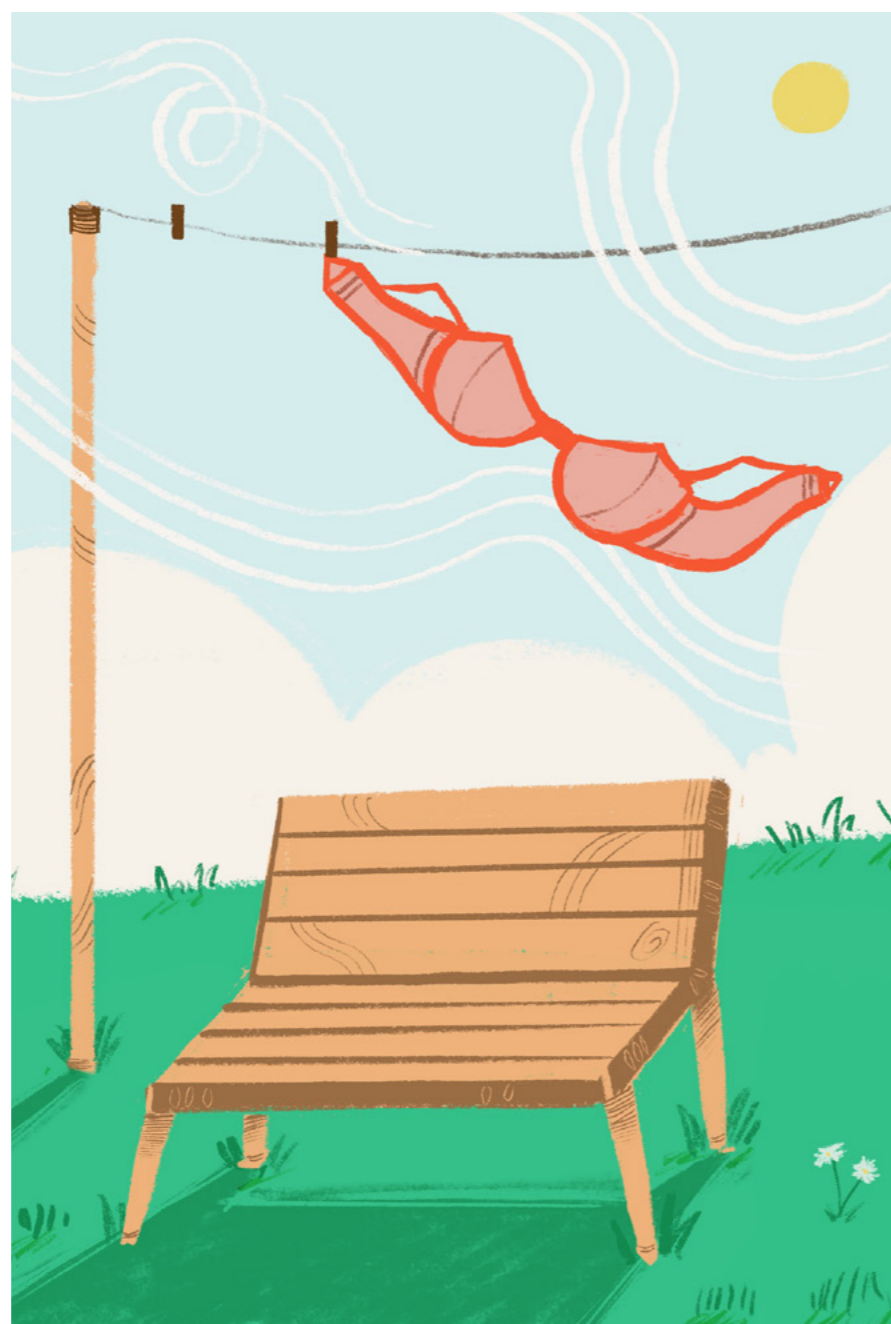
The day goes by no problem,
Folk would say 'who knew?'
But bra removed and lounge wear on
You're really quite askew!

There are many different options,
To get you realigned
To give you back your boobage,
Of some or other kind.

I've been pondering for a while now,
And come to the decision that,
All options considered,
I think I'm going flat.

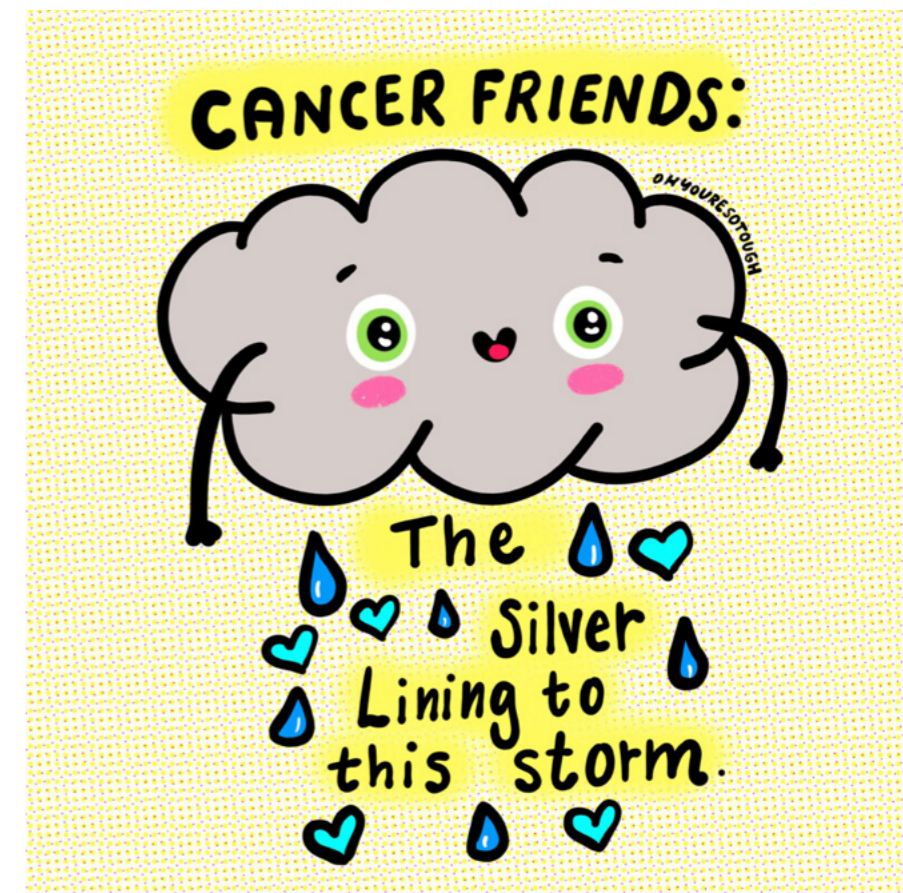
So Cheerio my boobies,
I enjoyed you when you finally came,
You fed both my babies,
So you leave without any shame.

I'm looking forward to symmetry
To choosing to be a buxom wench
Or embracing my new body image
As flat as a park bench!



My name is Chelsey Gomez and I am an artist known as 'Ohyouresotough'. I am a two-time survivor of Hodgkin's Lymphoma and I advocate for the cancer community through my art. I was inspired to create this piece after the passing of one of my close cancer friends. Nobody would ever voluntarily join this "cancer club", but through cancer I have met some of the most amazing people. They are truly the silver lining to the storm that is cancer.

**Artwork and Words
by Chelsey Gomez**
Follow Chelsey on
Instagram and Twitter at
@ohyoursotough



Unfortunately I have been affected by cancer, diagnosed in September 2019 with Stage Three bowel cancer, but thankfully treated at the brilliant Royal Marsden Hospital.

My treatment plan kicked off with six weeks of radiotherapy and as the world descended into lockdown, I had just started my chemotherapy. During this period I was desperate to press on with my artwork and give something back to this amazing hospital that had looked after and still does look after me so well. In a bid to do so, I set up a fundraising campaign, producing artwork daily for a month which was then sold, with all proceeds going to Marsden. I enlisted

the help of my mother and niece (also artists) and we produced a work a day to a theme devised by me. All artwork had sold by day five, within minutes. It felt brilliant and certainly helped to keep my mind off feeling unwell (as well of course as my little girl!).

This little artwork was produced during my treatment - a dedication to my husband who was so stoic and hands on with our little girl, who turned two halfway through my treatment. They really were guiding forces in helping me to battle through and feel as best I could.

**Artwork and Words
by Daisy Simpson**
Follow Daisy on Instagram
at **@daisysimmo**

Yes to Life's Wigwam Support Groups

Yes to Life's Wigwam support groups are available online and in-person and provide a space for people to receive support and inspiration from others and share what they are learning about lifestyle changes that support their health and wellbeing.

These are some testimonials from group members reflecting on the benefits of being part of Wigwam Support Groups. To find out more, head to Yes to Life's website yestolife.org.uk and find Support Groups under the 'I'm New Here' menu.

"Finding out there is such a supportive, proactive, informative and nurturing group, which I was warmly welcomed to join, means the world to me. It helps me feel empowered, positive and more in control of my own destiny." – K.A

"It was such a relief to find an open and supportive group, totally on the same wavelength when it comes to the challenges faced by those of us looking for a more proactive and personalised approach to healing ourselves." – Lucy

"Sharing is powerful, educational and takes the scary lonely feelings out and replaces them with strength." – Jill

"I urge anyone with an interest in optimising their outcomes, even self reliant, frosty 50 somethings like myself, to include a Wigwam group in their investigation." – E.F.

Read a blog by Yes to Life Wigwam Coordinator Philip Booth about support groups and the evidence that they can support cancer recovery in this issue's digital content, available on the [Blog](#) section of Yes to Life's website, yestolife.org.uk, and the [News](#) section of Artlift's website, artlift.org.

WIGWAM
Yes to Life cancer support group

Resources

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

Cancer Care Map cancercaremap.org

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

Charlie's charlies.org.uk

Community cancer support and therapy centre based in Gloucestershire.

Focus gloshospitals.nhs.uk/charity/what-we-do/campaigns/focus

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

Gloucestershire Cancer Exercise glocancerexercise.org.uk

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

Great Oaks Dean Forest Hospice 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 livethroughthis.co.uk

Personal stories and helpful resources about living with or beyond cancer.

Longfield Community Hospice Care longfield.org.uk

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

Macmillan Helpline

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call 0808 808 00 00 or visit macmillan.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Information Hub at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital gloshospitals.nhs.uk/our-services/services-we-offer/cancer/macmillan-cancer-support-information-hub

Located in the main Outpatients Unit, just past the Main Atrium. A place to get information, support and signposting with the help of staff and trained volunteers.

Maggie's maggies.org

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

Penny Brohn UK pennybrohn.org.uk

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

Your Circle yourcircle.org.uk

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

Wigwam and Yes to Life yestolife.org.uk/cancer-support-groups

Yes to Life's online and Gloucestershire-based cancer support groups, plus links to other resources.

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



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