

**BY ANDREA FAIRBAIRN  
BREAST CANCER NIRVANA**

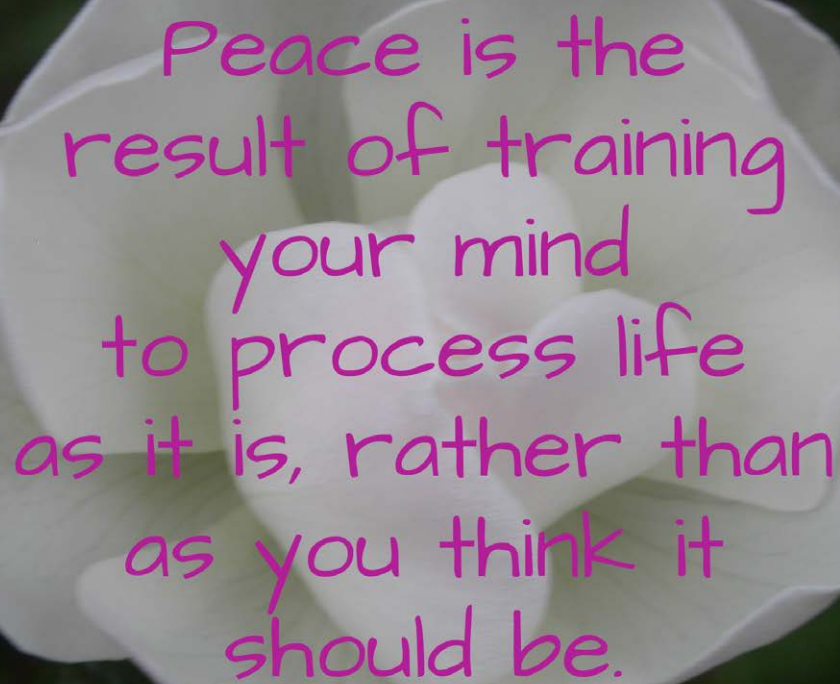
# **BARING IT ALL**



**33 TIPS ON CREATING A GREAT  
FUTURE AFTER BREAST CANCER**

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A close-up photograph of a white rose with a quote overlaid in pink text. The rose is the central focus, with its petals clearly visible. The background is a dark, blurred green, suggesting foliage. The text is written in a casual, handwritten-style font.

Peace is the  
result of training  
your mind  
to process life  
as it is, rather than  
as you think it  
should be.

- Wayne W. Dyer

# INTRODUCTION

## Surviving breast cancer

Survivorship is a terribly wonderful time and spans a great range of people with varying levels of health. You may have survived cancer and are ready to launch yourself back in to normal life, but at the same time feel mentally and physically spent. Or perhaps you are simply in a continuing limbo between well and unwell with no respite? You might simply feel grateful and completely well, and want to get back into life without delay or fuss. And maybe you feel all of these things at different times of the day or week.

[Cancer.net](http://Cancer.net) explains that surviving cancer or survivorship can be defined in different ways. Two common definitions include:

- Having no disease after the completion of treatment, and;
- The process of living with, through, and beyond cancer. By this definition, cancer survivorship begins at diagnosis. It includes people who continue to have treatment to either reduce risk of recurrence or to manage chronic disease.

Sometimes, people who have survived cancer consider their close friends and families “co-survivors” because of the experiences they have had in caring for the person with cancer. Others with metastatic cancer don’t feel that the “survivor” label applies to them because they continue to live with cancer every day.

No matter how it is defined, survivorship is unique for each person.

## Moving forward

As the meaning of survivorship differs, so too does moving forward. For some, moving forward is being alive after illness but it can also mean recovering from side effects, putting cancer behind us, starting a new job or running a marathon.

How do you define moving forward? For me, moving forward is taking one step towards recovery and health, today. Life has many twists and turns but what matters is how we feel, and whether we are comfortable and enjoy today.

I found it helpful to realise that moving forward does not happen in one event, in a straight line or by a certain date. It often involves side and backward steps, a bit like snakes and ladders, but is a decision to live a positive life today, whatever the outcome of tomorrow.



## **Creating a great future**

It is one thing to survive and move forward from breast cancer. Creating a great future is another step altogether. It may involve stepping away from your identity as a cancer patient or survivor and moving towards new life goals. For others, it is making the best of every day as a gift whether you are well or unwell.

Creating a great future after cancer requires confidence, courage and gratitude. It takes strength to make plans for the future almost as if cancer never happened in the first place. Being grateful for today also forces us to appreciate each day whether we are well or not.

## **About this eBook**

The goal of this eBook is to give practical tips to assist in rebuilding your life after cancer, but also to guide you gently towards a life that you love. Cancer impacts a range of things that you wouldn't necessarily think about, from friends, to work, to finance. This eBook contains practical tips on all these aspects of life from a woman who's been through breast cancer twice. My hope is that this eBook will make your transition to a post-cancer life smoother and easier.

I have loosely divided the eBook in to two sections: 1) managing your health and recovery, and 2) celebrating life. Start reading anywhere in the eBook and only accept tips that feel right and add value to your life.

If you would like to know more about my journey in moving forward from breast cancer, check out my Moving Forward diary on my website [Breast Cancer Nirvana](#).

Wishing you all the best!

*X Andrea*

# ***MANAGE YOUR HEALTH AND RECOVERY***

Perhaps the hardest and the easiest tip is that you are responsible for managing your health. That involves eating as well as possible, sleeping well, exercising, having a low stress lifestyle, being optimistic and talking to specialists quickly when things are not right.

These things sound simple but there is so much involved in living healthfully. It requires constant prioritising, learning new skills, organisation and being assertive about your health needs.

Some of your health is not within your control, but a lot of it is. So influence the things that you can by choosing health each day.

## ***ACTION***

Get your health foundations right; commit to eating a bit better and exercising today. Seek support from friends and family to improve your health.

## **1. TREAT RECOVERY AS YOUR JOB**

One of the most helpful things a doctor told me was to treat cancer treatment as a job, and when treatments finish, to treat recovery as a job. This means that you focus on recovery as the priority in your life rather than meeting requirements of other people and your paid job. Once you have prioritised your recovery, life gets a whole lot easier and you start to bounce back quicker.

This message was reinforced by one of my oncology nurses, who told me that women who rested more during and after treatment often suffered less side effects, as they were less fatigued in general.

I decided to stop working during my surgeries and chemo so that I could focus just on recovery rather than other deadlines. After treatment ended, I took some time to rest and then went on a holiday before going back to work part-time.

### ***ACTION***

Prioritise your recovery from cancer as an important thing in itself. This may require saying no to various activities in order to say yes to your recovery.

## 2. TAKE WONDERFUL CARE OF YOURSELF

You have just survived cancer and cancer treatments, and your body and soul require gentleness and healthy living in order to repair and rebuild.

Eat as well as you can (good protein, fruit and vegetables). Get gentle exercise every day, even if you start with just 15 minutes. Take some time for reflection and rest each day. Ensure that you get eight hours sleep a night. If your spirit is blue, do something uplifting today. Listen to your body and if you need to go to the doctor, go.

Enjoy your life and be kind to yourself; you are the only one who can do this for you.

### **ACTION**

On a daily basis, think about how you would like to spend the day and do at least one thing just for you. Be kind to yourself.

“May your day have diamond moments”

- Sandra



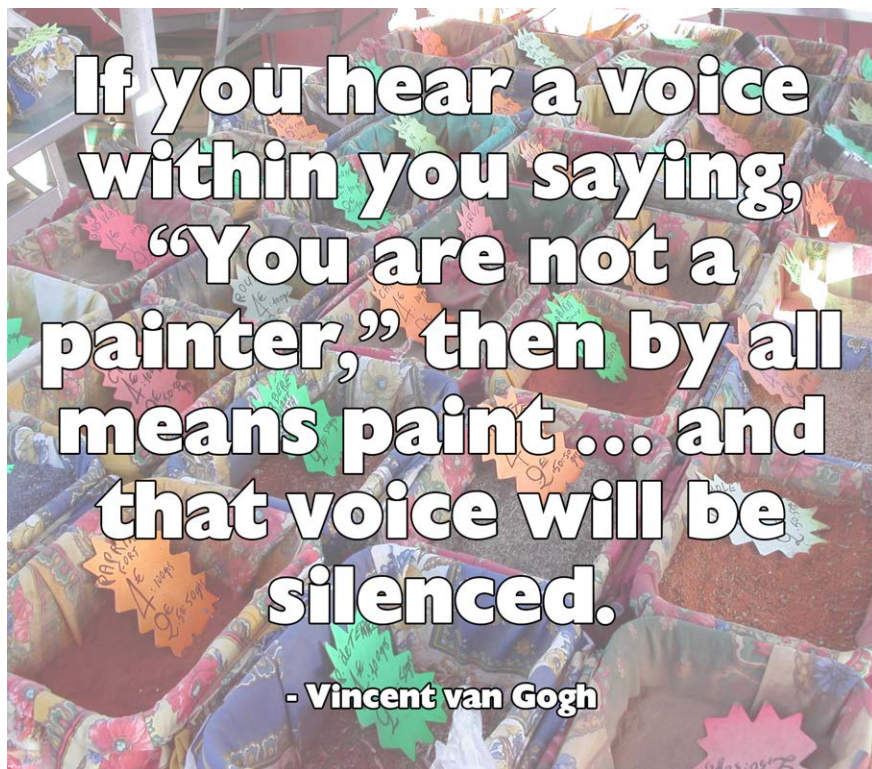
### **3. BE YOUR OWN BEST HEALTH ADVOCATE**

When we are ill or recovering from illness, we are often presented with decisions to make when we don't feel up to making those decisions. It is important to count on support from others (including health advocates). However, only you can tell people how you are really feeling and what you need.

It can be challenging to be assertive, stick up for ourselves or say 'no' to people including family, friends or health professionals. However, at times we need to stand up for ourselves and fight for what is right for us.

#### **ACTION**

Ask a friend to help you write down what you need before meeting with your medical team, employers or cancer organisation workers. Be your best advocate and stick up for you and your recovery.



## 4. PRACTICE THE ART OF CONVALESCENCE

Convalescence is the gradual return and recuperation to health and strength after illness, and also the period needed for returning to health after illness.

It is almost out of date to talk about convalescence, as we have a culture that wants things fast. It would be easier if things were black or white, and we were either unwell or well. Yet associated with illness is a period where we are neither, or sometimes both well and unwell.

Take time to recuperate after your cancer treatments. Don't return to full time work straight away unless you really feel 100%. Instead, have a holiday, take some rest and time for yourself, get support, talk about your experiences, be gentle with yourself and work part time.

Your convalescence time will depend on the type and grade of your cancer, the number of and type of surgeries, the length and intensity of your cancer treatments and how you as a unique individual were affected by the treatments. Convalesce on your terms and do what is right for you.

### **ACTION**

Rest when you are tired and stop before you over-exert yourself. Plan rest breaks each day and do not rush back into the work place at a million miles an hour.

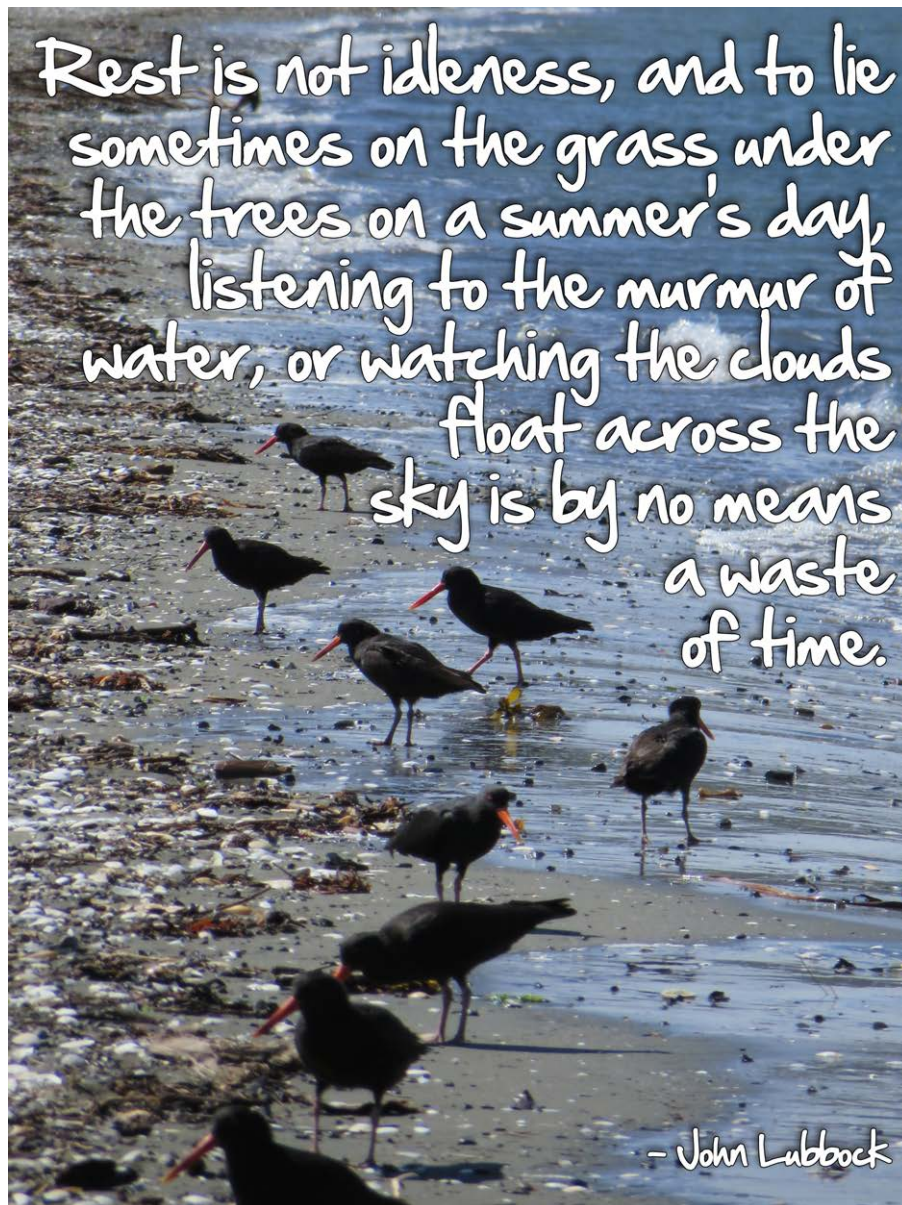
The Dalai Lama, when asked what surprised him most about humanity, answered “Man. Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present; the result being that he does not live in the present or the future; he lives as if he is never going to die, and then dies having never really lived.”

## 5. CULTIVATE THE ART OF IDLENESS

One of the things I've had to learn through breast cancer is that being idle, couch surfing and simply resting, are essential when recovering from illness. In modern life, it is all about achievement and being busy. For recovery from illness, we need to turn the busy-ness upside down and focus on being still.

### **ACTION**

Read a book, watch a movie, do a Sudoku, take cat naps; do nothing when you are fatigued and to prevent fatigue.





## 6. IT TAKES TIME TO RECOVER. WHAT'S THE RUSH?

One of the challenging things about cancer recovery is that its timeframe is unknown. We are all unique and have had different types of treatment and reactions to medications. Sometimes, we bounce back straight away and other times, we feel sub-par for quite some time.

We can't predict your recovery time; your body will recover in its own time and pace, in fits and spurts, and this may be very frustrating.

Do not compare yourself to others who bounced back straight away, worked full time during chemo or are running marathons. Your body has its own intelligence and timing.

### **ACTION**

Realise that cancer recovery is also a journey with learnings along the way. Allow your body with its own wisdom to recover slowly but surely.

“The trick is to enjoy life. Don't wish away your days, waiting for better ones ahead.”

- Marjorie Hinckley

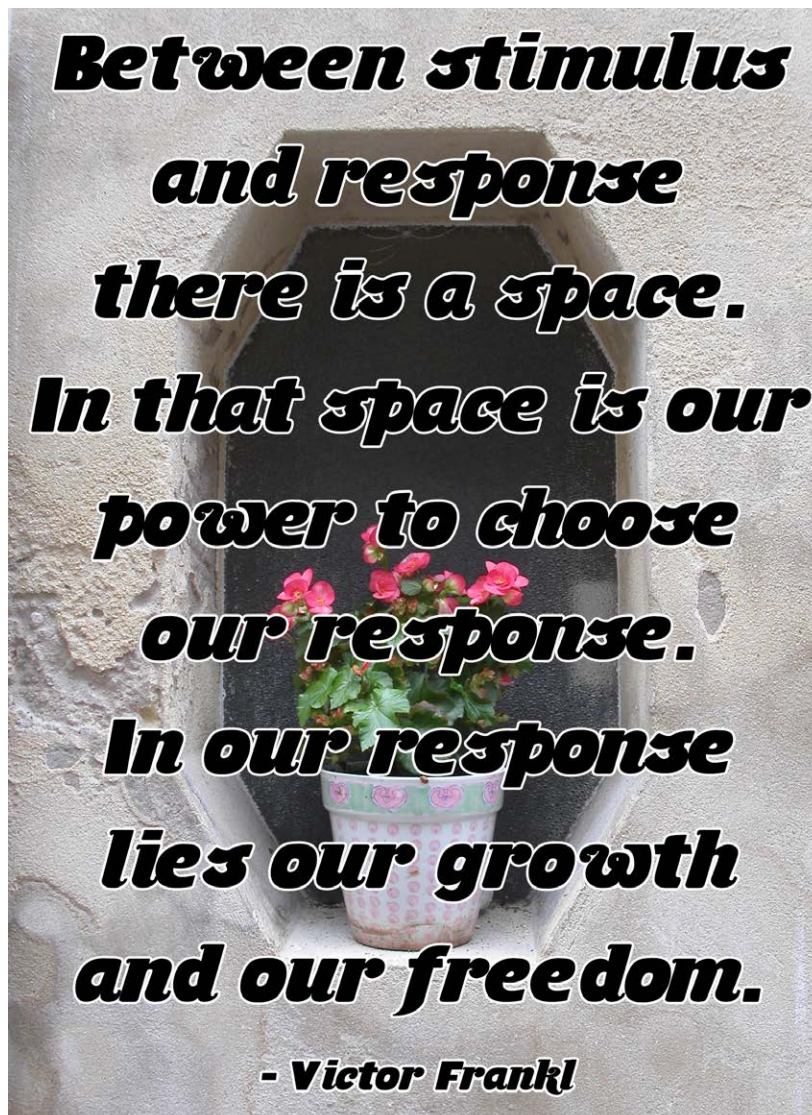
## **7. BODY-TALK - ACT ON WHAT YOUR BODY IS TELLING YOU**

Something we all learn well during breast cancer treatment is how to listen to your body. We are no longer bullet proof and if there are aches and pains, they need to be respected and acted on.

The first step is learning to listen to your body (notice when your body is tired, sore, irritated or you feel something is not right). The second step, is to act on what your body is telling you. If your body is tired, rest and if there are pains, they need to be checked by a specialist.

### **ACTION**

Learn to listen to the messages that your body is telling you with a technique such as mindfulness.



## **8. FOCUS FORWARD, NOT ON THE WHY OF CANCER**

It is easy to dwell on all the possible causes of cancer or even blame yourself. Unfortunately it won't help you in your recovery.

Do not spend hours and days reflecting on how you could have prevented cancer. Instead focus your energy and mind on getting better and creating your future.

When you are feeling well and have recovered from cancer, it is a good time to look at lifestyle and reducing stresses to prevent future cancer. But even then, there are complex combinations of genetic and environmental factors at play. Just focus on what you do have control on, which is how you live today.

### ***ACTION***

Focus on your recovery and a positive future, not on the past or the unanswerable whys of cancer.

“Just when the caterpillar thought that world was over, it became a butterfly...”

- Anonymous



## 9. TALK – SEEK SPECIALISED SUPPORT IN YOUR POST-CANCER LIFE

After a breast cancer diagnosis and treatment, there is a lot to digest and come to terms with. There are many cancer-specific issues that arise that feel unique to you but are quite usual for those affected by cancer.

Not everyone gets how significant facing cancer can be, and you're lucky if you have a group of friends, a partner and family who you can discuss your thoughts and feelings with. Even if you do, you may need to talk to someone neutral and specialised in cancer from time to time.

For some of us or at some times, it may feel as if there is no one you can talk to about how you really feel about cancer. You might want to appear positive at all times for friends and family and not talk about any fears or problems you are facing. Or you might just not have someone close enough to talk to about your inner feelings at this time.

There are a range of support people specialised in the world of cancer, such as nurses and counsellors, at your local cancer organisation, and there are cancer support groups and other cancer survivors to talk to. Ensure that you get the right support for you at times appropriate for you.

### **ACTION**

Talk to a support person: your doctor, medical specialist, nurse, counsellor and your local cancer organisation. You can also connect with other cancer survivors through cancer support groups, programs and services.

“I believe in pink. I believe that laughing is the best calorie burner. I believe in kissing, kissing a lot. I believe in being strong when everything seems to be going wrong. I believe that happy girls are the prettiest girls.”

- Audrey Hepburn

## 10. ACKNOWLEDGE AND EXPRESS YOUR GRIEF

Cancer comes with a shock and takes us down a road that we were not planning to take. We enter into the world of life-threatening illness and things change as a result of that. Our lives are disrupted or changed from small to huge ways. We may have lost parts of our beautiful bodies but in addition, perhaps we lost a job, relationship or income due to cancer.

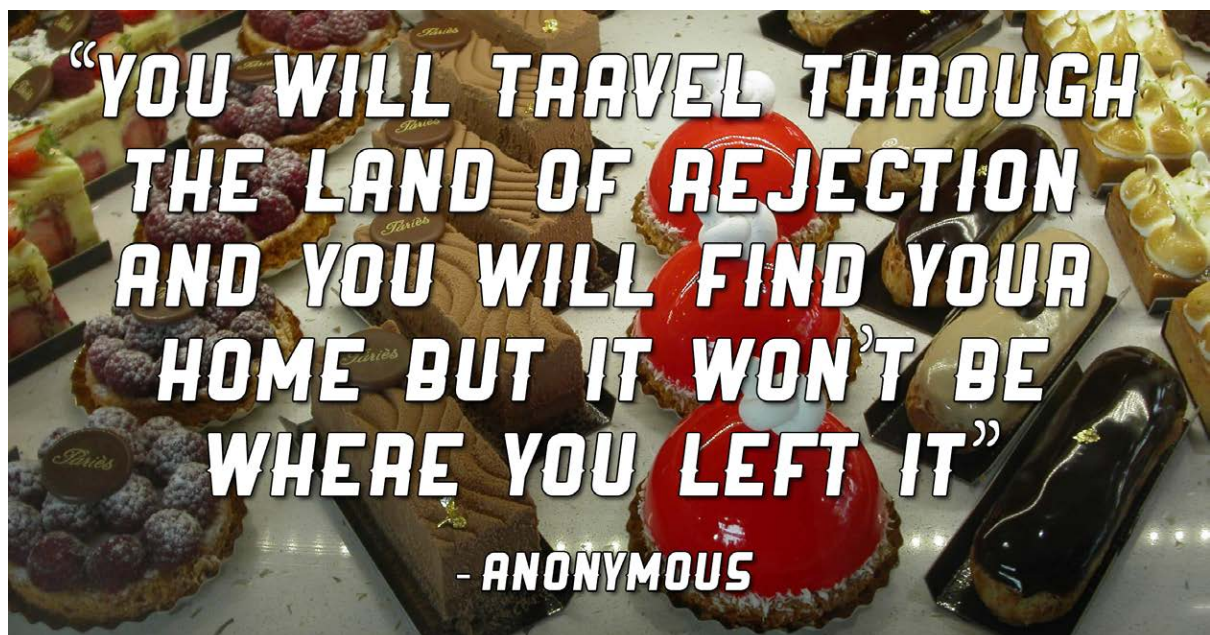
It sometimes seems that life was not supposed to be this way and that we will never be the same. We have lost who we were before and found a new person and life is just different.

It is often at the end of treatment that much of the grief of cancer arises. During treatment time, we are busy, focused on getting through the appointments, treatment and getting well. As we finish treatment, waves and feelings about loss, change and grief seem to come up. Relationships with friends, family members, work, money, love, life and health may have shifted somehow, even if just by a millimetre. It can be quite unsettling, even if we are grateful to be alive.

If you haven't before now, this is the time for accepting and grieving cancer. Express your feelings in a way that feels right to you such as with a counsellor, through writing and creating, art therapy and talking to friends and family.

### **ACTION**

Acknowledge what you have lost and what you have gained from cancer. Write a letter or poem to your cancer or create an artwork that expresses how you feel about cancer and moving on with your life.



“This is the test of your manhood: How much is there left in you after you have lost everything outside of yourself?”

- Orison Swett Marden

## **11. SEEK HELP WITH FEAR, DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY**

Depression or anxiety may appear when you least expect them, such as just when you have finished treatment and thought you would feel great. It can be an overwhelming time as you lose the security blanket of the hospital system and live with the fear of recurrence.

Often there is an accumulation of tasks or issues that were left during treatment and suddenly need to be attended to once you are well enough to do so (such as tax, bills and work issues). This is a positive stage in the re-entry to the healthy world as you are well enough to start addressing these issues but it may not feel that way.

If you are feeling blue or facing any mental health issues, seek help straight away. Recovering from cancer is not just physical but has many emotional and mental aspects.

### **ACTION**

It is good to talk through any fears and issues when they arise. Seek help from your Doctor if you are feeling depressed or anxious.

“Peace.

It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work.

It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.

- Unknown

## 12. SUPPORT, SUPPORT AND SUPPORT

Life during and after cancer is not always a piece of cake. Support is really important to negotiate the twists and turns of life during and after breast cancer.

The *Life After Cancer Epidemiology* study in 2012 found women with small networks and low levels of support were 61% more likely to die from breast cancer than those with large networks and high levels of support. So seeking support is not only good for your mental health, but also necessary for your physical health.

### **ACTION**

Seek support in a way that feels right for you. Join a breast cancer or cancer support group, do a course at your local cancer organisation, talk to friends and family, connect with other cancer survivors and check out cancer websites and on-line groups.





### **13. GET YOUR MOJO BACK**

At the end of cancer treatment, there may be temporary dents in your self-esteem and confidence. In addition, your sense of hope and spark for life may be missing in action.

I find the best tonic for this is to do as many enjoyable things as you can every day. My friend Sandra says “do something jolly every day.” I also recommend having adventures and goals to look forward to and that you feel excited about (such as going on a retreat or holiday or joining an art or writing class).

Some of my friends encouraged me to go on a trip to Brazil and Argentina about a year after I finished my cancer treatment. When I came back, I realised that I had found my mojo, confidence and a new lease of life. I hadn't realised how little spark I had been living with.

#### **ACTION**

Do something jolly every day and start to get out there in the world regular adventures.

“Every morning we are born again.  
What we do today is what matters most.”  
- Gautama Buddha

## 14. SEEK COMPLIMENTARY THERAPIES

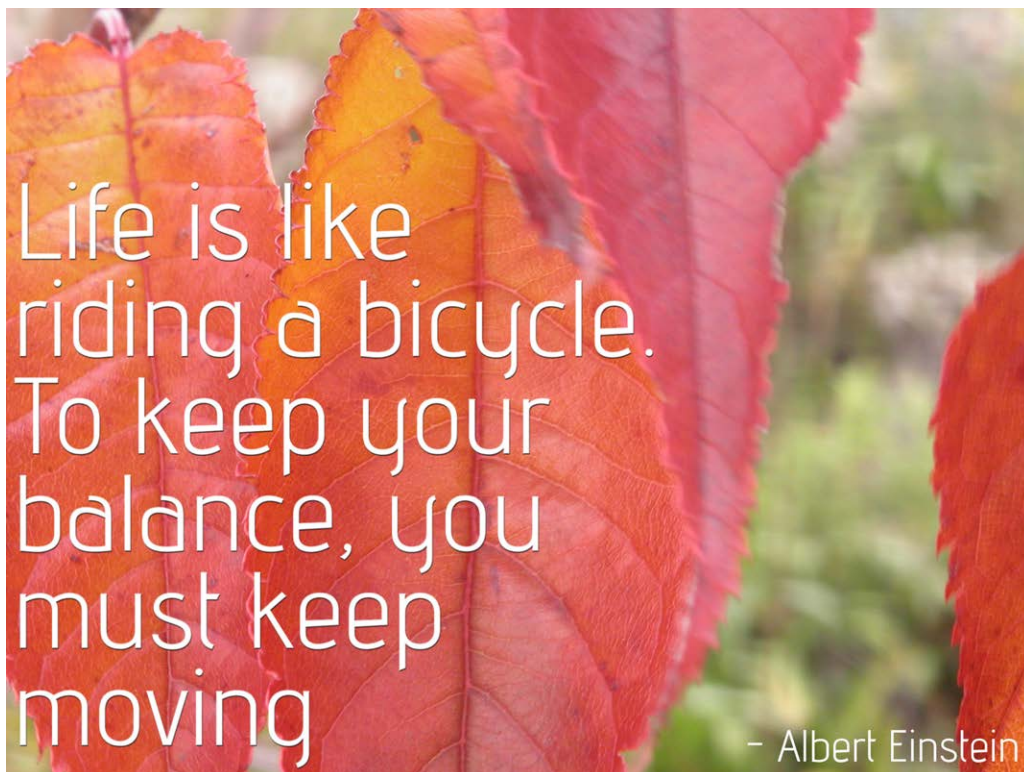
As we recover from cancer, surgeries and treatments, our bodies need gentle care and therapy. There are a range of effective and complimentary therapies that do not interfere with the other treatments you have received and help relieve side effects. For example, acupuncture is great for nausea and headaches and I have found EFT really effective with healing many of the side effects from treatments.

Pink Pilates assists cancer survivors with targeted exercise programs. There are also a range of cancer workshops and retreats available that offer time out and convalescence.

Ensure your complimentary therapies are effective. Professor Shaun Holt has done a lot of research in his book *Complementary Therapies for Cancer*. This book outlines which therapies are likely to help and shows you how to make choices based on good medical research, not anecdotes. Professor Holt's book also looks at commonly used therapies which are unlikely to help, or worse, will actually cause harm.

### **ACTION**

Choose one of two complimentary therapies such as Pink Pilates, Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), acupuncture, massage and art therapy.





## 15. LOW STRESS MEANS HAPPIER CELLS

This may seem challenging but it is important to keep your stress levels down in order to keep your body chemistry healthy and happy.

Different types of stress create stress hormones called cortisol in your body and cortisol impairs immune system function. “Cortisol suppresses immune function and may hamper the immune system's ability to counter the spread of cancer“ (from a 2000 study by David Spiegel, MD, Stanford professor of psychiatry and behavioural sciences).

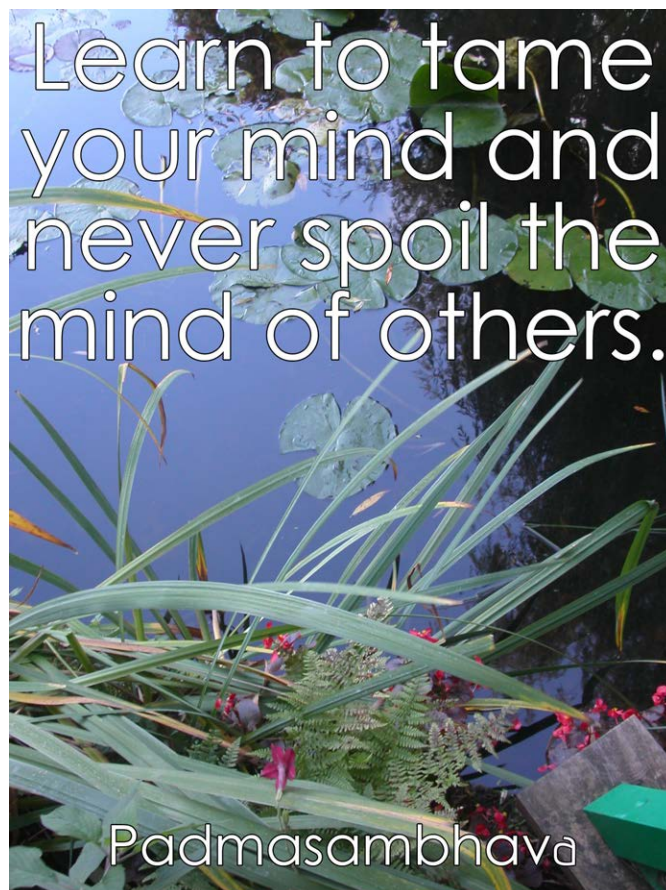
Being peaceful and happy is good for your physical health as well as your mental health.

### **ACTION**

Aim to live a low stress lifestyle and keep your immune system happy.  
Learn a relaxation practice such as yoga, Mindfulness or meditation.

“Choose to be optimistic, it feels better”

- The Dalai Lama



## **16. FOLLOW UP LIFESTYLE**

Many of us make promises to ourselves that once treatment finishes, we will be healthier. Well, now is that time.

The keys are quite simple: exercise, getting your heart rate up for 30-60 minutes most days. Eat lots of fresh fruit and vegetables and good sources of protein. Cut down on sugar, alcohol, and drink more water and green tea.

It can be difficult at times to prioritise a healthy lifestyle in our modern world with so many distractions. But all it requires is being healthy today. Start slowly and seek help with a dietician or through Pink Pilates, who have specialised post-cancer exercise programs.

### ***ACTION***

Talk to your nurse, doctor or cancer organisation for advice and start gently. Do something healthy today.



## **17. FOLLOW UP SIDE EFFECTS AND SURGERIES**

Many of the side effects from cancer treatments and surgery end up impacting us most as time goes by. There may be cognitive, immune, hormone, bone health or mental health issues that require follow up.

There also may be a range of appointments and decisions required concerning breast reconstruction surgeries. Focus on you and what your needs are; breast reconstruction was really positive for me, but for other women, they are happy not to have more surgeries.

Keep a record of your side effects and do schedule regular follow up appointments with your specialists. Do not accept ongoing pain and discomfort when it could be alleviated by seeing your doctor.

Keep attending all your follow up appointments. All of these appointments form a special web of support for you in your life post-cancer.

### ***ACTION***

Keep your appointment cards organised and ensure you attend your follow up appointments. Keep a record of your treatment side effects to inform your specialists.

## 18. GETTING SORTED FINANCIALLY

Cancer affects your financial security, sometimes for many years to come. If you had unpaid leave from work or went on a Work and Income benefit, you may be struggling financially and anxious to work to get the bills paid. You may also have had to pay significant health costs that may or may not be covered by health insurance if you had any.

If you were fortunate enough to have income protection insurance, you may have had a lump sum payment. However, with a cancer diagnosis, be aware that you may not be able to get some types of insurance for up to ten years; even travel insurance may be impacted.

After I finished treatment, I found it helpful to talk to a range of financial advisors at the bank, insurance brokers and financial planners. With all their advice, I have made financial decisions which are the right fit for me in my post-cancer life. For example, I sold my house and bought a much cheaper house so that my mortgage is manageable whether I work full- or part-time.

### **ACTION**

As soon as you feel able, take stock of your finances and insurance. Talk to a range of financial advisors about the best path forward for you. If you are in debt, talk to a free budgeting service and ask for help.

“I can't change the direction of the wind,  
but I can adjust my sails to  
always reach my destination.”

- Jimmy Dean

## 19. THE RIGHT FIT AT WORK

Cancer tends to impact our careers and depending on how well we feel, we can participate in work to a lesser or greater degree. Again, we are all different and have unique situations. While going through treatment, you may have needed to take sick leave or extended absences from work. You may be able to work part-time, full-time or not at all. Your workplace may or may not have been supportive during your treatment. Some women choose not to tell colleagues about their illness at all to prevent perceived judgement or discrimination.

You may also have realised that health and work/life balance needs more of a focus than career building.

Focus initially on your short term work requirements while in recovery. Jointly with your doctor, take stock of your work needs by assessing how many hours you are able to work. Then plan the best work options that suit you. Keep in touch with your manager and Human Resources and talk to your local cancer organisation or a career counsellor if you need to.

As you feel better, you can start to think about the future. Do you enjoy or love your work? Is there a career you have always wanted to try but were waiting for the right moment? You might be happy with your role but need reduced hours or more flexibility. You might want to take extended time off work to focus on rebuilding your health. Or you might be happy to jump in to a new challenge and put cancer way behind you.

### **ACTION**

In the short term, assess how many hours you can work with the support of your doctor. When you feel up to it, evaluate whether you would like to try something new with career either in type or role or a difference pace of life. You might wish to see a life coach or career counsellor.

“Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.”

- Confucius



## 20. SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Cancer may have impacted your relationships, from your partner, your friends, through to your work colleagues. Cancer can change these relationships from millimetres to kilometres.

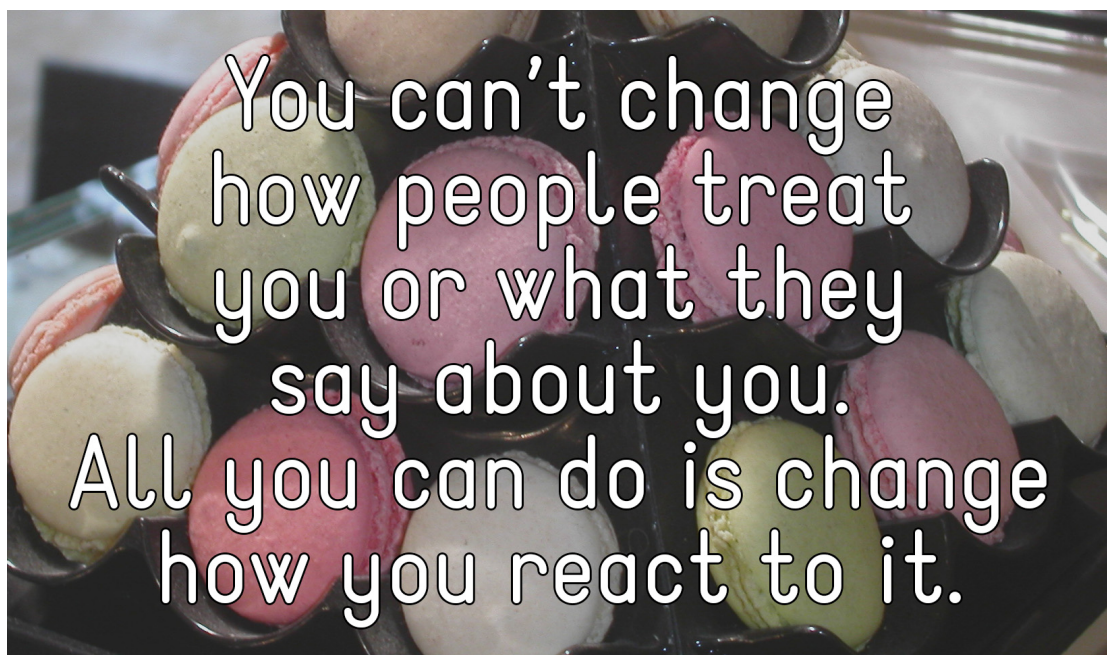
In addition, while giving you support, often loved ones are holding back on their lives a little to be there for you. Often when we finish our treatment, everyone relaxes and there can be a lot of catching up to do as people express a lot of what has been going on for them. Loved ones might even be experiencing compassion fatigue from giving so much of themselves.

Our partners and families need support too, throughout and after our cancer experiences. As we know, cancer impacts everyone. Cancer requires us to focus intently on ourselves for a period of time and it is not always possible to focus on our loved ones. So now might be the time to get support for them (your local cancer organisation may offer support services and programs for families and partners).

In addition, cancer has a way of shedding people in your life who can't be there for you or walk beside you. However, on the positive side, I have ended up with incredible loyal friends who have stuck by me and who I will value for always.

### **ACTION**

Take stock of your relationships with your partner, close family and friends. It might be time to offer your support and gratitude to them. Seek support from your local cancer organisation if you need it.





## **21. A HEALTH APPOINTMENT BOOK**

This sounds too simple to be true, but has been my best tool in cancer appointments and follow up. Buy a small hardcover notebook and use it for all your cancer related and health appointments. Keep it in your handbag so you can note thoughts and issues as they arise.

The notebook has three uses:

1. Awareness of your health issues. Jot down issues, aches and pains and questions as they arise at random times.
2. Plan what you need from your medical team. Plan each medical appointment you have: what you want to say to your specialist and the questions you need to ask.
3. Take notes. Take the notebook to all your appointments and write down the replies to your questions, names of medications and follow up (have a friend write in your notebook for you if that helps).

The notebook can be your best friend, as you are not relying on memory that may be affected by cancer treatments. This process also forces you to plan and manage your health appointments, ensuring that you get your needs met.

### ***ACTION***

Buy a hardcover notebook and keep it in your handbag. Use this notebook for recording health issues, your questions and information from your medical appointments.

# CELEBRATE YOUR LIFE

Surviving cancer brings mixed emotions. Both you and your medical team are happy to be released from their care, but cancer may have left some scars. Life can seem a little well, daunting.

So even if you don't feel like it right now, perhaps later today, do something to celebrate life and jump back in to it again.

## 22. PLAN AN END OF TREATMENT CELEBRATION

Whatever your feelings about cancer, finishing treatment is a milestone marking the end of a challenging life stage and needs celebrating. In addition, planning life post-treatment and your end of treatment celebration gives hope and something to look forward to while experiencing the unknown-ness and discomfort of cancer.

You may have had time off work for treatment but that does not mean that you were on holiday. So have a holiday if you can before getting back to the workplace.

### **ACTION**

Before your treatment ends, brainstorm with some friends on your little or big end of treatment milestone celebration. This could be a special dinner, weekend away, through to the dream holiday. It is your dream and your milestone with a budget determined by you. Enjoy.

“Remember that your natural state is joy”

- Wayne Dyer

## 23. ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR STRENGTH

Character and strength does come alongside adversity so acknowledge and celebrate your strength.

When diagnosed with breast cancer, people used to say to me “you’re so strong”. I used to reply that anyone would do the same with a breast cancer diagnosis. But after a while, I realised that I had grown stronger and going through all these difficulties has turned me into a superwoman. Not a superwoman in doing marathons and moving small buildings, but in that I am resilient, assertive and took cancer in my stride.

### **ACTION**

Acknowledge and celebrate what you have gone through and that you are a strong remarkable woman.

“Character cannot be developed  
in ease and quiet.

Only through experience of trial and  
suffering can the soul be strengthened,  
ambition inspired, and success achieved.”

- Helen Keller

## 24. YOUR NEW NORMAL

People often talk about “the new normal”, the period after cancer, where you find it difficult to return to life just as it was before. You may have changed a little and the world will have changed a little too.

Your body might be physically different or feel different; your hair may have grown back straight or curly and a different colour and you might have new scars including a changed or loss of a breast. All these changes may lead you to feel differently about yourself and your place in life.

It is time to accept and love your new body and your new normal, and celebrate who you are today.

### **ACTION**

Take time to reflect on how life has changed for you and what is your new normal? Every day, celebrate who you are today and embrace your new normal. Enrol in Look Good Feel Better if you haven't done it already.

“Out of suffering have emerged  
the strongest souls;  
the most massive characters  
are seared with scars.”

- Khalil Gibran

## **25. YOU ARE UNIQUE. EXPRESS YOURSELF AND YOUR UNIQUE LIFE**

Not one of us is alike and we all contain amazing creative potential inside us. After cancer, it is a perfect time to look at your unique self and reflect on whether there are parts inside you that would like to be expressed.

Would you like to write or have a blog? Would you like to paint, sculpt, act or bring more music or dance in to your life? What are your favourite ways to express yourself and your unique personality? Do you have friends and family that you can talk to about anything that is going on for you? Reflect on who you can express yourself to the most and why.

### **ACTION**

Reflect on any parts of you that need more expression and on parts of you that feel perfectly expressed. Take a new action to express yourself, such as art therapy.

Don't waste your life trying to impress other people. Do what you love, love what you do.



## 26. GET INSPIRED

Inspiration can launch you from a mundane average day into an energised and uplifted feeling that your day and whole life have purpose.

What makes you inspired? Watching or participating in your favourite sport, walking in nature, doing genealogy, meditation, reading poetry or memoirs of inspiring people, looking at or creating art, gardening or helping others? It's great to unlock what makes you feel inspired and to include these moments in your daily life.

I find looking at art and doing walks in nature inspiring and uplifting. I love bright flowers in the house and reading memoirs of people who've overcome great difficulties. I also find talking to interesting and creative people makes me feel full of energy.

### **ACTION**

What makes you inspired? Get to know all the things that make you feel uplifted and inspired and experience inspiration on a daily basis.

“It is only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth and that we have no way of knowing when our time is up - that we will begin to live each day to the fullest, as if it was the only one we had.”

- Elizabeth Kubler-Ross



## 27. DREAM A LITTLE

Use your cancer experience as a personal development tool to explore what you want out of your life or just out of today for a start. Take some time to reflect and dream about what you want for your life. This exercise is all about wants not needs. Do you want more time? Income? Improved relationships? Travel? More joy?

### **ACTION**

Keep a journal and each day, ask yourself ‘what do I want?’ (Honestly, without censor). It is incredible to see what comes out of us when we give ourselves permission to dream of what we want.

"In France, they have a saying for the time when you “have your head in the handlebars” focused on your career and building a settled life – it’s a time that lacks moments to stop, look around and think about the track you’re on. We did stop and realised we weren’t satisfied. We wanted to break free from our comfortable lives and discover the world. So here we are living that dream. We don’t know where it will take us – if we’ll discover our dream home or never go back at all – but this is the life we choose right now, bringing our work on the road and exploring this incredible world”

- from [www.bridgesandballoons.com](http://www.bridgesandballoons.com)

## **28. LIFE AUDIT – REFLECT ON WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY**

Take time to reflect on what nourishes you, how you would like to live, what is important to you, what your definition of success is and what you are here to fulfil in your life.

In Phil Kerslake's book *Life, Cancer & Happiness*, Phil talks about doing a life audit post-cancer. It is a wonderful personal development tool to take some time for yourself, and be guided through a process to audit your life.

In doing this process, you gain clarity about what gives you satisfaction and peace in your life. For example, I found it helpful to focus on how I wanted to live my life rather than what I did.

### ***ACTION***

Get a copy of Phil Kerslake's book and either alone or with a friend, carry out a life audit.

## **29. LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE - LIVE LIFE ON YOUR TERMS AND NO ONE ELSE'S**

You have been through an awful lot with breast cancer and now that your treatments are finished, you deserve to live a life that you greatly enjoy.

Living life on your terms means knowing how you want to live and daring to live that way, even if it is different to how you lived before or and perhaps different to your friends and family. It is about living according to your inner truth.

### **ACTION**

After doing the life audit in the previous step, start the wonderful process of going after what gives you most life satisfaction. Live the life that best reflects you, not anyone else.

“What lies behind us and what lies before us  
are tiny matters compared with  
what lies within us”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson



**THIS ABOVE ALL:  
TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE**

**SHAKESPEARE**

## 30. LIVE AS IF YOU HAVE ONE YEAR LEFT – HOW WOULD YOU SPEND YOUR LAST YEAR (OR LAST FIVE YEARS)?

Another personal development tool is to consider how you would like to live for the rest of your life if you hypothetically had less years. What life would you love to live and how would you live your life if you had a couple of years to live?

### **ACTION**

Plan for a quiet hour or two when you can sit down with some paper and write:

- How would I live my life if I had ten years to live? Who would I spend time with and what would we be doing? What kind of work or hobbies would I try? Where would I travel to?
- Then ask, how would I live my life if I had five years to live?
- Then ask, how would I live my life if I had two years to live?

Then the exciting bit is to start creating this life.

“Can you remember who you were,  
before the world told you who you should be?”

- Danielle LaPorte





### 31. FALL IN LOVE

This might sound simple but in battling cancer, it is easy to fall out of love with life. Life can be incredible and wouldn't it be wonderful to both fall in love with life again and fall in love romantically.

If you are not in love with a fellow human being, take some positive actions to connect with others. Truly connecting with someone is a life affirming gift.

In addition, try some new experiences that might be the best moments of your life. After I finished my treatment in August 2012, I went to France for a month. It opened my eyes up so much to a wonderful life out there waiting to be lived. I felt completely inspired.

#### **ACTION**

Consider the following questions; are there actions that need to be taken to either find or fall back in love? What would need to happen in your life for you to love it? Are there some experiences that you have always wanted to try?

“Let yourself be silently drawn by  
the strange pull of what you really love.  
It will not lead you astray.”

- Rumi

## 32. PRACTICE GRATITUDE

The practice of gratitude changes our perspective on life from a negative to a positive viewpoint and is good for our physical and mental health. Even when you feel sick or fatigued, there is something to feel grateful for. I used to walk on the beach after chemo when I felt rotten and somehow miraculously felt that life was good.

After going through two breast cancer diagnoses, I feel more grateful than ever. There are many people who've had a worse time of it than me or young children with illness. I am fortunate that I have been able to travel and see the world, have good friends and family and many other things.

### **ACTION**

Daily in a journal, think of three things that you are grateful for.

“The trail is beautiful.  
Be still.”

- Navajo Tribe



### **33. OFFER HELP TO ANOTHER CANCER SURVIVOR**

When you are feeling enough energy, give someone else the benefit of what you've learned through your cancer journey. This could be by phone, on-line, in person, by cooking, driving or just listening to someone confronting a life-threatening illness. Share your wisdom, connect with others and contribute. You will help another person but also feel really good doing this.

#### ***ACTION***

Talk to a cancer organisation about volunteering your time to help other breast cancer survivors.

# CONCLUSION

## Life after breast cancer

I hope you have found some helpful tips in this eBook. My most important point is that the happier and healthier you are, the more you will enjoy life and importantly, the stronger physical defence you have against future cancer.

While no one ever chooses breast cancer, I am grateful for the learning that it is brought to me. I wish you all the best with your journey wherever it takes you. Enjoy each day and the people around you.

## About me

I'm Andrea Fairbairn and I am a 46-year-old Pacific Island New Zealand woman who's had breast cancer twice.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2007 and again in 2011. From my breast cancer experiences, I wanted to share my vision of making breast cancer easier and a positive life changing moment, rather than all nausea and hair loss.

I have lived most my life in Wellington, New Zealand; though I have done a bit of travelling overseas for work and holidays. I have always loved art, writing and helping people and have a BA in Psychology. I then worked in community development and international aid and have a Master's degree in Development Studies. However, when I was diagnosed with breast cancer, it started me on a whole new direction of self-care, healing and learning.

To find out what I'm doing now, please check out my Moving Forward Diary on [Breast Cancer Nirvana](#).



*Photo courtesy of Joel Maxwell*



## About Breast Cancer Nirvana

When I had breast cancer the first time, it was hard and there was so much learning in that time. However, when I was diagnosed the second time, it felt different; I had already learned pretty much all I could learn about breast cancer. This time, I felt that part of the purpose of my breast cancer was less about me and more about helping others...sort of part of my destiny.

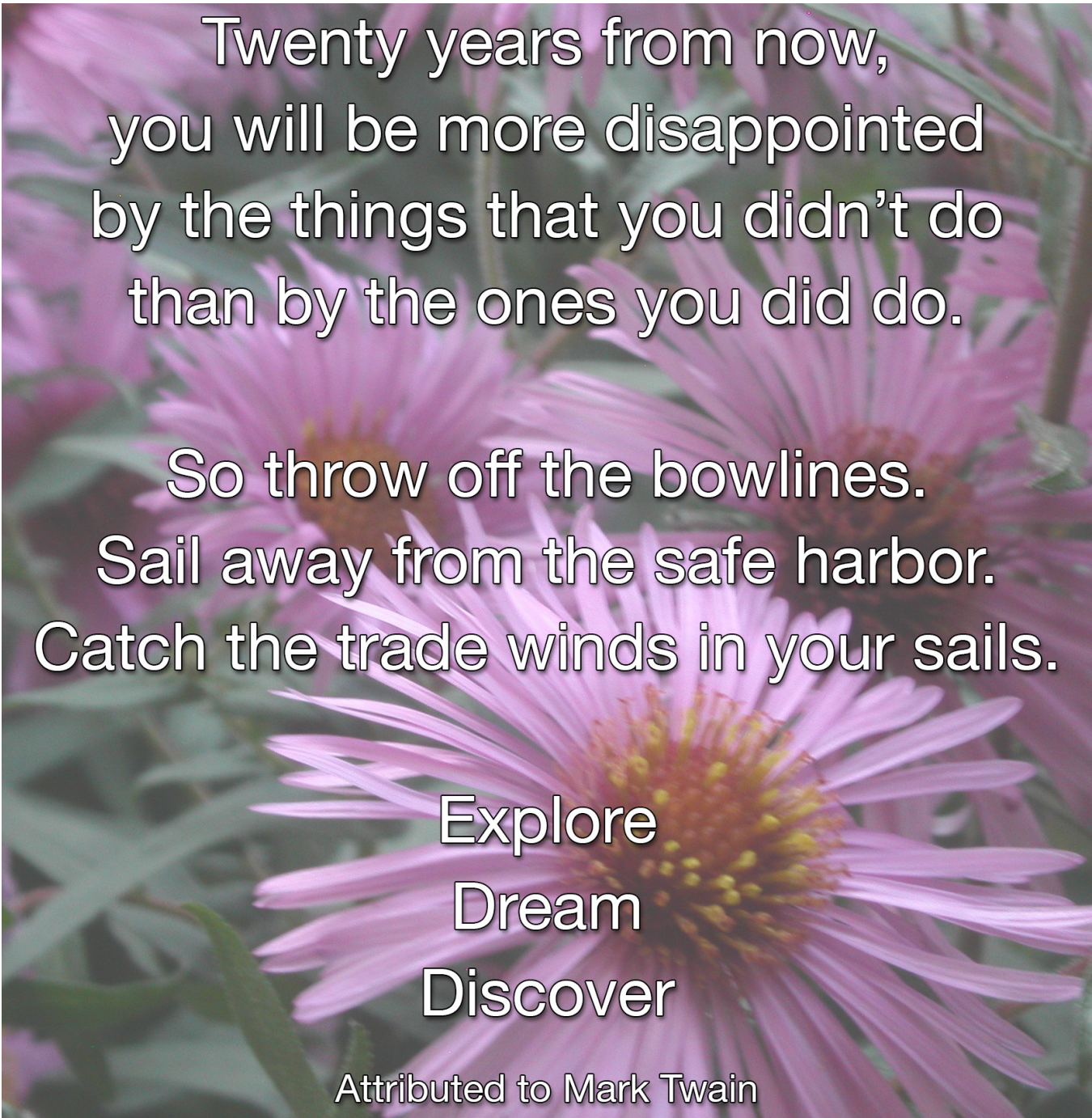
So I created the Breast Cancer Nirvana website with this vision and remain committed to supporting others not only survive breast cancer but hopefully, win a second chance at a great life. The name Breast Cancer Nirvana came about as I wanted people to feel peaceful and supported when they came to the site and also, to reflect the personal development and growth required through the experience of cancer.

Part of Breast Cancer Nirvana is about utilising my experiences for good by sharing the ups and downs of breast cancer and chemo. There are piles of cool resources, support and inspiring stories for women going through breast cancer and I wanted you to see everything in one place. Also, I wanted people to learn about what it's like to go through breast cancer and tips on how best to support our friends and family going through breast cancer. Please also check out my eBook [Chemo and Back Again](#), where I share my journey and tips from going through breast cancer.

I wish to thank so many people in my breast cancer journey. My family, who have been so supportive, my super amazing medical team and my fabulous friends. I feel very grateful for every terrible and wonderful experience as it has brought me to who I am today, where I am healthy and in a great place.

Special thanks go to Sandra Forsyth for all your practical suggestions.

*X Andrea*



Twenty years from now,  
you will be more disappointed  
by the things that you didn't do  
than by the ones you did do.

So throw off the bowlines.  
Sail away from the safe harbor.  
Catch the trade winds in your sails.

Explore  
Dream  
Discover

Attributed to Mark Twain

