



Humboldt Community Breast Health Project

Supporting individuals facing breast or gynecologic cancer concerns Fall 2012

Vol. 13 Issue 2

How the Project's Support Groups Began

by Julie Ohnemus, MD, HCBHP Founder & Medical Consultant and Associate Chief Medical Officer, Open Door Community Health Centers

The Project's original support group began with the founding mothers, as we were all women with breast cancer and their support people. Prior to joining spirits and envisioning the Project, we were a grassroots breast cancer support group called the "Amazon Warriors Extraordinaire", which had splintered from an ACS group. The A.W.E. embodied vocal self-advocacy, challenged the medical communities standards of care, and at times was considered "radical". These values served as our rallying cry for individuated care and a voice in our treatment choices. This is how the Amazon Warrior became our symbol."

HCBHP's breast cancer support group viewed ourselves as "warriors" - defined as women of power and strength, who out of love, caring and authenticity challenged each other toward growth and unifying support

The central theme of our support group was the power of "story." As the founding mothers gathered around a kitchen table sharing their stories of triumph and tribulation laying the foundation for the Project, so too the support group gathered around a central candle highlighting each individual's story. As story offers a narrative of life from the head and the heart, it was a place of understanding, witness, information, inspiration and comradery. The listener was as affected as the teller by the open honesty of each person's journey.

At that time we only had one support group, and so all stages of breast cancer were present. Though at times hard for the women with early breast cancer to witness the challenge and suffering of a woman with metastatic cancer, it ultimately served as a platform of transformation. It became a seat of hope in the midst of a reality of struggle, possibility - tears, laughter - compromise, opportunity - thriverhip and death. The reflective contrast of sameness and difference created awareness that there was no absolute.



continued on next page

12th Annual Fall Concert



New Location

Calvary Lutheran Church
716 South Avenue, Eureka

**Saturday, September 22, 2012
7:00 pm**

Artists

Luther Cobb, MD

Heartbeat Chorale led by Elisabeth Harrington,
Pat Person oboe duet with Dr. Cobb,
Cindy Moyer & Friends String Quintet.

Tickets \$20 including light reception,
Available "at the door" and

Drs. Cobb & Mahoney's office, Eureka 476-0691
And the HCBHP office, Arcata 825-8345

Fall Concert Sponsors

Blue Lake Rancheria & Casino
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Hospice of Humboldt
Mad River Community Hospital
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Lima's Professional Pharmacy
Cloney's Pharmacy
Erik Jansson, MD
Join Y Luh, MD & Michael W Harmon, MD
William Weiderman, MD, OB/GYN
Crystal Springs Bottled Water
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How the Project's Support Group's began...cont.

The construct of our group was the open circle – a symbolism embracing inclusiveness and honoring choice including death.

One of the defining moments of our group was experienced with the first death of a group member. She was a single woman without local family members, so we had formed a 24-hour care circle allowing her to die at home with added assistance from hospice. She had been a teacher to us all -- facing her fears directly and becoming fearless. She had challenged the group's opening ritual of lighting the candle to include naming something we each released and an intention for the coming moment. At our year-ending support group meeting of 2000 she was in the final stages of dying. Two group members stopped at her home and from her bed she lit her intention candle from the core group candle that would be used the following year. She expressed her intention of letting go and timelessness.

At the support group, her candle and intention were shared, and as the final candle was lit in the circle of 14 women, a call came to say she had just died. This was a transcendent gift of consideration, timing and love, as we were together to support one another when she took her final breath. So that night the group traveled to her home, blessed her body, and as our final goodbye carried her body out to the hearse giving honor to our sister and witnessing the attentive presence and transformational wisdom a support group offers.

As HCBHP has grown we have expanded our groups to additionally include a gyn & other cancers group, an advanced disease group, and a young women's group. Each continue the thread of narratives that pick up where the prior support group left off, thus our open circle of story, care and authenticity. The support groups, in journey together, help form the heart of The Project - binding us for whatever the morrow holds.



Thank you to those who attended the August 4th Healing Journey's "Cancer Fighting Kitchen" workshop. Authors Rebecca Katz & Lise Alschuler were fantastic.

Cancer Fighting Kitchen Sponsors

CalFresh; Northcoast Co-op; St. Joseph Hospital; Evans Mechanical, Inc.; Chautauqua Natural Foods; Locally Delicious; Omicron Omega Chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing.



HCBHP received United Indian Health Service's prestigious **"Friends Are Good Medicine"** Award 2012 acknowledging our longtime partnership.

We are honored.

Medallion made by David Ipina (Yurok)
Paddle made by George Blake (Hupa/Yurok)

Dear Friends:

This year has been busy with a large "Cancer Fighting Kitchen" educational event and a small Afternoon Tea to honor HCBHP's 15th anniversary. In the meantime, people newly diagnosed with breast and gynecologic cancer have continued to find their way to us for support and information. It is amazing to observe the transformation when people first meet our warmline volunteers (mostly cancer survivors themselves) and staff. They leave that first conversation feeling a little less scared, empowered with relevant information and a next step planned to explore on their cancer journey.

Since our services are free and we are not eligible to receive funding from other larger cancer organizations because they do not have "affiliates" here, we survive thanks to the generosity of community members like you. We hope you continue your local support again this year.

Thank you for volunteering, donating and referring your friends and loved ones. Thank you to Dr. Julie Ohnemus and the founding mothers for the vision, passion and courage to create HCBHP for our rural community fifteen years ago!

Rose Gale-Zoellick, Executive Director



The Value of Support Groups

by Mary Meengs, MD, Client Services Director

“Sometimes when a client first contacts us, she asks about the availability of a support group that would fit her situation. Other times, when we are telling a new client about our groups, we hear “Oh, I’m not a support group kind of person.” There’s no one right way to get through the long process of diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship of cancer. Some people are more private, or have abundant support already. To those of us who participate in support groups, it seems obvious that the experience is valuable and beneficial. But is there any objective evidence that groups help?”

David Spiegel, MD, of Stanford University, published the results of his groundbreaking research in 1989 in *The Lancet*. He found that women with metastatic breast cancer who received a year of intensive supportive-expressive group therapy lived 18 months longer on average than controls. This was exciting news and raised hopes that mind-body interventions could make a significant difference in the health outcomes of very ill patients. However, further studies by other investigators could not reproduce those results. Research since then has mostly focused on measuring psychosocial and quality-of-life outcomes instead of strictly medical benefits. There are many challenges in designing and interpreting these kinds of studies; some measure very quantifiable, objective data like blood levels of stress hormones, while others rely on questionnaires and psychological assessments. Just as cancer treatment is becoming more personalized to the unique aspects of a patient’s tumor, many feel that support groups and other psychological interventions are more beneficial for some people than others; for instance, those with a higher level of emotional distress or pain seem to improve after participation in groups.

Most researchers agree that a number of quality-of-life outcomes are improved by support group attendance; some of those benefits are listed here.

- **Reduced feelings of isolation, loneliness, or of being judged
- **Improved sense of empowerment and control
- **Enhanced coping skills and adjustment to new situations
- **Reduction in distress, depression, anxiety, and overall burden
- **Increased knowledge about the illness, new research, and treatment options

**Improved sleep, energy, sense of vitality, and ability to exercise and complete activities of daily living

**Less pain

Increased social connections, with an opportunity to talk openly and safely about feelings and experiences

When I am describing our support groups to a potential new member, I usually emphasize that they offer a very confidential setting for sharing concerns, fears, and both good and bad experiences. There is a lot of practical sharing and coaching between group members, such as which lotions and potions and garments to use during radiation treatments, which supplements or physical therapy modalities are helping someone with their neuropathy, or who to speak with at the oncologist’s office to change your appointment. Some of these strategies for getting the most and best out of our limited local resources seem especially valuable in our rural setting. I assure people that most groups experience a lot more laughing than crying; I am frequently reminded of how beneficial humor is for our immune systems.

There is one way to know for sure whether or not one of our support groups is a good fit for you: try it out! You will almost certainly observe that most participants leave in a much better mood than when they arrived, and you will have made friends who share something very special with you.

Support Groups

Meetings held at the Project Office, 987 8th St., Arcata, unless otherwise noted. Meeting times may change. Call 825-8345 to confirm or to add your name to the reminder call list.

Arcata Breast Cancer Support Group

2nd & 4th Thursdays of the Month, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Gynecologic Cancer Support Group

2nd & 4th Tuesdays of the Month, 3:00-4:30 p.m.

Young Women’s Breast Cancer Support Group

1st & 3rd Tuesdays of the Month, 6:00-7:30 p.m.

Advanced Group

For those living with Stage 4 Disease

Every Monday, 11:00 am-12:30 p.m.

Amazon Writers, a Peer-Led Group

2nd & 4th Wednesdays of the Month, 2:00-4:00 p.m.

Fortuna Breast Cancer Support Group

Visiting Angels Office, 1719 Main Street (near Shotz Coffee)

1st Wednesday of the Month, 6:00-7:30 p.m.



Author Missy Gruen lives with her family in Humboldt Co. on the banks of the Mad River where they all enjoy loving life.

**The Uninvited Recurring Dream
By Missy Gruen**

**I keep opening the doors.
“Are you sure you don’t want to leave?”
But cancer says “No thank you.”
It stays on my couch
guzzling vodka, smoking cigarettes,
propositioning anyone within ear shot.
I’ve tried cutting it off,
but somehow it always ends up
being the life of the party,
drink in hand.
It was almost out the door once.
But just as the latch was about to click,
a foot wedged in,
“oops, forgot something” it said.
What could I do?
Now, there it sits making more friends.
I think I’m going to call the cops.**

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From “The Cyclic Nature of Promises: Poems by Missy Gruen”, a chapbook published in 2012 and supported by members of HCBHP’s Amazon Writers who have also created another chapbook “Laughing like Ravens.” Both are available for purchase at HCBHP. Enjoy a little laughter and a tear or two.

Thank you to our generous & adventurous community for joining our first-ever

**BiddingForGood**



On-line auction

Thank you to the many donors and bidders. It was fun and raised about \$3,000.

Thanks to everyone who helped make the Vacation Raffle a success. Through your hard work and dedication to HCBHP and its mission, you helped us raise \$64,000.



**2012 Vacation RAFFLE Winners**

Frank Canning of Redway - Casa Salate in Sayulita, Mexico  
Shirlee Degnan of Trinidad - Victoria, British Columbia, Canada  
Dianna Sauers of Fortuna - Coho Cottages in Willow Creek  
Sue Ellis of Alaska - Sea Haven Cottage in Westhaven.



Thank you Raffle Sponsors

Pierson Building Center, Cher-Ae Heights Casino, Wildberries Marketplace, Coast Central Credit Union, Kokatat, Lima’s Pharmacy, St. Joseph Hospital, Wing Inflatables, Cloney’s Pharmacies, Hospice of Humboldt, City Ambulance, Patterson-Conners Insurance (Lic#0B72732), George Petersen Insurance (Lic#0603247), Almquist Lumber, Brandi Easter Photography, Buckport Sporting Goods; Hunter, Hunter and Hunt, CPAs, Jackson & Eklund, CPAs, Post Haste Mail Center, Renner Petroleum, Dalianes Worldwide Travel, North Coast Growers Association, Scrapper’s Edge.  
Media: Lost Coast Communications, Bi-Coastal Media, Arcata Eye, KHSU, KMUD & McKinleyville Press.

**Thank you to our Newsletter Underwriters:**

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## Nicole Nada's "Cancer Kicking" Experience

"I rode 314 miles to my first chemotherapy appointment as a fundraiser for two organizations that are very important to me and a 'soul lifter' for myself. I raised over \$15,000 for the two organizations –one on each end of the cycling route. Thank you donators!!!! I am honored".

Follow Nicole's blog: <http://kickingmycancer.com>

*"The Humboldt Community Breast Health Project was founded on the "wounded healer" and "patient advocacy" models. The friends and breast cancer survivors seated around our Founder, Dr. Julie Ohnemus's kitchen table in 1997 believed that women in rural northern California deserved the same information and quality of care that women found in the city. Dr. Ohnemus' vision continues to grow. The Project's services include a patient navigation program, support groups, information specialist, helpline volunteers, an extensive resource library and more. The staff and helpline volunteers, mostly cancer survivors themselves, provide peer support to help people going through cancer learn to become their own best medical advocate. This grassroots organization provides all its support and information free of charge."*

Congratulations to Nicole Nada for showing the strength one can gain from what is often felt to be an insurmountable journey. We thank Nicole for raising over \$5,300 for HCBHP.

### HCBHP Staff:

Executive Director - Rose Gale-Zoellick, MSW, MPH  
Client Services Director - Mary Meengs, MD  
Client Services Coordinator - Brenda Elvine-Kreis  
Office Manager - Barbara Sage  
Volunteer Coordinator - Natalie Engber  
Resource Asst. - Jahna Morehouse  
GYN Cancer Support Group Facilitator - Rebecca Zettler, RN

### Client Services Volunteers:

Information Specialist - Sue Mossman  
Warmline Volunteers- Chris Angell, Jane Crosbie, Vicky Dodge, Bonnie Etz, Beryl Feldman, Joy Hardin, Linda Marlow, Rinda McClure, Felicia Oldfather, Mary Oswell, Sheryl Sandige, Linda Serrano, Sandy Swietzer, Jean Wichelman

### Board of Directors:

**Officers:** Liz Lara-O'Rourke-President, Eva Laevastu-Vice President, Steve Engle-Treasurer, Gretchen Stadler-Secretary

**Board:** Bojan Ingle; Allan Katz; Rosemary DenOuden; Cathie Gillen; Melissa Jones; Carolyn Lane; Teddie Lyons; Koreen Nagle; Brea Sorrells and Melinda Wilson.

## We Are Forever Grateful to Our Contributors!

Thank you to the 1500 individuals and businesses who generously donated to HCBHP in the past eight months. Space allows a partial listing of foundation and event funders.

- Fall Concert Sponsors (see page 1 of this newsletter issue)
- Healing Journeys' Cancer Fighting Kitchen Sponsors (see page 4)
- Vacation Raffle Sponsors (see page 4)
- Sales for Survivors participating businesses (see pink insert in this issue)
- Bidding for Good On-Line Auction Donors and Bidders
- Afternoon Tea donors and volunteers
- Eureka High School Third Annual Breast Cancer Awareness Night
- Ferndale High School "Slam Dunk Cancer" Event
- "Kicking My Cancer" fundraiser started by Nicole Nada's bike ride to treatment in Marin
- "Lemonade Day" youth entrepreneurship donations
- Several Eureka Girl Scout Troops for making greeting cards with encouraging messages and donating lovely notebooks with inspirational quotations
- Catholic Daughters – Our Lady of the Redwoods
- Soroptimists International of Humboldt Bay
- Women of the Moose - Eureka
- Women of the Moose – McKinleyville for donation of hats
- Cassie & Steve Coppini, Mandie Jaso and the 13 Teams competing in the Third Annual Batting for Boobies Co-Ed Benefit Softball Tournament in Fortuna
- Six Rivers Running Club for partnering with HCBHP to make Atalanta's Victory Walk & Run a benefit event
- Baroni Designs for six years of hosting a line of jewelry to benefit HCBHP
- Blue Lake Casino & Hotel for "All Night Dance Party" Benefit Event
- Bonnie McRaith Massage Therapy for donating massages to clients
- Furniture Design Center
- Heartbead for making and donating volunteer appreciation necklaces
- Humboldt Mobile Massage for donating massages to clients
- Humboldt Redwood Company
- Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship's social action committee
- Jerry Peterson Memorial Fund
- Harold Edward & Sibyl Jamieson Memorial Endowment Fund (Hannah/Craig) for gynecologic cancer support & support group
- Patricia D and William B. Smullin Foundation
- Union Labor Health Foundation
- United Way California Capital Region

To receive a copy of our 2011 Annual Report with a complete listing of last year's contributors, please call us at (707) 825-8345 or view the program and fiscal reports at [www.hcbhp.org](http://www.hcbhp.org).



## Leave a Legacy Gift via our Fund at Humboldt Area Foundation

Breast Health Project, Humboldt County Fund was established in 2007. We want to grow this fund to \$1,000,000 so that someday we can hold fewer fundraising events to maintain our operating expenses and focus more on our clients. To learn more, contact Chris at Humboldt Area Foundation, 707-442-2993 x-302.

Humboldt Community  
Breast Health Project  
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(Corner of 8th & J)  
Arcata, CA 95521



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(707) 825-8384 FAX

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After hours by appointment

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Website: [www.hcbhp.org](http://www.hcbhp.org)

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**Resources for Mammograms, Pap Tests & Other Women's Health Exams**



Women without insurance or with high patient costs and who may meet income guidelines can call HCBHP to learn more about the following programs:

**CDP- Every Women Counts:** All local hospitals and many doctor's offices/clinics participate.

**Family PACT:** All local hospitals and many doctor's offices/clinics participate.

**Mad River Hospital's Free Mammography** grant from National Breast Cancer Foundation

**Miller Farms Pink Tub of Gardening Supplies Raffle**

Drawing October 6th, 3 pm  
Tickets \$5 - 3/\$10 - 7/\$20  
Available at Miller Farms  
or HCBHP.  
*Need not be present to win.*



**Zumbathon - Bayside Grange**

October 14th, 1 to 3 pm  
Fun exercise to benefit HCBHP.

Contact HCBHP for more information.

**Other Ways to Support our Services**

- Baroni's Breast Cancer Education Jewelry - [baronidesigns.com](http://baronidesigns.com)
- Good Search/Good Shop - [goodsearch.com](http://goodsearch.com) and/or [goodshop.com](http://goodshop.com)
- Hold a fundraising event
- Contribute your volunteer skills