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15 March 2000

You may have read Pat Planner's article in the February Newsletter. It was entitled 'Living with the Enemy'. She wrote that, as people who have or have had cancer, "we must not consider ourselves totally helpless as individuals, as we know there is much that we can do to help ourselves, and in seeking that help we find ourselves and our lives can take a new and interesting turn and a whole new world can open up when we join the cancer club".

As always, and particularly during the year we are covering at this AGM, we have steadily increased the numbers of people who come to our 'cancer club' for help. And the way we operate our 'helping' system means we never run out of helpers, because each new person who visits seeking our help then usually becomes a 'helper' themselves, without thinking about it and perhaps often without realising it.

And lots of our helpers have real 'stickability'. When Gill retired at the very time I started to be involved with the Centre in 1993, she was very quickly pulled into the system, and is still with us ~ reliable and steadfast. Since then we have continued to attract a gathering of people on whom I and the Centre rely. I wish I could mention all the names, but that would be cumbersome because everyone who comes here has particular strengths which mix up into an almighty marvellous and staggeringly successful recipe for the Cambridge Cancer Help Centre. But I must mention Tricia because she and I know we have the 'right mix' of strengths and weaknesses ~ the sort of mix that could lead to disagreement and disharmony in the hands of the unenlightened. I suspect that I must irritate her sometimes because, according to my psychometrics, I can be 'inattentive to detail and precision, am not objective, am less organised, and may seem disorganised.' (And I think that's true.) But she and I can look beyond that and Tricia will believe I have some strengths to compensate for all that, and we have a 'knowing' that together we achieve a lot that works well for the Centre.

You can probably tell that this report is centred on the people who come to the Centre! How fortunate we are that those left behind when someone has died often stay with us (I'm thinking particularly of Margot) ~ hopefully helping themselves with their continued attendance here, but most definitely helping all those who continue to seek our help. And look at our healers, Jane, Scilla, Caroline, Carolyn, Dennis, Sue, Sarah and Jennie, and our counsellors. They and Veronica (our manicurist) offer their skills without making any charge to the Centre. Look at Cambridge Constabulary, who have good and friendly links with us, and have improved our assets considerably. Look at Oakpark Security who installed a £600 security system for us ~ free of charge.

Sometimes I remember the Centre's bad times (and it's good to do that). I'm fervently glad we didn't give up when times were difficult, and also appreciate that David Wilson and others helped to keep us going through those times.

Our social life is sparkling! Occasional lunches at the Curry Queen, twice-a-week lunches at Topkapi, just around the corner, and among other excursions, our yearly 'long weekend' trip to Sheringham, described by Pat as a 'very large dose of the best possible medicine ~ laughter!'

Inevitably, life cannot be good all the time, and we occasionally have to face up to periods of sadness when someone we are fond of dies. It may seem that we are having to cope with an increase in such situations at the moment, but I believe that is mainly due to the fact that the number of people coming to the Centre has increased considerably, because more hospital staff are sending their patients to us. And Ros wrote, also in the February 2000 newsletter: 'Sometimes at the Centre there comes a time to say goodbye to people, when the medical team have no more to do. Some of us find this harder to do than others, but it is as important as sharing in someone's happy recovery.'

And if, because of losing some of our friends, we frantically ask ourselves if we are doing anything valuable at the Centre, then I suggest

we do two things: The first is to imagine what Brian McPherson would have said if we had put that question to him! And those of us who were fortunate enough to have known him during the many years he fought the cancer (and won many of the rounds) will know pretty well the attitude he would take in answering that question! He used to say that hope and optimism gave him control of the cancer. And he resourced that hope and optimism at the Centre. You couldn't tell him what he could and couldn't do. Told not to drink alcohol, he'd go and have a pint and a pie when told good news (and when given bad news), and when we went and talked to the students at Melbourn Village College, he took his motorbike to show to the boys, and when a teacher reminded Brian that he couldn't ride his bike on the school premises, he, of course, rode his bike to the absolute delight of those boys, who always made a fuss of him whenever we returned to their school. Perhaps that didn't endear him to the teacher, but that was just Brian. He'd got cancer and so he felt he couldn't be told he couldn't do anything. I sat as a passenger in his car while he insisted he should drive through Drummer Street and Emmanuel Street (newly forbidden route), him as cool as a cucumber, me in a state of not knowing where to put myself and anticipating at least six police cars (all with a Gordon Murray and a Geoff Bye in them) and a helicopter to descend on us.

And one of my views is that he lived so long because he was a 'fighting spirit'. He fought the system to get NHS homeopathic treatment, he fought the hospital appointment system: "But doctor, I've got cancer. I can't wait four weeks", (so was seen that day). He went out and bought the powerful motorbike he'd always wanted. Fighting Spirit with capital letters stuff.

Now the second thing: I remember Anna many years ago saying to me, "If I'd stayed at home today I would be frightened, alone, looking out of the window at the rain, so I thought I'd be better off coming here to talk to friends". Isn't it better to come to the Centre ~ for healing, for tea,

for talking, painting a picture, reading a book, listening, comforting, supporting? So ~ that's it. Ask yourself 'what if there were no Centre? What then?'

Pat also wrote: 'This cancer club is the one nobody wants to join, but for some it can become a privilege to become a member.'

I say that it is a privilege for me to be involved with our Cambridge Cancer Help Centre ~ to make so many friends, to have such fun, even though it is sometimes sprinkled with sadness. But that's not the way it is only at the Centre; it's the way it is in life ~ a mixture of sadness and good things ~ **Many Good Things**.



*Marilyn & Brian
1991*

27 February 2002

“Please write a report for the AGM”, said David.

“Give me a clue”, I said.

“Rally the Troops” he said, quick as a flash.

Looked in dictionary.

Under ‘rally’ it says

“Bring or come together as **support** or for action”

and “assume or **rouse** to fresh energy”

So this report is headed *Supporting and Rousing*

Supporting

and I’m just going to say what I think we all know, but if we are in a troop-rallying frame of mind it’s good to remind ourselves of what a very special place this is. That this Centre does its best to support those people who have cancer and those people who are carers of someone who has to face the cancer journey. I believe the support is particularly best given by people who have had or have got cancer, backed up by those of us who haven’t had to personally face that devastating blow of such a diagnosis. For example Gill, who was our first volunteer and who runs the Centre when I’m not here on a Tuesday, and Tricia who looks after everyone on Wednesdays when I am absent.

Perhaps it’s helpful to remember Dulcie’s comment a few weeks ago when she said to me “what is so special about this place is that it tries to provide what people’s individual needs are”. And I think well, we try but perhaps we won’t always succeed, because we aren’t perfect.

And then we come to

Rousing

I'm not sure we need to rouse something that is obviously inherent at this Centre. But what we do in a gentle way is to waken up every-one's fighting spirit, to rouse it into action, and thus to take on the cancer, to fight it whilst, at the same time, (and this is a big bonus) we all make new friends and benefit from the contact we make with each other.

And the **support** and **rousing** comes in strong measure from people who are battling away against what they have to battle away at and yet they still find the time and inclination to put some, maybe a lot, of their energy into supporting other people, to show them what to do and how to do it.

And, yes, I do know that although a new person at our door may well have been asking themselves "do I really need to go to this Centre?" before their first visit, they will leave with some joy in their hearts and realisation that the visit was a good idea, that there is some hope emerging, and we should all be proud of that because to have that effect on someone, on many people, is incredibly inspiring.

What a team ~ everyone plays a part. There isn't a single person at our Centre who doesn't contribute a sparkle to the success of this Cambridge Cancer Help Centre. Our healers and counsellor - unpaid for what they do for us but certainly contributing in their different ways to our success. Our librarian, who has set up our library in a proper manner ~ so that all our books are listed, labelled and cared for. Collectively we make tea, provide lifts, gather for lunches/dinners, social events, raise money, man stalls, make recycled cards and try to put into action the most difficult skill ~ listening. What gems we have in this place. It is amazing. We all offer something different, because there are so many extraordinary ordinary people here, to make the complete picture of a place that offers so much in such a loving way. And another thing we have learned is that our informal way of going on is, for us, the best way of doing things and that the person who has cancer is one of the best ambassadors for this

Centre. Ours is the right way. And that Right Way didn't fall into our laps. We learnt it through very difficult times. We devised it ourselves. Our Way doesn't appear in the text books on how to run a support group.

And the office team is the greatest of office partnerships. Tricia and I are able to share our strengths, admit our weaknesses to each other ~ not an easy thing to do for most of us perhaps but Tricia and I can do it easily and comfortably and thus combine our strengths, to work in the best way for the benefit of the Centre and the people who join us here. And our trustees are not just names that appear on the back of the newsletter. They all play strong parts in our rich tapestry, working away at all sorts of things that are part of the important background of the Centre. And with the good of the Centre at heart. So, David Wilson (our superb treasurer ~ and we often tell him that!), David Barylko, Jane Cornell, Fran Dawson, Paulette Dupuy, Mark Howe, Viv Neville, Gill Overhill and Tricia Smith are, I can assure you, trustees of note.

And what a privilege it is to be a part of what goes on here. Can anyone wish for anything more rewarding and pleasurable, than to take everyone's side in their fight against cancer.

In the Snakatak café a couple of Tuesdays ago about a dozen of us gathered for lunch and because of the good-natured teasing and such goings-on a roar of laughter or two welled up from our little group. Such proof, you see, that our Centre isn't a dismal place but a place of hope and optimism and outstanding battling against the hardships our friends experience.

So my realisation is that in this very special place we **do** come together to offer **support** to the person who has cancer and **support** to their carers and we **do** hope to **rouse** them to fresh energy. And we do it our way, which is the right way.

All is well in this place.

Ann



January 1995

19 March 2003

Fighting on the Beaches

President John F Kennedy said, on the 20 January 1961,
“And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you
~ ask what **you** can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world,
ask not what America will do for you. But ask what **together** we can do”.

The words that particularly caught my imagination were ~
“but ask what together we can do”

We don't need to say “people of this Cambridge Cancer Help Centre,
don't ask what this Centre will do for you, but ask what together we can
do for people who have cancer and for their carers and families”. Because,
you see, the magic of this place is that without being guided to do so,
everyone does, together, the best it can do for everyone else. Of course
when someone new arrives at our Centre we do our best to help that
person, as they ask, but before long, perhaps without realising it, they are
helping someone else.

John Bird, founder of ‘Big Issue’ said that the idea that homeless people
could make decisions for themselves was an unusual mind-set for most
charities. And surely that sort of feeling was behind Marilyn's reasoning
when she decided to start up the Cambridge Cancer Help Centre. It was
perhaps behind her view that people who had cancer needed to talk to
other people who had cancer, to find out information for themselves, in
order to help each other. On television recently John Bird said he believed
that the people with the problem were the right people to try to find
solutions.

But I think Marilyn thought it first and John Bird re-invented the wheel!

President Nelson Mandela said that fortunately he had had the assistance of dedicated colleagues and friends who had helped him complete his work and to whom he wanted to express appreciation. And I feel that way too and appreciate all the help we receive from everyone who comes to this Centre.

There aren't any quotations here from British politicians! I could have gone down the road of Sir Winston Churchill, with "fighting them on the beaches and never surrendering", but President Kennedy, President Nelson Mandela and John Bird said exactly what I wanted to say.

Rev Martin Luther King, on 28th August 1963 said, "I Have a Dream". So I'm telling the Universe, as we are recommended to do by those who believe it's the right thing to do, that although this Centre is a brilliant place, absolutely full of remarkable and courageous people, my dream is that one day we will own our own Centre, that it will be a peaceful, calm place ~ an oasis, and a continuing 'Shining Light', as it has recently been described.

Then all will be well.

March 2004

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Some businesses and organisations from time to time earnestly gather around flip-charts with felt-tipped pens and discuss what's going on around them, under these particular headings.

I consider that our Centre's **Strengths** lie in the way we support someone who has cancer, and additionally, that we also support their carers, family and friends. And that we have people like ... well, I started to type what was a long list and then realised that everyone is a part of our strength and we haven't got the time or perhaps the inclination to sit here while I read out all the names of the people who do so much for us.

Our **Weaknesses** ~ well, we don't admit to many! Even though we know we aren't perfect. But I suppose to some of our members we would do what we do better, if we did it more often, by opening five days a week, as we once did until seven years ago.

Threats ~ well in September we picked up a rumour or two that our Centre's building was going to be demolished. Once that was confirmed we all sort of went "oh dear, what do we do now?" ~ but it wasn't long before that mood changed to one of optimism. So this particular threat became an opportunity to move on and become an Opportunity. (That's with a capital 'O') If we can transform weakness and threats into opportunities and strengths, well, what more could anyone want!

So, **Opportunities** ... We have an opportunity to all plough in to find new premises. Premises we can keep solely for our own use. This would enable us to put back the photographs on the walls, not have to hide

names and addresses, an opportunity to keep our cosy, warm, friendly,

homely and welcoming Centre to ourselves ~ a difficult task in a place like Cambridge where rents and buildings are very expensive.

Having realised our opportunities, let's just dwell a little more on our strengths, and feel good about ourselves. It isn't uncommon for someone to arrive here for the first time, looking extremely anxious and perhaps not wanting to be here at all. And then, perhaps having had some healing, some reflexology, some hand massage, some counselling, some head massage and some talking to someone else who has or has had cancer, they actually say, on their way out, "I feel a different person compared to when I arrived". I know I'm always saying this and putting it into reports like this one, but isn't it just marvellous that we can do that for someone in our large family. Not that I do it, but someone who has had cancer can do it ~ has the strength to do it ~ to overcome the other person's temporary weakness of extreme fear. And someone else said, over the telephone at the beginning of the conversation, "I'm clearing out my house for charity because I have been told that I haven't got very long to live". But at the end of the conversation she said, "I feel Hope (another capital letter) has just walked into the room".

So I think this Cambridge Cancer Help Centre is marvellous. Let's look forward to everyone celebrating with a 'welcome-to-our-new-home' party in whichever new place we find, and maybe we'll let Margot put some gin into the 'non-alcoholic' punch. See you there sometime in 2004.

All is well.

9 March 2005

Proud and Powerful

The Cambridge Cancer Help Centre, founded by Marilyn Barnes in 1986, aims to support people who have, or have had, cancer, as well as supporting their carers. So for nineteen years we have endeavoured to put people in touch with others who have or have had cancer (perhaps a similar cancer). And also to provide carers with opportunities to meet each other/receive support. Sometimes a person who has cancer doesn't come to the Centre but often in this situation the carers seek us out.

We also offer a wide range of complementary therapies, provided by a generous and kind team of therapists. Not claiming to 'cure' people we do believe that the side effects of treatment such as chemotherapy and radiotherapy are lessened by the sense of control given by using complementary therapies.

Since 1986 the Centre has grown slowly. We're all extremely proud of what we have achieved. The Centre is powerful, which means 'having great power or influence'. So I asked two of our Centre members if we at the Centre had influenced them

A lovely young man (a carer) said

"People at the Centre helped me realise that what was going on with me was normal and I experienced total welcome, really it was *completely* welcoming."

And a lovely young woman told me

"The Centre has given me an outlook that is far wider than my own little world. Being there brings it home that I worry about myself and I shouldn't do so because I see a lot more people coping with harder things than I. So I'm now starting to take off, to go forward I get such a *good feeling* at the Centre."

The essence of what we do is summed up by C. S. Lewis. It appears on page 88 of the Centre's book '*Looking at the Stars*'

Friendship is born at the moment when one person says to another ~“What! You too? ~ I thought I was the only one”.

Do we facilitate those moments? Yes, we do. Does anyone else offer all of what we offer? No, they don't. (Not in our part of the world.)

Beethoven, on page 19 of '*Looking at the Stars*' is reported as saying

***I will seize fate by the throat;
it shall certainly not bend and crush me completely.***

Our Cambridge Cancer Help Centre is awash with people who feel the same way ~ and if they didn't feel that way when they first visited us ~ the chances are that they do now.

We've done well since 1986, particularly in the past year. I'm sure we'll continue to offer good support to everyone who seeks our help in the future.

4 April 2006

We made a break with tradition this year and held our AGM at lunch-time instead of in the evening. As a result more people came and we all enjoyed a shared lunch after the meeting.

David, sadly, has resigned as Hon Secretary, but we are all extremely pleased that Peter has agreed to fill the post. We have also lost Beverley as Honorary Treasurer and are glad that Tricia is now looking after our financial affairs. Tricia says, “thank you Beverley for all your hard work in bringing our accounting system into the technological age ~ and for your continuing help as I get to grips with the spread-sheets”.

Kindness

Twenty years since Marilyn Barnes founded the Cambridge Cancer Help Centre ~ I think it is time to do some reflecting:

“Kindness is the one thing we are all hungering for. And it is at the same time the easiest thing to show and the greatest thing to give”. I read that ten years ago and put it into the April 1996 newsletter, pointing out that I thought our Centre was kindness personified.

That newsletter also informed us that we were trying to raise £50,000 in 1996 but had only raised £9,000. So that year the Centre nearly foundered. I remember Fran (our chairperson then, as now) coming to see me to point out what was likely to happen, unless our finances took an unlikely leap: redundancy ~ and the closure of the Centre. Well, the redundancy happened but the closure didn't. I remember carrying on as usual, still going into the Centre because it was the sort of place you didn't relinquish easily, if at all. And I wasn't going to let go. I remember being told later that everyone was waiting to see what I would do. If I stayed the Centre wouldn't close; if I left the Centre would indeed close. It didn't occur to me not to be there.

So I'd sit there at my desk, occasionally vaguely pondering on how the mortgage on my house was going to be paid, but needn't have worried because someone anonymously offered to pay me a sum for working at the Centre two mornings a week. This sum would be paid for one year, at the end of which it was hoped the CCHC's funds would be able to pay me an honorarium. And I would also have some free time to increase my income with some free-lance training.

In that 1996 newsletter I wrote about 'an emotionally delicious recipe' ~ which was a mixture of three people turning up with bags, brooms and brushes, to transform our patio into a delightful summer retreat, Ron was in charge of Daphne and Brenda, Glyn was painting the walls and doors, Paula was massaging feet, Jessie was healing, the dropper-innerers were adding to the delight of the morning and it was truly satisfying to see so many people getting on so well together.

I wrote some of our members' messages in that newsletter ~

- In early August last year I was dying! I felt I had a maximum of 2 years left. I came to the Centre and was given a forty year extension.
- I am no longer alone. There are others like me.
- I was given two years. I've done five months. Thanks to the Centre for their love and care and **kindness**.
- It feels like you are at home, it is so comforting.
- The Centre stopped the nightmare.

So that's a little bit about our past. Our **future** is exciting. Mark is about to run the North Pole Marathon. He says that the challenge of tackling that marathon is dwarfed by the challenge which faces people with cancer. Annie has started a 'Different Strokes' group, Anne Fleming is about to start a Multiple Myeloma Group, both being held at our Centre. We also open and offer therapies one evening a month. And because our Constitution allows us to do so, in the future we may welcome other health-related charities/organisations to use our new premises, when we

find them!

We **still** have an emotionally delicious recipe simmering away at our Centre. One of our 2006 dropper-innerers says...

“I arrived at CCHC hairless, anxious and fearful not wanting to transfer my worries to family and friends to be welcomed with **kindness** and wonderful healing. The Centre became my haven and still is. Now, five years on, and visiting most weeks, it is my privilege to play a small part in helping to ease the worries of newer members of this amazing place we call ‘Our Centre’.”

Another member says, “I can only add praise for all your centre gives to people in **kindness**, time and support. It is so nice to know that there are places such as the centre where you can go just to be yourself.”

So anyone coming to our Centre hungry for kindness and support will indeed find it, for it certainly **is** an easy thing to show and a great thing to give.

**In this part of the country, no one else does what we do ~
so very, very well.**



13 March, 2007
Making a Difference

Here is someone's vision for ideal care for people who have cancer.

- The patient should feel empowered and should be able to feel that life doesn't end when they get their diagnosis. *We try to make that happen*
- Do everything to discourage gloom. *We try to do that now*
- Ideally it would have a placid and healing view. *We haven't got that ... yet*
- Large kitchen with a kettle seldom off the boil. *Well, we have got the kettle but haven't got the large kitchen ... yet*

That was the view of Maggie Jencks ~ she wrote about it in 1994 ~ and there have been several Maggie Centres built in Scotland, usually attached to or within hospitals.

Luckily for us, Marilyn Barnes had the same sort of ideas, and that was in 1986. But her approach was to start small, with two people, and gradually increase. Today we have a regular mailing list of over 250 members and interested supporters of our Cambridge Cancer Help Centre.

The big difference between Maggie's and Marilyn's views was that Maggie's vision was to be realised in hospitals. Marilyn's view was that our Centre should be a place where people could meet other similarly affected people in a non-medical environment. One thing I am sure they would both agree upon, as said by Charles Jencks about the Maggie Centre and by us about the Cambridge Cancer Help Centre is that "you can just go in and 'slip into a relationship' without having to fill in forms. It's an institution which is not an institution, a home that is not a house, a church which is existentialist".

I particularly like that bit 'slip into a relationship' because that seems to me to be the major thing we do at our Centre.

Maggie and Marilyn made a difference

All of us here make a difference ~ there is no doubt that **everyone**

here contributes to the success of this Centre. How absolutely marvellous for all of us to know that we make a difference. We do it all the time, just by being here and listening to each other. I do not know of any other charity which operates in a similar way.

Somewhere I read

“I go to my support group because on bad days they carry me through and on my good days I can carry them.”

Here is another example of this Centre ‘making a difference’ ~

Not long ago someone arrived here quite early one morning. This person was distraught because of receiving devastating news about the progress of the cancer which, it had been thought, was diminishing. We sat together and set up a three point plan. One of the options was to get counselling urgently. You will all probably know that counselling certainly isn’t obtained quickly! However, well within the hour we had found a counsellor (who just happened to be Fran, who is usually extremely busy). Where the counselling could take place was a big problem because it is usually carried out here when the Centre is closed. However, no privacy was available that morning. BUT, there is always David Rayner!! So I phoned him on his mobile phone. But he just happened to be at Stansted airport! As soon as I explained the problem he suggested I should ring one of his garden centre staff, Dean, which I did, and he was able to arrange for the counselling to take place in a peaceful place, within two hours, at Scotsdales Garden Centre!

David Rayner and Dean made a difference.

This may be the last time we hold our A G M in this building. It has seen, and is seeing, some remarkable people who have coped, or who are coping, with horrendous, difficult times in their lives.

A lot of people made this Centre continue for 21 years. I can

remember Glyn and his ‘painting team’ changing at least ten doors from gloomy brown to welcoming white! Robert Sayle and the Police provided us with many needed things, and we had new carpet fitted.

We will always affectionately dwell on the nice times seen in Stockwell Street, but we can now look forward to the next AGM being held in our new premises at Scotsdales Garden Centre.

In the last few days people have said to me that they hope the Centre won't change too much, they like it the way it is. So what we will try to do is hang on to what we've got, bring in some other support groups who look after people who have other illnesses: they can meet on different days of the week, but we will try to keep what is special about this Centre today, as much as possible ~ but still making a difference.

Here is something Ingrid wrote for a newsletter a few years ago:

I wonder if you have heard the story of the young man and the starfish. One day, at early dawn, he was seen walking along the beach picking up stranded starfish and throwing them back into the receding sea. On being asked why he was doing this he said that if he didn't, once the sun came up the stranded starfish would die.

“But the beach stretches for miles and there must be thousands of stranded starfish” remarked an onlooker. “What difference can you make?” The young man looked at the starfish in his hand and threw it safely into the water.

“It makes a difference to this one”, he replied.

David Rayner will make a difference ... an enormous difference

All of **you** make a difference to each other
and most certainly to me.

Much love Ann



July 2007 ~ all our belongings safely stored at Scotsdales Garden Centre

September 2007~ moved into temporary accommodation in the

March 2008

Cut above the Rest

At our AGM last year we told ourselves we would hold the 2008 AGM in this new building. So, 22 years after Marilyn Barnes founded this Centre, here we are and I'm sure it won't be too long before we are in here for real.

Joy and Sadness

Let's look at the sadness first.

I know of two people who have asked me not to send them newsletters, because they just cannot bear to read about the people who die. These two people have had cancer and just want to be positive. (From time to time I email one of them and we write about the good things that are happening to her and to our Centre.)

Some years ago the trustees and I discussed this issue and it was felt that although most of 'our' people live on a long time following their diagnosis and treatment, a few do not. And we agreed that when someone dies it is right, of course, for us to write about them in our newsletter.

So, talking of death (this is the sadness bit. But perhaps if we listen to what is written about death, perhaps it isn't sad after all).

Elizabeth Kubler Ross wrote that a long time ago people were much more in touch with the issue of death, and believed in Heaven and life after death. She says that it is only in the last hundred years that fewer and fewer people truly know that life exists after our physical body dies. She suggests that we have made the transition from an age of science and technology and materialism into a new age of genuine and authentic spirituality. She says this does not really mean religiosity but, again, spirituality ~ an awareness that there is something far greater than we are, something that created this universe, created life; that we are an authentic and important and significant part of it and that we can contribute to its

evolution.

Obviously the death of someone we knew well is hard to bear. I want to tell you a couple of things that happened to me when two of my family members died. Those particular happenings made me feel better at a time when I felt, and was, distraught.

Exactly at the time I needed it, Tricia sent me this poem written by Bishop Brent:

What is Dying?

*A ship sails and I stand watching till he fades on the horizon
And someone at my side says "he is gone".*

Gone where?

Gone from my sight, that is all:

He is just as large as when I saw him.

The diminished size, and total loss of sight is in me, not in him.

And just at the moment when someone at my side says "he is gone",

There are others who are watching him coming,

And other voices take up a glad shout,

"Here he comes!"

*and **that** is dying*

In the Special 5-Year Survival issue of 'Icon' (copies of which are available from our Centre) Madeleine Kingsley writes, in an article entitled 'Light at the End', that it is curious that we suppress a mass of information that, however unusual, could offer consolation to the dying and the bereaved. She goes on to say that it also offers, if you are open to the idea, optimism of life beyond the last breath. She continues to write that Dr Peter Fenwick, a London neuro-psychiatrist with a special research interest in Near Death experience, believes that the anecdotes he hears are credible, significant and similar to the numerous unusual experiences he has logged. He also says that one in ten of us will have some such experience to tell, and those who do are not necessarily at all

religious.

After my Mum died, I sat in my garden, in the sunshine, upset about my Mum, and a letter came to me from someone I briefly met when I worked at Robert Sayle. She wrote a beautiful letter to me and included this verse written by William Blake:

*He who binds himself to a Joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the Joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.*

So I cried a bit more! ... but then felt better and able to let my Mum 'go'. But I often reflect how fortunate I was that Tricia and Madeleine were able to affect how I felt about the death of people I loved ... and they changed my despair to acceptance.

Having done the sadness, let's move on to the Joy because all of us at this Centre affect how our 'starfish' feel ~ and I will explain what I mean about 'starfish' by repeating, again this year, something Ingrid wrote for one of our newsletters.

I wonder if you have heard the story of the young man and the starfish. One day, at early dawn, he was seen walking along the beach picking up stranded starfish and throwing them back into the receding sea. On being asked why he was doing this he said that if he didn't, once the sun came up the stranded starfish would die.

"But the beach stretches for miles and there must be thousands of stranded starfish" remarked an onlooker. "What difference can you make?"

The young man looked at the starfish in his hand and threw it safely into the water. "It makes a difference to this one", he replied.

So, in simple terms, that's what we all do here ~ we make a difference to

each other. So if you have been a stranded starfish, I'm very glad you were thrown back into the sea of this Cambridge Cancer Help Centre.

I'm also very glad that Annie has started her 'Different Strokes' group here. Annie is on a roll! Soon she will have two stroke groups operating at this Centre! And Anne F's Multiple Myeloma group meets here, and some of Annie's and Anne's groups also come along to our Centre to join in with our activities.

When we left Stockwell Street the view was expressed that it was hoped the new Centre would be as welcoming and 'homely' as it was in the last premises. Of course it will be ~ and if it isn't ~ just let me know!

In an old book I read the following ... and I relate it to this new Centre which David Rayner is building for us.

Nothing is too good to be true

Nothing is too wonderful to happen

Nothing is too good to last

And then I read about myself!

I have perfect work

In a perfect way

I [try to] give perfect service

For perfect pay!

I must say to all the friends I meet here, you are marvellous, exciting, sometimes sad, often very funny, single-minded in your strong purpose to recover and get well, you are energetic, determined most definitely a cut above the rest.

Love Ann xxx



from a watercolour painting by Pat Beaumont

Spring 2008 ~ moved into the David Rayner Building

March 2009

CONFUCIUS ~ said

“OUR greatest Glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall”

So I asked myself ~ what is it that enables us to rise every time we fall? Do we need to feel worthy in order to fight back?

Some people believe that we are all born with a full bucket of self esteem. However, it isn't long before the bucket leaks. These leaks are caused by parents, teachers, brothers, sisters, friends ~ just about anyone can cause a leak of self esteem. Perhaps without knowing they have done so.

Under the age of ten at Romsey School, I was made to stand on my desk because I was the only one in the class who had got a sum wrong. What misery to me was caused by that teacher. Quite a nice teacher in lots of respects, but not if you got a simple sum wrong! So she thought I had learned my lesson ~ but the lesson I learnt through that humiliation was that sums were not for me and I held that view throughout my secondary school and into adult life. All her behaviour did to me was make me dread every arithmetic lesson through my secondary schooling. So that meant a big hole in my bucket of self-esteem.

Cancer knocks a pretty big hole in the bucket so I reckon we need good self esteem if we are going to rise up against the cancer/stroke/life-threatening illness adversity.

In the book '**Emotional Intelligence**' (ISBN 0-7475-2830-6) Daniel Goleman, author, shows how emotional intelligence can be nurtured. He says forget IQ ~ brains, he says, may come in useful, as may social class and luck, in who will succeed in any realm of life, but Emotional

Intelligence is the factor to worry about.

So I reckon that if we are going to rise up against the cancer/stroke adversity we need good self esteem. How do we do that? ~ we do it for each other. We need to fill up each others' buckets with self esteem.

In the last newsletter someone said she was "out of control, needing to get back confidence in myself". I think that self-confidence equals self-esteem. She added that coming to this place, this Centre, was the beginning of moving on for her. So there must have been a few positive strokes in this place for her, from you.

Incidentally, when I ran a course in a prison, we talked about buckets of self-esteem. Was really very concerning ~ most of the people I was talking to had lousy buckets of self-esteem ~ in care at the age of 5, or younger, running away ~ approved schools, borstal, prison, lack of confidence, sogo to the pub because the alcohol gives you confidenceand so on.

It has been said that this Centre is a lifeline. Perhaps that's because we give positive strokes. And we meet people who have survived their illness ~ and that fact gives other people a boost to their own self-esteem. They will think well, if someone else has done it then maybe I can do it too. But, of course, unfortunately there are no guarantees.

The therapists give positive strokes, the tea ladies and gentlemen give positive strokes. In fact we all give positive strokes to each other. Remember the irrepressible Paul Burbridge ~ full of self-confidence and, I have no doubt, a very high self-esteem! Look at Janet and Judy ~ everyone who attends their 'Living with Cancer' course feels better. Bet they are good at giving positive strokes and boosting people's self-esteem.

Also in this book I read that our **emotions** play a far greater role in thought and decision-making than is commonly acknowledged.

So our feelings count every bit as much, even more than, thought.

Emotional intelligence is said to be more important than IQ when you are fighting cancer. Your IQ can come to nothing when emotions hold sway. So my question is ~ is it due to the level of self-esteem we have that dominates how well we rise up against cancer? Do we need to feel worthy in order to fight back? My view is that the answer to those two questions is YES. But in this place everyone here cares about everyone else. And that's why I think this place is marvellous...and cannot be beaten.

And that's because of All of You.

March 2010
Accepting Others As They Are

This is what Marilyn Barnes (our Founder) recently wrote to me ~

“As I left hospital in 1982 I remember feeling completely alone and abandoned by the medical team. No matter how tender and loving the family is there is always that feeling that they have to be spared and in a way, supported by the patient. So a brave face must be put on things. I realised I couldn’t be the only one to feel like this. That’s why I started the Centre. **Every person in this Centre is able to help others, and does so, even without realising it ~ accepting others as they are is a very big point of this. Cancer was where my focus was ... but now I feel we need to help vulnerable people of any kind and be inclusive.**”

I know I get emotional about this place and about all of you who delight in what it offers. And when I was seeking inspiration for what to talk about at this meeting I was thumbing through a booklet compiled by Tricia, entitled ‘Quotations ~ That Have Left Their Mark’

And there was the perfect one for me! ~

“Say as you think and speak it from your soul”

So, that is from Tricia (and Shakespeare) and so, from my soul, here is what I think about everyone at this Centre.

At this Centre we have:

One person whose three children died from cancer

At least one person here whose daughter died from cancer

Until very recently we had someone in our group who had motor neurone disease ~ there isn’t a cure...yet

We have people here whose grown-up sons and daughters have been

killed in road traffic accidents

And dear Margot's son was killed a few months ago in a paragliding accident

Someone at this Centre, who has got cancer, said to me not long ago that if a person has cancer they also have hope of recovery and of again leading a normal life. But, she added, if a son or daughter has died, whether from cancer or in a road or paragliding accident, there is not that hope. So, we wondered, which situation would be the hardest situation for us to bear. To have cancer or to lose a child.

So that's something for us to think about.

In 'Larkrise to Candleford' the Postmistress said to the postman that if you love what you do you give yourself to it and you have a sense of belonging. Someone who comes here told me that coming to this place has given him a structure to his week ~ better to be here, he said, than sitting at home day after day thinking about cancer. So I am sure that he and others have a strong sense of belonging to our Centre.

The Postmistress also said to the postman that "people need people" ~ how true that is about this place and she also said that people take it in turns to help each other ~ which they do at this Centre, particularly once we all recognise that people here are experiencing cancer, bereavement, anxiety and depression.

Our trustees may or may not have had their own struggles with cancer and we are so very fortunate to receive the enormous help they give, along with their integrity, to our Centre.

I often feel how fortunate we are to have such wonderful helpers: a lovely tea team, who are such fun to be around, Liz, who comes in at 6.45am and voluntarily does three hours of cleaning, Dennis, Peter and Anne who lead the relaxation sessions on two days, therapists who do not charge us a

penny for what they offer to everyone.

There are gaps in the attendance of the therapists at the moment because of illness or a change in their family commitments. In addition to the therapists we all know, we have Sylvia who offers hand massage, Nigel who brings all the therapies together by looking after the therapy appointments' book, Barbara who looks after updating CRB checks and the therapists' insurance and Anne who maintains the therapists' paperwork. Some of the therapists are here every week, some every two weeks or once a month. Our counsellors continue to offer special help to those who need their skills.

Keith is very good at scooping up money and banking it for us.

Joe makes and repairs things for us and, it seems can do anything we ask of him! Stuart is here all day ticking off the 'to do list' we relentlessly create for him, Wendy assisted by Anne buys all our provisions, Richard and Bernard look after the garden and pots, Jean teaches computer skills to beginners, Penny, now joined by Theresa, looks after our 'Goods for Sale' (and raises a lot of money) ~ and Penny also takes us to Ikea (OK and other places!)

And I feel so overwhelmingly delighted when I see, for instance, occasions such as when I saw Pam and Yasmine welcome Maureen into their card-making/craft group. Now you may not think that is remarkable but Maureen had motor neurone disease and literally could not lift or move a finger, an arm, a foot or wriggle a toe but they made her feel she was part of their group. She smiled and laughed through the half an hour she joined their Craft Group,

Someone described Pat as "the lovely Pat". How marvellous to see her Art group spread out from two people to so very many more that we have to keep buying more Art tables! Pam has enthusiastically set up an Art & Craft group on Tuesdays. Incidentally, Pam whispered to me the other day

“you know I always used to say I couldn’t stand groups and clubs ~ now I love it here! In fact I am too busy to find time to die.”

Annie has made such a remarkable and tremendous difference to her Different Strokes people. They want to lead normal exciting lives ~ because Annie absolutely DEMANDS that they endeavour to lead normal and exciting lives! And she has to be obeyed!

Anne Fleming's myeloma group expands almost while you are looking at it. It is a very successful meeting ground for people who travel a long way to meet Anne and discuss myeloma within her group.

Bless all of you for playing your part and for making this place the way it is. A lot of people at the Centre were told by Penny Brohn Cancer Care (then the Bristol Centre) that it is important to “make your heart sing”. And everyone here makes my heart sing because it is so gratifying that there is a remarkable and beautiful closeness between all of us at this place, and endless support for those who need it, because we are truly a ‘Support Group’ and, as Marilyn wishes, we are

Accepting Others As They Are.

Much love from Ann

Fran

I could tell you that Fran and I were here almost every day during the time this building was planned and built. On the days the Centre wasn't open, (we were operating from the Sunflower Room) we were here. David Rayner asked us to set up a café in the little cabin just over there ~ where we could serve tea and cakes and ask people to give a donation to his building fund as they sat and watched the builders doing their building of our Centre. And it was there that we met potential volunteers ~ I think a couple of them are now in our Tea Team.

I could tell you that we were here so often that David and his daughter Caroline, offered us staff discount in the restaurant!

I could tell you that we were allowed to put on the first coat of paint in all the toilets. So when you use the toilet, please reflect on that! We were allowed to put shiny aluminium foil over all the joins in between the breeze blocks and we were allowed to make gallons of tea for the builders as they worked around us on this lovely building. So we can tell ourselves we did play a small part in building this marvellous Centre of ours.

But the most important thing to tell you is that a few years ago Fran offered help and her listening skills to someone who really needed them. When I phoned him yesterday evening he said,

“at that time it was a struggle to enjoy life. I was slipping downhill but after four chances to talk to Fran, the light came on again and I had more enjoyment of life. Fran did a good job for me”.

And Fran did a good job for me as Chairperson.

Tuesday 22 March 2011

Friendship....and “*It Isn't What You Does So Much ~ It's What it Means*”, which was said by Mr Perks, Station Master in ‘The Railway Children’. So let's look at what we does!

- The Tea Team ~ bless them, for offering friendly and welcoming faces to people who often find the tea bar their first port of call, particularly when visiting our Centre for the first time.
- Pat and Mike lead the Art group ~ its popularity accounts for the fact that we are running out of space for our artists. It is popular because of Pat and the support given to Pat by Mike.
- Jean is proving that learning to use a computer is easy-peasy.
- Anne Johnson feeds the birds, or should I say the squirrels! And she does her tea-team stint on Mondays.
- Barbara doubles on the tea bar and tackles some of the Admin in the Office.
- Pam and her gang enthusiastically lead the successful, fast-growing Craft Group.
- Nigel continues to liaise with the therapists about their appointment times for the diary.
- Janet and Judy lead their popular and highly-acclaimed ‘New Perspectives’ course. Lives are changed as a result of the excellent work they do.
- Richard supervises weekly yoga classes, from which he raises lots of money for our Centre, and he and Bernard look after the garden which surrounds the Centre.
- Anne Fleming continues to lead her large Myeloma group and Annie Diggins continues to expand her ‘Cambridge Different Strokes’ group.

When we talk about ‘friendship’ it is true to say that in the end we always need another human being. And Ralph Waldo Emerson said “*the way to have a friend is to be one*”.

C. S. Lewis wrote, *“Friendship is born at the moment when one person says to another: ‘What! You too? ~ I thought I was the only one’*”. How apt that is in a cancer help centre. Finding someone else who identifies with all that one wants to say. What a comfort!

And I count myself extremely fortunate to be able to say that I have so many friends I enjoy being with in this beautiful and amazing place.

Jane Austen said, *“One enjoyment was certain, that of suitability of companions ~ a suitability which comprehended health and temper to bear inconveniences, cheerfulness to enhance every pleasure, and affection and intelligence, which might supply it among themselves if there were disappointments abroad”*. It is as though, when she wrote that in ‘Pride and Prejudice’, she had a vision of the Cambridge Cancer Help Centre between 1986 and 2011!

So I think we have a lot of, as she said “suitability of companions” ~ for instance Denis said to me, “I didn’t think I was a joining sort of person”, but he went on to say that this Centre is “like a warm blanket” because of the friends he has made.

Carole Patrick walked in to the Centre a few weeks ago ~ we came face to face and then she said, “I am not supposed to be here today. I wasn’t going to come today. But this place is like a magnet.”

And I thought ~ that kind of tells me that we are doing the right thing at this Centre.

You will have gathered that I am not clever enough to make up all those brilliant and apt quotations. They came from Tricia’s book ‘Quotations ~ that have left their mark’.

So many thanks to Tricia, who is a true friend, for producing such a booklet.

The last word is about all of you ~ Beethoven said, *“I will seize fate by the throat; it shall certainly not bend and crush me completely”* ~ lots of defiance from Beethoven, who reminds me about all of you who have cancer and your defiance against the illness. But perhaps you didn’t feel this way until you came to this Centre and found other people in similar situations.

When we were moving out of Stockwell Street a lot of us were anxious

that we would keep the 'homely' feel to the Centre. Never quite sure if we have achieved that informal feeling. BUT it was proved to me last week that we have done so because we always want everyone to feel and enjoy the informality of this place ~ to treat it as if they were at home. So....there was this young woman elegantly sprawled out on one of the sofas, head propped up on cushions (the way one does at home) among lots of her friends who were all slouched around in a friendly slouching sort of way. And her legs were bent up behind her (in the way one does at home) as she reclined in a happy comfortable sort of way. So, everyone from Stockwell Street ~ I think we did it! It's homely! I think we are doing alright!

Derek C added this ~

Since finding the CCHC, I have come alive again. I have a purpose, a reason to get up in the morning. I don't feel like I'm on the scrapheap any more losing my job through illness.

The Centre is non-judgemental, it is a sanctuary for us, where we can leave our everyday problems behind and talk with like-minded people, laugh or cry and not feel odd. Most of all is the total inclusion, whatever our ability.

The CCHC envelops you with a warmth and love that is indescribable.

Long may the CCHC continue. Thank You

Much love from Ann



March 2012

Invisible Web ~ Connectedness

This is about quantum physics and science ~ neither of which I know much about! However, two books I read made a lasting impression on me. The first was ‘The Field’ by Lynne McTaggart. (ISBN 0-7225-3764-6). I remember being so taken with it that I spent the whole of a sunny summer day in my garden reading it from start to finish. Didn’t understand it all but the first page led me on because it mentioned the idea of ‘Connectedness’, so that arrested my attention for the whole day.

Ed Mitchell, the sixth man to land on the moon, was on his way back to Earth with Alan Shepherd in their space shuttle Apollo 14, when suddenly, without any warning, he experienced the strangest feeling he would ever have ~ and that was a feeling of connectedness ~ as if all the planets and all the people of all time were attached through an invisible web. He said he could hardly breathe because of the majesty of the moment and he felt distanced from his body. He looked at the other Apollo crew members and none of them seemed to be aware of anything other than the tasks they were carrying out.

It was as though Ed Mitchell had experienced a blinding epiphany of meaning and in just an instant he discovered and felt ‘The Force’. He suddenly had his own inner conviction that human minds were connected to each other and to everything else in this world and every other world.

There seemed to be, to him, an enormous force-field here, connecting all people, their intentions and thoughts and every animate and inanimate form of matter of all time. He felt that anything he thought or did would influence the rest of the cosmos.

In the early 1970s a handful of scientists stumbled on an element of quantum physics that seemingly had huge potential. That was ‘The Zero Point Field’, which Lynne McTaggart describes as “an ocean of microscopic vibrations in the space between things”.

In this so-called ‘dead’ space lay the very key to life itself, to cell communication, to DNA, strange effects like ESP or spiritual healing and also to the collective unconscious. Scientists have discovered that “we are

an energetic charge. All human beings and all living things are a coalescence of energy in a field of energy connected to every other thing in the world". It has been called a "resonating universe".

So...25 years after Ed Mitchell had experienced collective consciousness in Apollo, scientists were beginning to prove it in a laboratory.

What happened to Ed Mitchell changed the world

So, on the grounds of his 'connectedness', I linked in to Henrietta Lacks, a poor, black American woman who died in 1951 from cancer of the cervix.

Henrietta Lacks also changed the world

Normal cells go through life, then stop dividing and begin to die. However, Henrietta's **malignant** cells didn't stop dividing and they never died! They are immortal and you can see them at Cancer Research UK and in thousands of cancer research establishments throughout the world.

An individual HeLa cell weighs almost nothing. One scientist estimates that if you could pile all the HeLa cells ever grown on to a scale they would weigh more than 50 million metric tons. They would wrap around the Earth at least 3 times, spanning more than 350 million feet. They have contributed to five of the past ten Nobel prizes for Medicine. It has been suggested that while scientists have made fortunes and reputations from Henrietta's tissues, the same cannot be said of her family: they were not informed.

Henrietta Lack's cells still continue to grow and multiply. The world's first immortal human cells were cut from her cervix. More than 60,000 scientific articles have been published about research done on HeLa cells: a further 300 papers about those cells are published every month. There are billions of Henrietta's cells stored on ice. A scientist said, "once there is a cure for cancer, it will definitely be largely because of Henrietta Lack's cells".

An author, (not of this book) Eric Schlosser, said "racism, greed, idealism and faith in science helped to save thousands of lives but nearly destroyed her family".

A scientist said "no dead woman has done more for the living". Henrietta, a poor, black American woman, changed the world and made it better for those of us who have had cancer. We are connected to Henrietta

Lacks.

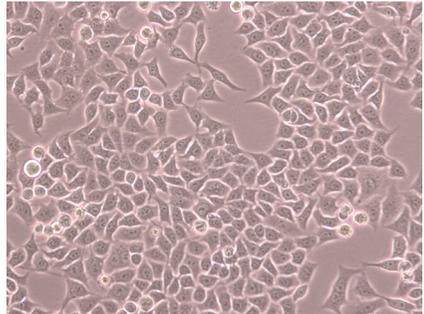
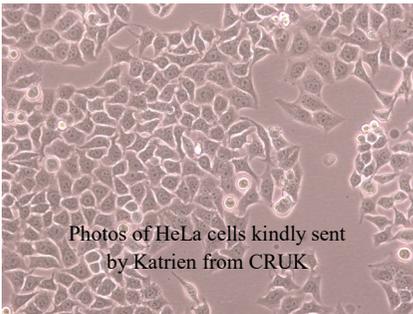
Ed Mitchell changed the world: Henrietta Lacks changed the world

All of you change our little bit of the world at our Centre because of what you do so immeasurably well for each other. Why is that, I wonder? Perhaps Anne Janowski (who used to be our chiropodist) summed it up when she said, “I felt that both staff and visitors were on an equal, non-clinical footing with a common successful aim to give and receive support and hope”.

Perhaps that’s our secret! Not much hierarchy here, no bosses ~ just all in it together helping each other ~ tea team, craft team, therapists, Art team, individuals, all quietly helping out wherever they see a need.

There is, I am certain, a connectedness here amongst all of us, a determination to do our best for each other. How very fortunate we are to be a part of this place. And what a lovely feeling to be connected to each other as part of the Invisible Web. How absolutely marvellous ~ you are all marvellous. And amazing.

At our Centre all is well



March 2013

I can remember my first day at the Cambridge Cancer Help Centre, taking up one floor of Redmayne, Arnold and Harris who had kindly allowed our Centre to use their top floor for as long as they could do without it. We furnished it with mismatched chairs, a filing cabinet and a kettle within easy reach!

I remember standing by myself, on Day One, enthralled and excited about the task ahead of us. A short time later I was joined by Maureen Wood and Gill Overhill ~ our first two volunteers. We were a good team as we embarked on a venture to increase the number of people who came to our Centre and we also ran courses to bring in an income.

I know all of us will be extremely grateful to Marilyn Barnes who, with the help of her daughter Sophie and friend Sheila Shanks, established this Centre in 1986. Marilyn's aim had been that a meeting place was needed for someone who had cancer to meet other people who had cancer.

So...this is my 20th year. I still have the energy to continue to do what I do now ~ unlock the door and put the kettle on, because everything else that happens here is perpetuated by all of you for each other.

But...the time has come! I'll be 77 this year and although my sons keep reminding me about football managers who are getting on a bit, but who still carry on managing their teams, and David Rayner, who never looks as though he is getting on a bit, I know that leaving the Centre is the right thing to do, for the Centre's sake. I did once rashly promise David Rayner that I would be at the Centre as long as he was running his garden centre ~ and he hasn't let me forget that ~ I get constant reminders from him.

I know the trustees will find the right person to be the new co-ordinator.

But I'll be here until Christmas ~ won't miss the lunch and the panto. I am always amazed, inspired and very touched by the way you all carry on, despite what you are going through and I shall never, ever, forget that.

Love, Ann





September 1999



November 1999