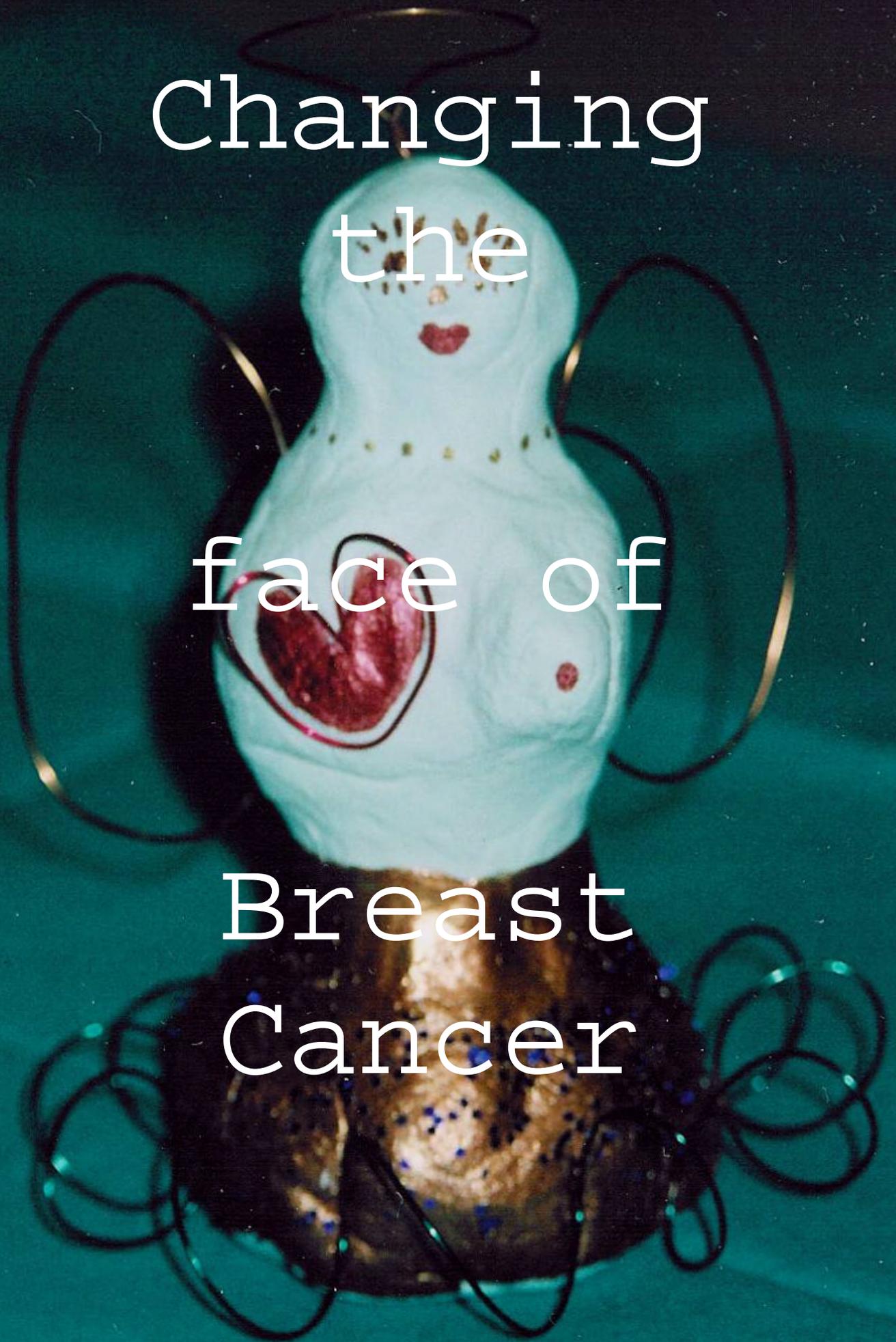


Changing
the

face of

Breast
Cancer



Changing the face of Breast Cancer

A handbook based on the creative works of breast cancer survivors.
Written and Edited by Aimee Greenberg, MA RDT

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This book is dedicated to the warrior women who push forth, hearts first, into points of light and dark, unknown.

And . . .

To my husband Tom and my lovely daughters Lily and Avalon, in whose eyes I see beauty and magic.

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1. Introduction

Overview

This book is a retrospective of techniques, case studies and original work derived from monthly expressive arts and drama therapy workshops with breast cancer survivors at South Coast Medical Center, Laguna Beach, California, January through December, 2000. The book is written as a handbook for creative arts therapists who use the expressive arts to heal and support cancer survivors. Mental health professionals without training in the arts, psychodrama or creative arts therapy should use this handbook only with the assistance or under the supervision of an arts therapist. Conversely, trained artists lacking mental health expertise should consult with a mental health practitioner before working with cancer patients. Survivors, students and caregivers should also use this manual with discretion. As a drama therapist and breast cancer survivor, both the process of writing this book, as well as working with the women, has proven both professionally and personally rewarding.

Definition

Drama therapy (and by extension creative arts therapy) is the systematic and intentional use of drama/theatre/art processes and products to achieve the therapeutic goals of symptom relief, emotional and physical integration and personal growth. It is an active, experiential approach that facilitates the client's ability to tell his/her story, solve problems, set goals, express feelings, achieve catharsis, extend the breadth and depth of inner experience, improve interpersonal skills and relationships and strengthen the ability to perform personal life roles while increasing flexibility between roles.

History

The following is a partial listing of other practitioners, artists or projects that have used the arts as a healing tool for cancer patients and survivors. Firstly, I'd like to credit Anna Halprin, dancer and teacher whose manual "Moving Toward Life," is a manual written for dance students that incorporates a series of exercises for people living with cancer. "It is also for caregivers, health professionals, and people who have had cancer or are living with it now. The work is an extended application of my explorations of the Life/Art Process, the Five Stages of Healing, the PsychoKinetic Visualization Process, and my personal studies of the integration of mind, emotions and sensations." Halprin states that: "I am very careful to make no claims that the work I am doing with people with cancer is a treatment or can extend life, but I am certain that it does expand and transform the quality of life. There is intriguing evidence that some people who undertake healing processes that make sense to them can extend their lives as well as expand them." (HALPRIN, 1995)

In Berkeley California, The Public Health Institute's Breast Cancer Answers Project uses art and writing to improve the quality of life of patients with breast cancer. The participants have exhibited their work entitled "Distinct Grace" in six galleries in the Bay Area. Joyce Sykes, a drama therapist in the New York area has been working with survivors and hospice patients in New York and Aruba. Joyce uses drama therapy to process unfinished business with hospice patients and the terminally ill.

As a music therapy intervention on cancer patients, Judith Pinkerton of the Center for Creative Therapeutic Arts conducted a study which investigated the effects of sequenced, specialized music called MEE (Music Exercising Emotions) Concert as music therapy intervention on state and trait anxiety levels of cancer patients undergoing adjuvant chemotherapy. Cancer patients may frequently experience high levels of anxiety, and research supports music's ability to affect anxiety levels with the application of sedative and stimulative music.

Purpose

The program was designed to complement traditional support groups in the community and to enhance allopathic medicine with alternative therapies to improve the lives of women with breast cancer.

Objectives

- ▶ To provide emotional support, spiritual healing and transformation through the arts.
- ▶ To enhance body image and self-esteem.
- ▶ To educate and empower survivors through role-play and sociodrama.
- ▶ To foster creative expression and skill building.
- ▶ To provide a safe and therapeutic forum for the creative processing of personal, spiritual and medical issues related to breast cancer.

Issues and Obstacles

The participants involved are dealing with several complex issues that influenced both the continuity of the process and the rate of return. These issues include: fear of dying, illness due to the effects of surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, depression, fatigue, altered body image, dismemberment, loss of sexuality/femininity/self-esteem, powerlessness and loneliness, as well as spiritual and relationship issues.

Throughout the process, I observed various stages of dealing with a cancer diagnosis that are parallel to the stages of grieving, i.e. shock, denial, anger, fear, realization of mortality and healing. However, whereas the grieving process is punctuated by a linear finality in healing; the cancer process is more circular or random and chaotic, whereby at any given point in the process, the patient may immediately boomerang to a prior stage of diagnosis; triggered by news of a metastasis, recurrence or death of a friend, the anniversary of a diagnosis, a visit to the oncologist, a breast exam, media coverage of the disease, etc.

Evaluation

The project was evaluated on a monthly basis to measure its incremental (as well as session by session) success in meeting the objectives mentioned above. A six-month written evaluation based solely on change in body image and self-esteem was administered. A final evaluation was administered during the last workshop to assess the merit of the process in regards to objectives set forth. The end session of the year 2000 culminated in performances mapping the healing journey or ritual, which was considered in the evaluative process. Evaluation results demonstrated a significant increase in self-image/esteem, affect and an overall willingness to resume daily activities and re-enter the community.

Ordering of Content and Individual Sessions

The chronology of this book is arranged according to specific groupings of activities, i.e. projective media, visual art, writing, movement and drama. The progression of activities and/or interventions was designed to follow Robert Landy's Distance Model, which moves a patient along a continuum from projective to confrontive media (LANDY, 1986). This decision was based on my desire to slowly and safely foster a supportive, trusting and creative environment for the participants, while simultaneously measuring the "risk readiness" of the group.

Credits

Project Director, Aimee Greenberg, MA RDT is a drama therapist, educator and artist. Aimee has worked with various populations in diverse settings and has created original performance and installation works for fifteen years in the United States, Europe, Russia and Japan. She is the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, and has written several articles on the dramatic and therapeutic process for DRAMASCOPE and THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY AND PSYCHODRAMA publications. She is also the author of two books and two screenplays.

Funding for the year 2000 was provided by a community grant from the Orange County Affiliate of The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation. An analysis of the project was presented at the National Association for Drama Therapy Conference in San Francisco, November 2000. The project continues under the name of Moving Towards Life. The group has since been opened up to all women with cancer and continues to be sponsored by corporate and foundation donors including Irvine Health Foundation and Toshiba Corporation.

NOTE: Sans Serif font is used throughout the text to accent personal experience or case study. The names of all of the participants have been changed to ensure confidentiality.

Visual Art

Watercolors

Inspired by an out loud reading of *CLEARCUT*, by Terry Tempest Williams, (see Appendix A) I asked the women to use watercolors to express their feelings generated by the words and images of the story.



Figure 10 & 11: Two breasts represented as seedpods and vegetation. One is scarred and shows no new growth.



Figure 12: **A tree ravaged by the elements, yet, still standing.**

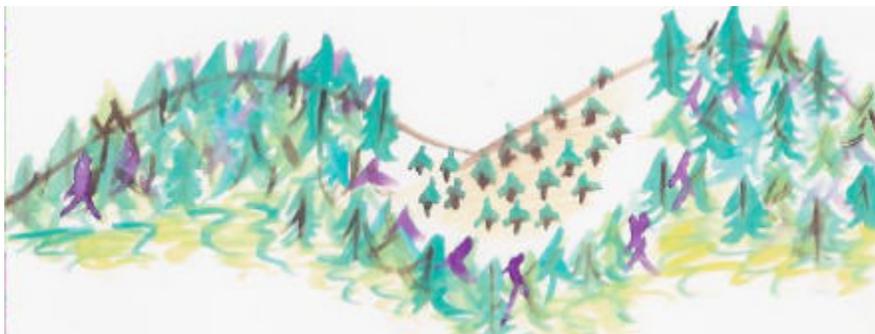


Figure 13: **A section of clearcut in the form of a woman's torso profile or two breasts, showing new growth, light and promise.**