

CONTENTS

Making New Plans

BY JENNIFER M. GANGLOFF

Survivors experience urge for change in their lives.

Kim Rider had a serious competitive streak. Well, not just a streak. It was in her very nature. She was a competitive mountain bike racer, a competitive barefoot water skier and a competitive cross-country skier.

All that came to a screeching halt, though, when the 48-year-old was diagnosed with breast cancer in May 2005 and underwent a lumpectomy and radiation before starting a five-year course of tamoxifen therapy. But once she completed radiation in September 2005, that familiar competitive fire relit. Rider refused to surrender her active lifestyle to breast cancer. “I had high expectations for myself,” she recalls.

High indeed. Rider decided to scale California’s 14,162-foot Mt. Shasta with the Breast Cancer Fund, a nonprofit based in San Francisco. “Mountain climbing was something I always wanted to do and thought I would do, but never had time to do,” says Rider. She spent the months following treatment training for the climb. The effort paid off, and in July 2006, Rider summited Mt. Shasta. “It was such a magical experience,” she says. “I felt like I floated to the top, and it really gave me a sense of confidence and helped me reclaim myself.”

Whether survivors scale a mountain, reconnect with a favorite pastime or shrug off stereotypes, there’s no denying that facing down cancer triggers a need to find meaning and confront challenges. For Rider, she’s already making plans to climb Mt. Shasta with the Breast Cancer Fund in 2007 in addition to a ski mountaineering trip in Canada in February. She’s even toying with the idea of getting back into competitive water skiing and mountain biking.

Rider concedes she has struggled with comparing herself to who she was and what she could do before breast cancer. But now she’s filled with intensity. “I want my life to be purposeful and rich. My family doesn’t always understand my passion for extreme things but they know it nurtures and fulfills me. I don’t want to just talk about something or dream about it. I want to do it.”

Back in the Saddle

During one of her several rounds of treatment for chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) that was first diagnosed in 1980, Arlene Pannullo kept getting pneumonia and was frequently hospitalized. At one point, doctors thought things looked so grim that she might have lymphoma. “All I could think was, ‘Damn it, I never went to Greece,’” recalls Pannullo, who owns an antiques business in Clifton, New Jersey.

As it turned out, Pannullo didn’t have lymphoma. But the incident helped her realize that she didn’t want to be faced with regrets. So when she finished her latest round of treatment for CLL in April 2006, her thoughts turned to an activity she’d once enjoyed on occasion but gave up completely when she was diagnosed nearly three decades ago—horseback riding. She was hesitant at first and questioned if she was up to it. “I called a trainer and told her, ‘I’m 66 years old, I just finished chemo and two years of restricted activity, and I’ve always wanted to do this,’ ” Pannullo recalls, “and she welcomed me into an adult riding group.”

Today, Pannullo takes private riding lessons three days a week, learning the fine points of the four gaits—walking, trotting, cantering and galloping—and how to tack a horse, or put on the saddle and bridle. Pannullo now hopes to compete in dressage, a series of difficult, orchestrated movements that’s been likened to horse ballet. And she’s looking for a horse of her own, preferably a rescued thoroughbred that couldn’t make it on the racetrack.

“When I’m riding, I feel as if my endorphins are working,” she says. “I don’t take my body for granted anymore. I was afraid that if I didn’t do this now, I would never do it, and I don’t like the word never. I’m doing what I want to be doing, and I’m very lucky that I’m able to.”

And what about that trip to Greece? “It’s on my agenda,” Pannullo says. “Probably in the spring or next summer.”



Arlene Pannullo recently put an end to an almost 30-year hiatus from horseback riding. Photo by Tim Larsen

Saving the Cardinal

Jan O'Daniell had been worried. She thought a prophylactic bilateral mastectomy would mean doom for the cardinal tattoo gracing the upper portion of her left breast. But there was good news: "I am going to get to save the cardinal," she says.

This cardinal is no ordinary tattoo, even if it looks like a rather ordinary drawing of a rather ordinary red bird, nevermind its chosen perch. No, this cardinal is highly symbolic for O'Daniell, who at age 46 has had Hodgkin's disease twice, breast cancer twice, partial removal of her parathyroid gland and surgery for a benign acoustic neuroma that left her face partially paralyzed and deaf in her left ear. It was in 2001, between the two breast cancers, that she got the tattoo. "The cardinal represents God's presence in my life," says O'Daniell, a former singles' minister from LaPorte, Texas. "I really struggled with God, wondering why he didn't protect me. But to say that God has not gotten me through all this would be a lie. It's a very complex relationship I have with God."



A simple tattoo of a bird helped Jan O'Daniell reclaim her body after multiple cancer diagnoses. Photo by Johnny Hanson

The cardinal also represents freedom for O'Daniell, who faced opposition when she told her highly conservative family and friends that she intended to get a tattoo. Even her husband, Michael, was initially against the idea. "I had a lot of explaining to do," she says. "I was breaking away from the concepts they had of what women were supposed to be." But when she convinced her husband that getting a tattoo wasn't about rebelling but about reclaiming some control over her body, he not only changed his mind, he came up with the design.

"I had [the tattoo] put low down because I thought it would be a very private thing for me, and I ended up showing it to everyone—then thought, 'I could get arrested for this,' " O'Daniell jokes.

After she heals from her October 2006 bilateral mastectomy—a treatment choice she made to prevent future breast cancer recurrences—O'Daniell may add more tattoos to help cover the scars, perhaps a simple branch or perhaps an entire Tree of Life. But because of previous radiation to the area, she must proceed cautiously to protect her skin. It may take years to add all of that ink safely, but

O'Daniell doesn't mind. "I could not believe how liberated the cardinal made me feel. I wasn't expecting it to make me feel so confident, so bold and so alive. Tattoos are a way of reclaiming my body."