

# The Young Ones

## August 2006 Newsletter

... [extract of review from this newsletter]

### Review - *Heartsongs in the Key of C: Women Writing about Breast Cancer*

On 23 September 2006 *Heartsongs in the Key of C: Women Writing about Breast Cancer* will be launched at the Otis Foundation in Mandurang near Bendigo.

*Heartsongs* records the joys and sorrows, the struggles, losses and achievements of ordinary women confronting an extraordinary challenge. It covers that gripping time around diagnosis, the process of coming to terms with that news, of learning and adjusting, incorporating and moving on.

Forty-eight women from across Victoria contributed to *Heartsongs*. Many young women are represented in the collection. Jo Ruff was 26 when she was diagnosed, Marlene Parsons, Lee-anne Hazeldene and Josè Breust, were all 34. Aged 72 at diagnosis Kath Semmler is the oldest writer. Unfortunately there are lots of women in-between too.

In 'My Diagnosis' Lee-anne writes about those first awful moments around diagnosis: 'I rushed to my boss's office, just in time to catch her and let her know I couldn't work the next day, then burst into tears. Then I hurried back to the gymnastics, but I couldn't stay inside to watch with all the other mothers. Back outside, I cried again. That week was filled with tests and doctors' appointments which confirmed the worst. Living in the country has its difficulties with distances. Cancer was confirmed, over the telephone. I was in shock and just cried and cried, but I felt I needed to be brave for my children. I couldn't possibly die, dying was not on my busy agenda!'

In 'Again and Again and Again' Marlene writes about the fears of recurrence: '... I breathe deeply, struggling to contain the fear. Breathing to compose myself. Standing, I don my bra and shirt. I shove my prosthesis in where it belongs. Taking a seat, I face him once again. Another biopsy, another row of puckered stitches to add to the tapestry on my breast. A sigh of relief; a reprieve. Once again the lump is negative.'

You might have heard about this project since it first started in 2002. For project managers Marlene Parsons and Sharyn Dickeson it has been a four-and-a-half year journey from when the idea of *Heartsongs* was conceived after a Warrior Women writing workshop in Sale, to applying for funding and running writing workshops throughout rural Victoria through to finally finding a publisher. Christine Gillespie was the writing mentor at the workshops and BCNA the financial auspice. The project successfully attracted funding from Australia Council for the Arts, the Alfred Felton Bequest, and VicHealth.

Judy Horacek's illustration, 'The Pond of Tears', was used as a prompt in the writing workshops. This collection is loosely organised around the themes and issues that emerged from each of the six frames of her illustration. In 'Last summer I cried' women write about the discovery of a lump, tests and diagnosis. In 'My tears turned into a pond' they deal with diagnosis, surgery and treatment. 'Over and over in my head' deals with fears, especially of recurrence. Loss and death are broached in 'Often I would lie by the edge'. 'Eventually I resolved' deals with the challenges of living and dealing with the disease. 'Strange and beautiful things grow' explores the beginnings of moving on.

Participating in creative writing workshops was undoubtedly was a powerful therapeutic experience for the *Heartsongs* writers. The published collection makes good reading, offering a range of experiences for readers. *Heartsongs* will resonate with anyone who

has confronted uncertainty and adversity. The *Heartsongs* writers offer us a moving collection of writing about life.

*Heartsongs in the Key of C* is published by Kate Carey Productions. It's a beautifully presented A5 hardcover book that sells for \$24.95. *Heartsongs* can be purchased from any bookshop (some may have to order it in) or directly from the publisher, Kate Carey Productions, 51 Ormond St, Moonee Ponds Vic 3039, [katecarey@overthefencepress.com.au](mailto:katecarey@overthefencepress.com.au), [www.overthefencepress.com.au/katecarey](http://www.overthefencepress.com.au/katecarey).

If you would like to attend the launch and see the Otis Foundation units (a wonderful free respite for women with breast cancer) email Tess Moloney at Kate Carey Productions.

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