

Time Well Spent

Memories Over Tea

Nancy Jo Bush, RN, MN, MA, AOCN®

I will always remember when our “tea time memories” began. I was working as a nurse practitioner in a private oncology practice. One of my colleagues was the inspiration behind what turned out to be a pleasurable activity of comfort and support for some of our patients and ourselves. Being in a small community practice, we grew fond of many of our patients and families who continued their care with us along the cancer trajectory. One of our very special young women named Dana was being treated for inflammatory breast cancer. Undoubtedly, she was one of the most courageous patients we had, battling her disease through high-dose chemotherapy and radiation therapy treatments. She always came into our office with a smile and showed her gratitude by bringing the staff lunches or baked goods. Her mother always accompanied her to treatments and they would sit in the chemotherapy room with high spirits, sharing hope with other patients. Toward the end of her life, “Dana-Doll,” as my colleague

Karen Pike, RN, OCN®, nicknamed her, wanted to have a luncheon in her own home with her closest friends. Karen suggested an “afternoon tea” as the venue for the gathering. It was a beautiful fall day and the warm tea and delicious finger foods were enjoyed amidst laughter and stories. It was a day to be treasured by all of us, especially Dana.

During my clinical practice, I started a support group for women within the office setting. I feel that there are many emotional unmet needs for women who are neither newly diagnosed nor terminal but battling their diseases with continuous therapeutic interventions and, at the same time, trying to balance their roles as mothers, wives, friends, and employees. Our support group was small and we met over lunch in our staff lounge. Karen and I hoped to provide a safe and supportive environment for our patients to share their struggles, fears, and dreams. Ultimately the women became emotionally close to each other and Karen and I became touched by their courage and tenacity. When I resigned my position from the practice, Karen and I talked about how she could continue the support group for the patients who were emotionally invested in the continuity and cohesiveness of the group. It was Karen’s creative idea to continue meetings outside the office by having tea parties in lieu of a formal group therapy format. As both a nurse and a therapist, I was initially conflicted about my own involvement and whether it was professionally appropriate. The nurse part of me won out over the therapist and I enthusiastically continued to see the patients during the newly established tea parties. We rotated



Photo courtesy of Nancy Jo Bush. Used with permission.

Note. Pictured, from left to right, are Lucille Crossley, Karen Pike, Buff Crossley, Teresa Penner, and Nancy Jo Bush during a tea time get-together celebrating Nancy Jo’s survivorship.

our tea gatherings from rose gardens to patient homes and even once on a patient’s boat docked at sea. We wore fancy hats to not only be in proper attire for English tea but also to support those in the group with alopecia. We enjoyed seeing each other come to tea with our lovely dresses and impressive hats (the latter being the opinion of the “eye of the beholder”).

I wrote about our tea parties in tribute to one of our patients, Annette, in an article entitled, “Six Months in Time” (Bush, 2004). As we gathered for warm tea and delicious treats, we continued to listen, validate, and provide emotional support to the women on their personal journeys. The article was a tribute to Annette, who, at a tea party in her own home, informed us that she had asked her physician how much time she had left to live. Although resistant to reply but respectful to be honest, he had replied, “about six months in time.” It was at this tea party in Annette’s home when Karen and I realized the profound impact of our supportive gatherings. Annette shared with us pictures from her photo albums, including memories of her wedding and marriage, her love of riding horses, and her unfinished goal of attending school to become a certified teacher. Annette’s

The Katie Tea Cup

The Katie Cup symbolizes:

Courage

Strength

Hope

Love

Friendship

When we drink from a “Katie Cup” we remember.

We remember one who lived, loved, laughed, and taught us the meaning of fellowship.

The strength and comfort in a struggle shared.

—Karen Pike, July 2002