

We have learned from our experience. Though our cancers may arise from multiple elements, we know the work environment is a major contributor. We are writing together about what we have learned. We want others to benefit by joining together to take on stonewalling bosses.

We want to turn anger into action for change by telling beautiful, powerful, transformative, stories.

We are humanitarians, compassionate women, women who have faced death, women who have worked hard, raised families, contributed to our communities, faced adversity, made music.

We are strong women, who make unions strong. We want our stories to make a difference.

Sharon Angel is a job evaluation specialist with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). She has recently returned to work after undergoing treatment for a recurrence of her breast cancer. Sharon lives in Aylmer, Quebec in a little cottage near the Ottawa River, where her wonderful friends came to look after her.

Teresa Healy is a writer, a researcher in the labour movement and a singer-songwriter living in Ottawa. She is the author of Gendered Struggles Against Globalisation in Mexico (Ashgate, 2008) and editor of the Harper Record (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2008). As part of the folk duo Healy & Juravich,, she performs songs about work, love and struggle. She is now working on her next CD project due out later this year. Boot Against Nettle is a collection of songs about life as an Irish-Canadian woman which she began to write during treatment. <www.teresahhealy.ca>.

Sandi Howell is the recently retired Director of Equality for CUPE. She lives with her partner, on the Tay River, where she wanders happily in the woods, reads, travels, and enjoys the company of purring cats on her lap.

Laurie Kingston is a 43-year-old mother, writer, trade unionist and wife who was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer in 2006. She's been in remission since June 2007 and continues with monthly treatments. Laurie writes a blog called "Not Just About Cancer" and has written a book about her experiences called Not Done Yet: Living Through Breast Cancer, which was published by Women's Press in 2009. She lives in Ottawa with her two sons (who are seven and twelve years old), her husband, and her Tibetan Terrier.

Catherine Louli is a writer living in Ottawa. She is thrilled to be alive and raising her daughter Emma. She works full time for CUPE, and continues a course of treatment to keep cancer at bay. Catherine remains in awe of the mysteries of the universe.

Doreen Meyer is a recent retiree celebrating more than 13 years of being cancer free. As well as writing, she enjoys photography and stitching and is a member of the Out of the Box fibre artists.

At 51, and eight years past being diagnosed with breast cancer, Cathy Remus loves life more with every year that goes by. As a labour educator, she is constantly inspired by the members and staff she gets to work with in CUPE and the broader labour movement. She credits her family and friends for loving the cancer away and for continuing to enrich her life in so many ways.

JOAN BOND

Chronic Fatigue

One sofa cushion wearing thin
where her tail bone rests month after month.
The days' weight pulls
her face away from the window
toward documentaries, needlepoint,
biography.
She knows not to wait for
that home-town man to unhinge
the gate, walk on the front lawn, the first stair.

Nowadays visitors knock, enter
with flowers, prescriptions, chocolate
cake slices, thin
as her smile. They know
casseroles turn her stomach. On occasion
her mouth moves upward,
recommending reading material or tourist
attractions,
places she was when
getting into a car wasn't the journey itself.

She wants to give back by taking
in her visitors' well-intentioned gifts and
errands; even disclosures that
they are tired
of their lives crammed inside marked
calendars. Lying on a couch, watching TV alone,
eating almonds and cashews for
protein sounds good to them,
a secret they wouldn't speak
out loud.

Home Care workers and the cleaning lady know
what's in her cupboards, closet, refrigerator;
her life like crushed ice
melting into others.

Joan Bond resides on the prairies where she writes poetry and paints in watercolours. She has published in The Antigonish Review, Prairie Fire, FreeFall, The Nashwaak Review, and previously in Canadian Woman Studies. She is a late bloomer, stepping into her prime.