

N.J. woman's book aims to help cancer patients with survivor stories, medical information



"When pink was just a color" by Paula Flory: "You can't live in the U.S. and not be aware of cancer. I got my mammograms, did my 'selfies,' donated money, participated in the Race and supported by sister, Kathy, who, for years, has donated her valuable time and amazing talents to the Susan G. Komen Foundation. And despite the fact that I had known people with breast cancer and did what I was told I should do to keep this disease at bay, pink, to me, was just a pretty color and a singer. Then in April 2011, I found an unusual and unwanted armpit dweller."

(Photo courtesy of Kathi Edelson Wolder)



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[BRANCHBURG](#) — When Marion Behr was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2006, she didn't know at the time her journey would lead to publishing a 230-page book on the subject.

The 75-year-old Branchburg native has publishing experience, having penned a how-to guide for women looking to start and run a business at home. But her latest endeavor focuses on a subject that applies to both sexes: cancer.

"Surviving Cancer: Our Voices & Choices" (WWH Press, 2014) is a compilation of first-hand essays from cancer patients, medical experts and organization leaders. Its goal is to be informative but personal at the same time, Behr says.

"I knew that I wanted to publish a book that would feel really good for that person who had cancer, or their family to be looking and reading through," she says. "I didn't want something that felt cold. I wanted something that felt really comforting."

Sure, someone who is reading the book can find answers to questions like, "What are the stages of breast cancer?" and "How is chemotherapy given?" But readers also get a glimpse into the life

of a cancer survivor, an invaluable asset to anyone currently going through the struggle, according to Behr.

"So many survivors want to help other cancer patients," she says.

Behr felt that bond when she connected with other patients who were undergoing radiation therapy at St. Barnabas Medical Center. She then took that connection to the next level by creating sculptures from a patient's Alpha Radiation Cradle, an immobilization device custom-molded for each patient. Behr says she wanted the sculptures to convey the beauty, imaginings and feelings of the patients the cradles once anchored. (Click through the gallery above to see pictures of the sculptures).



A sculpture created by Marion Behr from an Alpha Radiation Cradle.

Photo courtesy of Marion Behr

The sculptures were presented at the New Jersey Center of Contemporary Art in 2009, and included a panel discussion with two physicians and four breast cancer survivors.

The overwhelmingly positive response from the panel discussion is what emboldened Behr to set the wheels in motion for the book.

"I got home and I decided I really wanted to do a book that had the same feeling that the panel discussion had that night," she says. Behr wanted the book to be fearless, have accurate medical information and "take patients on a journey that was very, very close to what a cancer patient experiences."

In all, the book includes up of 70 essays from survivors, doctors, social workers, cancer organization members and leaders, and other professionals directly involved in assisting cancer patients.

"This whole project has probably taken about 10 hours a day for five years," she says with a chuckle.

Now, Behr says, the goal is to get the book in as many hospitals as she can.

"(I want) to get the message out there without it being a frightening message," she says. "Most books don't take a cancer patient on the same journey that a cancer patient takes.

"I don't want to be frightened to death when I hear something," she continues.

Behr gave two copies to an owner of an eyeglass shop who also had cancer. The owner, who splits time volunteering at a hospital in a coal-mining town in West Virginia, took two copies to the hospital. One day, she walked into a room and saw a bunch of people reading the book to each other.

"My husband and I are not criers," Behr said. "So, you can imagine, that definitely left an impact."

Behr says that feeling helped further an effort to get the book to people who can't afford it. And while that is the next step in this process, Behr's true payoff is that she put out a final product she's proud of.

"When I started this, so many people who I respected, they all envisioned a book that was academic," she says. "And that just wasn't what I envisioned at all. The one thing I feel terrific about is that I stuck to my guns."

Click through through the gallery above to read excerpts from personal stories in "Surviving Cancer: Our Voices & Choices."

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