



Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Program Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC) Newsletter

**“If you watch how nature deals with adversity, continually renewing itself, you can’t help but learn.”
~ Dr. Bernie Siegel**

The days are getting longer, the weather is feeling warmer (slightly!) and the birds are singing. Spring is in the air and in this issue, we want to highlight one of the best parts about Spring – renewal. When you are going through a cancer journey, either as a patient or a caregiver, you are changed. In this issue we will celebrate the life of one of our founding PFAC members who inspired us all to embrace who we are becoming in the midst of our journey. Cancer is full of scary and stressful things, but it is also filled with moments of happiness, and learnings. Stacey’s beautiful poem GRIT really illustrates the ebbs and flows of a cancer journey. In this issue we feature a few things that will help you along that journey. Be well friends.

~ Jennifer McCloskey, Cancer Program PFAC patient member



Remembering PFAC Member: Stacey LePage

Written by Susanna Wong, PFAC Staff Member



The PFAC family is deeply saddened by the passing of one of our members, Stacey LePage. Stacey was our patient co-chair of PFAC and I had the privilege of working with her since 2018. Stacey championed a number of projects dedicated in improving the cancer patient and family experience, such as improving comfort in waiting areas, symptom screening, and patient education. Stacey created this PFAC Newsletter in 2019 as a way to communicate with patients and caregivers and provide information and support.

A talented writer, Stacey penned a number of the articles with messages of support, inspiration and hope, all wrapped with a touch of deliciousness (check out her [broccoli soup recipe!](#)). Stacey would be thrilled to know that our previous issue ([Winter 2023](#)) reached over 6,000 patients via email and print.

Stacey also extended her passion for improving care to the rest of Team RVH. She was our cancer representative at the RVH Corporate PFAC and was an active member of the CARE4 Patient Portal Working Group, RVH Accessibility Committee, and PET-CT Committee.

She was a courageous advocate for patients and caregivers and will be remembered for her kindness, enthusiasm, and passion.

Thank you Stacey, for everything. You will be greatly missed but know that your passion for improving care lives on.



A Few Words of Inspiration: GRIT

A poem written by Stacey LePage for the 2023 Gilda's Club Raw & Reflective Calendar

I wasn't always this person you see today
My story is not mine alone to tell –
You see, cancer took life's script from me
And my character – as well

I had great plans to change the world
To see all I could see
To do all I could do with life
And be all I could be

I studied hard, I earned my way
I worked hard, and saved, and prayed
That life would shine upon me well
So tough times I could evade

But the script I thought I wrote for me
The Future I would hold
No more was I in charge of me
The cancer stopped me cold

I had no choice but to read its words
And act out every line –
The plot, the scenes, the entrance cues
And none of them were mine

I played the part, I played my role
Reluctantly I obeyed
And those who watched me play my
scene...
Were incredibly – afraid

I bided my time and bit my tongue
For deep inside I knew
That this was not my role to keep
And that I would rise anew

The lines like glass upon my tongue
I tasted every word
I chewed them up and spit them out
Like cancer – I would purge

Then, deep within I felt my roar
It clawed right through the ground
It dug in deep and summoned the grit
To bellow my own life sound

A relentless climb, a pause, a slip
Then on my feet again –
I faced my life and what I'd become
And realized what I had gained

I took my hope, I took my faith
I sifted the sands of time
I had survived the play, the script, the scene
Life's victory was finally mine

And as I stood to take a bow
At the closing of the day
I looked beyond the stage where I
Had once my life been played

I had control of my lead again
My character renewed
A new day, a life, a future bold
And cancer was now subdued

A thunderous roar of clapping hands
An ovation loud and clear
The lights arose so I could see
All those whom I held dear

There they were just within my reach
The people I did love
Had loved me back and cheered me on
Like manna from above

No
I wasn't always this person you see today
The story, not mine alone to tell
Though cancer stole the script from me
I played my own role well.

Patient's Corner:

Patient Story:

"I am part of the current [EXCEL program](#). The trainers that we work with twice a week are phenomenal. Multiple variations of exercises are demonstrated so everyone can work at the own pace and level. Participants are invited to share all concerns or questions as a group or individually. The trainers' openness and willingness to help make the participants feel comfortable to open up and share . Both are extremely supportive and motivating. The exercises work your entire body involving strength, resistance, balance, etc. We just finished week 5 of 12 and I have more energy and feel better than when I began. **I strongly recommend it for everyone.** Does not matter type of cancer, what stage, sex or age."

Rachel D, Cancer Patient

For more information about the EXCEL program and exercise for cancer patients, we featured it in our [Fall 2022 newsletter](#). Check it out!



For more information on this amazing program:

<https://kinesiology.ucalgary.ca/labs/health-and-wellness/research/research-studies/exercise-cancer-enhance-living-well-excel>

Community Outreach:

Abbey Retreat Centre



*The Abbey Retreat Centre was born out of a vision to **support people living with a cancer diagnosis**. Through creating healing spaces and community, the Abbey Retreat Centre **provides whole person care that is complimentary to medical treatments for people affected by cancer and their primary support person.***



Recently we had a conversation with Barb Smith-Morrison, the Executive Director of the Abbey Retreat Centre, to learn more about this incredible organization and how you can be a part of it.

How would you describe Abbey's Retreat Centre to someone unfamiliar with your organization?

Abbey Retreat Centre is a safe and loving community for people affected by cancer. Our in-person retreats and online programs are for people who are newly diagnosed, in the midst of treatment, navigating life post-cancer, living with advanced stage cancer, or facing end of life. Two of our retreats are also designed for a key support person/caregiver to attend, if possible.

We find that wellbeing and healing are enhanced for everyone when those providing support are also cared for and given opportunities to be well-nourished, to rest, and to have their stories witnessed and deeply listened to.

All of our cancer support programs are offered at no cost to the participants because we recognize that individuals and families experiencing cancer already face many increased expenses.



Can you describe the type of programs that are offered at your retreat?

Retreats: Picture a quiet place, in nature. There is clean air to breathe, and a beautiful natural setting for walking or contemplation. It is a place where a person can step outside of their everyday routine, completely relax in the space and consider choices for themselves that are life enhancing. It is a safe place where they will feel listened to and be supported within a broader community.

The 4 day in-person retreat offers rest, renewal, companionship, and an introduction to a variety of evidence-informed practices that help to soothe, strengthen, and restore the body, mind and soul in the midst of a cancer experience. A key support person is encouraged to attend as well. Practices and experiences include: massage, informal and facilitated group conversation, delicious and nutritious food, gentle and restorative yoga, meditation and breath-work, nature connection, music, expressive arts.

The 3 day in-person retreat, just for the person living with a diagnosis, invites participants to use different creative processes as a means to explore their cancer experience and also includes group discussions, delicious and nutritious food, time in nature and space to relax.

We have just piloted a new **3 day in-person retreat for those facing end of life**. This retreat is for the caregiver/support person as well and offers ways to explore ideas about the end of life in a safe, beautiful and well-facilitated setting. We invite people to come prepared to share honest conversation. In addition to careful listening to each other, we'll explore our individual ways through the challenges of final stage cancers using many forms of the arts to express what is closest to our hearts when words alone do not suffice. Previous experience in the arts is **not** necessary.

We also offer two **online programs**.

a) **Re-Shaping Our Cancer Stories**. This is a 4-week program where people gather over zoom, twice/week for 2 hours each time. Through live, on-line gatherings, video segments, and supporting materials, we will integrate the natural world, simple art-making, yoga, meditation, sound, and discussion circles as we travel through our cancer stories to chart a fresh course. All of the materials you need will be mailed to you.

b) **Take a Thread and Follow It** This innovative program uses simple stitching and other art-making invitations to explore and express feelings of transience, and uncertainty in our worlds as it relates to a cancer experience, as well as ways to mend, repair and renew in a fresh way. All basic materials will be supplied. . Absolutely no previous stitching or artmaking experience is needed to take part, simply bring an open heart and a playful spirit!



Watch this inspiring [video](https://vimeo.com/643241248/6fa32f3e22) (<https://vimeo.com/643241248/6fa32f3e22>) that provides a glimpse into the impact of our cancer-support programs.

When are the programs offered?

Our goal is to host approximately 6-8 retreats/year (this is dependent on fundraising). We also offer our online programs at various times throughout the year.

If someone is interested in applying to one of these amazing programs, what is the process?

We encourage people to apply anytime for an in-person retreat or online program. There are application forms on our website. If someone needs support, they can call us and we can help them apply: 705-754-2966. Once you've applied, you're immediately put onto a waitlist.

What is the typical wait time, if you are selected, to attend this program?

Once you are on the waitlist, it is difficult to say precisely how long it might take to get into a program. It will depend on a few things: your health (we prioritize those who are living with advanced stage cancer), the length of the list for the particular program, your last-minute availability should a spot open up, and how your schedule coincides with the time of the retreat or the online program.

Our online programs are intended to build a safe community as well, so we ask people to ideally not miss more than 1 or 2 gatherings. We definitely understand though, that things arise and schedules change, particularly when you're living with cancer.

Anything else you would like our readers to know about Abbey Retreat Centre?

A quote from a past retreat participant: *"This is a valuable healing experience for the body, emotions, mind, and especially spirit. My cancer journey was in a sense solitary. Well-meaning friends could not hear what I was saying and sometimes my spouse and I have not said things out of concern for the other's fragility. Here we found a loving, caring, healing and fun community of newfound friends who shared our experiences. An incredible gift."*

We work hard and are very intentional about cultivating a safe and loving community in each of our retreats and online programs. Parker Palmer really captures our intention very well with these words, ***"The human soul does not want to be advised or fixed or saved. It simply wants to be witnessed."***

We are in a growing season as interest in our cancer support programming soars. We are working at training new facilitators, recruiting new board members, and inviting new donors who believe in our vision. Please reach out if you're interested in becoming part of this loving and transformational community!

To learn more about **Abbey Retreat Centre** follow them on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) or check out their website: <https://abbeyretreatcentre.ca/>

What's New in Cancer Support

Fear of Recurrence Therapy Group Support

Fear of Recurrence Therapy Group Support

A Group Support program offered by the Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Program

**Have you completed your treatment for breast (chest) or gynae cancer?
Do you live in fear and anxiety about the possibility of your cancer returning?**

We invite you to join a 6-week group program that helps you to understand your triggers, learn strategies to better cope with fear of recurrence and to overall improve your quality of life.



Session dates:

Tuesday, May 16: A one-time private meeting (online virtually) with a social worker. A specific appointment time will be confirmed after you register.

Tuesday May 23 to Tuesday June 23: Group sessions run from 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm.

Where: Online virtually, through Microsoft Teams

How to register: Call the Cancer Program's Patient and Family Support Desk at 705-728-9090 x43520

For more information: www.rvh.on.ca (type "cancer recurrence" in the search bar)

Look Good Feel Better is back live at RVH!



After a 3-year hiatus due to COVID-19, we're happy to announce the return of the in-person Look Good Feel Better experience. The **in-person workshop** is designed for women facing cancer. It is 2 hours and covers information and tips on skincare, cosmetics, wigs and hair alternatives. Rather stay at home? Look Good Feel Better is pleased to offer an **online workshop for both men and women**. For more information: <https://lgfb.ca/>



Photo source: Look Good Feel Better.

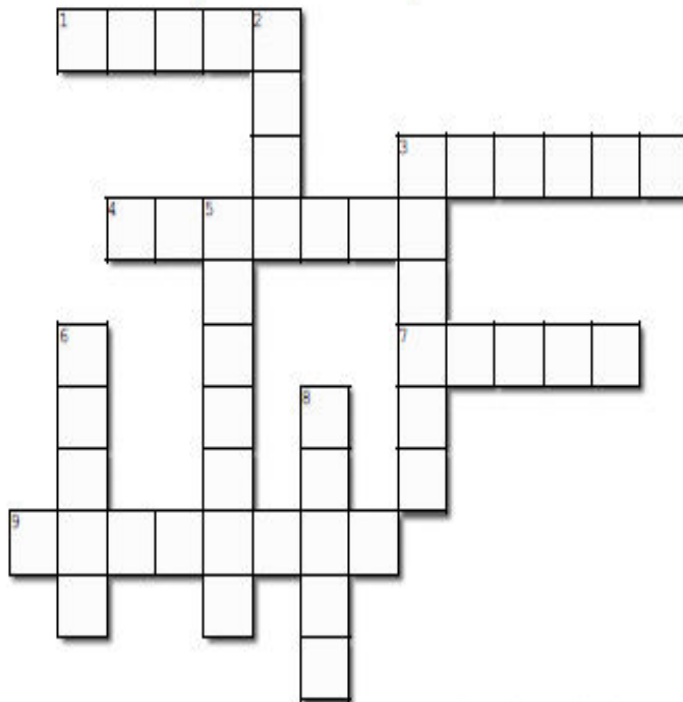
A Puzzle to Exercise Your Brain! (Answer key on the last page!)

Created by Debra Poss, Cancer Program PFAC patient member

Name: _____

Riddle Crossword

Complete the crossword puzzle below



Created using the Crossword Maker on TheTeachersCorner.net

Across

1. What can fill a room but takes up no space?
3. What flowers are kissable?
4. What is so fragile that saying its name breaks it?
7. What has many keys but can't open a single lock?
9. What kind of room has no doors or windows?

Down

2. Until I am measured, I am not known. Yet how you miss me, when I have flown. What am I?
3. What starts with a T, ends with a T, and has T in it?
5. What building has the most stories?
6. What word is pronounced the same if you take away four of its five letters?
8. What has hands, but can't clap?

Yummy Recipes



Spring Green Frittata

From EatingWell (www.eatingwell.com)

Frittatas are a versatile dish that can be served at breakfast, lunch, or dinner. This easy frittata, feature green spring vegetable accented by chopped tomatoes and parmesan cheese can be on your plate in 25 minutes. Feel free to substitute ingredients to suite your tastes and consult with your doctor

Prep Time: 25 minutes

Servings: 2

Ingredients

- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 4 egg whites
- 2 tablespoons fat-free milk
- 1 teaspoon fresh chives
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 cup finely shredded Parmesan Cheese (1 ounce)
- 1/2 cup 1/2 -inch pieces of asparagus
- 1/4 cup sliced green onions
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped spinach leaves
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 small Roma tomato, chopped
- 2 teaspoons of olive oil

Directions:

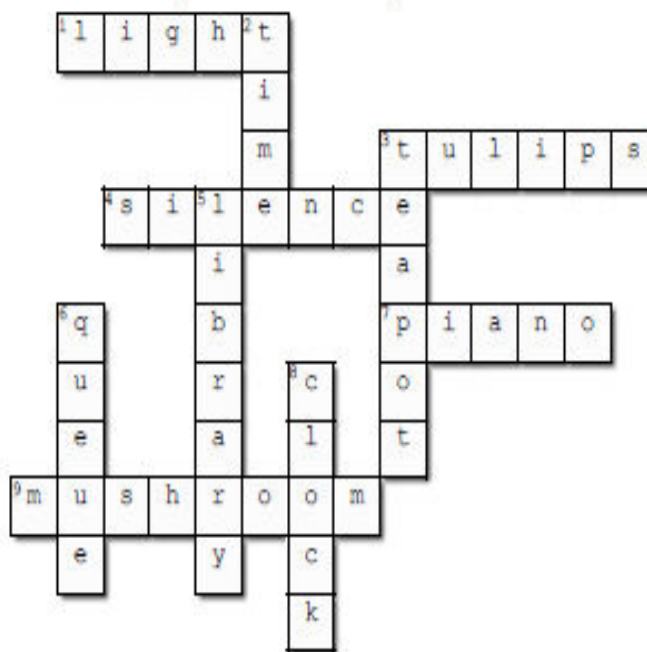
1. Preheat broiler, in a small bowl combine the eggs, egg whites, milk, chives and pepper: stir in 2 tablespoons of the cheese.
2. In an 8-inch non-stick broiler proof skillet heat oil over medium. Add asparagus and green onions; cook and stir 2 minutes. Add spinach and garlic; cook 30 seconds or just until spinach is wilted.
3. Pour egg mixture into skillet; reduce heat to low. Cook. Covered, 10 to 12 minutes or until nearly set. Sprinkle with remaining 2 tablespoon of cheese.
4. Place skillet under broiler 4 to 5 inches from heat. Broil 1 minute or just until top is set, and cheese is melted. Top with tomato.

Puzzle Answer Key

Name: _____

Riddle Crossword

Complete the crossword puzzle below



Created using the Crossword Maker on TheTeachersCorner.net

Across

1. What can fill a room but takes up no space? (**light**)
3. What flowers are kissable? (**tulips**)
4. What is so fragile that saying its name breaks it? (**silence**)
7. What has many keys but can't open a single lock? (**piano**)
9. What kind of room has no doors or windows? (**mushroom**)

Down

2. Until I am measured, I am not known. Yet how you miss me, when I have flown. What am I? (**time**)
3. What starts with a T, ends with a T, and has T in it? (**teapot**)
5. What building has the most stories? (**library**)
6. What word is pronounced the same if you take away four of its five letters? (**queue**)
8. What has hands, but can't clap? (**clock**)

If you are looking for back issues of the **Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Program Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC)** Newsletter visit us here:

<https://www.rvh.on.ca/?s=pfac+newsletter>