

# Healing through art

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Art can do amazing things to help us understand ourselves and the world around us, including healing from cancer.

I met with an old friend and fellow breast cancer survivor and a group of her artist friends last week to talk about using art to help women heal from cancer. Diane Hosey, who I had interviewed in the early '90s for my book *The Breast Cancer Companion*, was diagnosed in 1987 at 31 with stage 3 inflammatory breast cancer, a year after I was diagnosed.

In 2007 she decided to celebrate being alive by diving again into the abyss of breast cancer to more fully understand what had happened to her. As a very artsy woman and business consultant, Diane asked an artist friend named Karen Blessen (who was the first graphic artist to win a Pulitzer Prize, by the way) to interpret her experience through art. Blessen, a journalist and graphic artist, was the perfect person for the job, having founded the nonprofit [Today Marks the Beginning](#), whose mission is to use art to impact public awareness of social issues.

The resulting story and art created by Blessen appeared in the [Dallas Morning News](#) and was so powerful for Diane that she wants to explore how the same process might be used for other women who have survived cancer to gain new understanding of their experience as they heal. It was a dynamic discussion, with the six women gathered around the table bringing insight and excitement of their own remarkable lives to how such a project would work. How do you find the right match of survivor and artist? What would the resulting presentation look like? Is it a gallery show or performance art or both?

It's an exciting idea and I want to know what you think. Would you work with an artist to interpret your cancer to better understand what has happened to you? Would you revel in the possibility of finding new territory? What kind of presentation would you like to see whether you took part or not?

I am intrigued by the possibilities because in 1996 I created a piece of art that helped me understand the power of artistically interpreting my own experience. I had compared my feelings after breast cancer to being shattered and then having to put myself back together again--using that analogy when I spoke about one of the positives of cancer. Positive? Yes, because when you put yourself back together you can add things that weren't there before. I actually put a piece of pottery, by a well-known potter named Mary Whitkop, back together that broke the year after receiving it from a gallery in Taos, New Mexico. I reassembled the pot adding things as I went: the pink rhinestone ribbon, the crystals of an old necklace that belonged to my mother, beads chosen by my daughter to represent her, a symbol of Southern Methodist University where I was welcomed to teach while going through chemotherapy.

As I finished assembling the pot, I saw that one piece was still missing, probably

because it was clearly the point where the pot had hit the floor and the pieces were too small to save.

How ironic that my pot would be missing a piece. I filled the hole with beads that I had collected over the years, making it the most beautiful part of the pot. Like me, the pot had lost part of its original symmetry, which had been replaced with something bright and beautiful.