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The Art of Healing

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[A Letter From The Editor](#)

When I was diagnosed with cervical cancer, writing and poetry offered a space where I felt free of my diagnosis. Often, the works of American poet Mary Oliver provided a bridge into the woods in Washington or a field of wildflowers in Ohio. I remember reading her poem "The Other Kingdoms" during chemo. She reminded me of growth through change and inspired me to start writing poetry of my own.

Consider the other Kingdoms. The trees, for example, with their mellow-sounding titles: oak, aspen, willow. Or the snow, for which the peoples of the north have dozens of words to describe its different arrivals. Or the creatures, with their thick fur, their shy and wordless gaze. Their infallible sense of what their lives are meant to be. Thus the world grows rich, grows wild, and you too, grow rich, grow sweetly wild, as you too were born to be.

This edition celebrates the intersection of art and illness and all those who find solace in this space. For many members of the Woman to Woman community, creative expression is what brings them joy.

Whether it is taking stock in nature, processing grief and loss, or giving back through craft-making, the power of art is awe-inspiring in how it can move and connect us all.

This past September was also Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Month. At Woman to Woman, we strive to raise awareness of these cancers every single month of the year through our support groups, volunteer mentors, patient assistance fund, reunion events, and educational series. Read on to see how members of our community are making a difference 365 days a year. I hope you all remember that inspiration is all around us as fall begins. As my sixth-year remission date is this October, I plan to spend it writing under a tree, just as I hoped during treatment I would get to do someday.



**-Nicole Theodore,
Woman to Woman
volunteer, cervical
cancer survivor
and Woman to
Woman Newsletter
editor**

Piece Your Thoughts Together

[Join a collage workshop with Liz Rubel](#)

In partnership with the [Creative Center](#), which brings creative arts opportunities to people with cancer, Woman to Woman hosted a collage workshop in March that will be returning later this year. Participants of all experience levels can join artist Liz Rubel in a relaxed environment – no art background or art-making skills necessary. First, participants engage with expressive arts techniques in order to open up our creative brains in community together. Liz Rubel walks participants through collage tips, techniques, and a variety of approachable options that focus on the process of creating, over judging a finished result. Collages can hold much to interpret, and together, participants talk about what we might see in our own works. The next workshop is November 16th at 12pm – make sure to bookmark our events calendar below to sign up.

Gallery View: Take an Art Appreciation Break

Painting by Victoria Barr, Woman to Woman community member



Sulawesi Water Song (1982), oil on canvas, 40x50 inches, collection of Joanna Romer.

[Don't Miss It: Our Events Calendar](#)

Our monthly events calendar is now online, making it easier than ever to attend a virtual class, join a support group or book club, and get involved with our Woman to Woman community. And, of course, if you're looking to join a collage workshop, try your hand at writing, or enjoy other creative programming, the calendar is a valuable resource.

[Bookmark our calendar and stay up-to-date on Woman to Woman events.](#)

Carolyn Taylor on Giving Back

The power of photography and creative connections

When Carolyn Taylor was diagnosed with cancer, she considered herself very lucky: though she had both ovarian and endometrial cancer, they were both early-stage diagnoses and her treatment was short. A professional food photographer, Carolyn entered an essay contest held by British Airways two years after her diagnosis. The company invited entrants to write about what they'd do if gifted ten free flights, which would be awarded to the winning essayist.



Carolyn wrote about her dream to photograph what she calls "the global face of cancer" – and won. Thanks to the contest, she visited 14 countries with a camera in hand, a journey that has radically changed her life.

After interviewing cancer patients, caregivers, and healthcare providers, Carolyn's work was showcased in a special exhibition called *Survivors in Focus* at the David J. Sencer Museum at the CDC. But she was ready to find a bigger platform than photography and to amplify the stories of the patients in the pictures.

She founded [Global Focus on Cancer](#) (GFC), a non-profit that aims to help cancer patients worldwide by building culturally and resource-appropriate supportive and educational programs. Carolyn said she was moved to action by the lack of cancer care resources in many countries. "The disparities are enormous," she said. In Tanzania, for example, there were only four oncologists serving the entire country when she visited in 2011 (there are now seven). And in many low-resource settings, over 70 percent of patients are diagnosed in late stages of the disease. "How do you navigate a cancer diagnosis in that scenario?" Carolyn asked.

Global Focus on Cancer has seen serious dividends for its work, like in Vietnam, where a peer support program based on Woman to Woman has been implemented. Mount Sinai staff and volunteers, including Woman to Woman Program Manager Rachel Justus, have assisted in training hundreds of cancer survivors as peer mentors. The program, called *Stronger Together*, has been introduced at four sites across Vietnam. The program has also received more support in the way of grants, including one from the National Cancer Institute, and updates to healthcare policy that codify social support as part of cancer care in oncology hospitals.

Believe it or not, Carolyn's background in photography doesn't lend itself immediately to a project of this scale. Her professional background doesn't lie in portraiture or documentary photography. "I'm a food photographer, so I had no experience," she explained. "I was naive to the process and the work, but I decided that the photography itself was important." And it made her consider how to best use her own skills to improve treatment for patients around the world. "This journey made me ask, 'how do I want to live my life?'" she recalled.

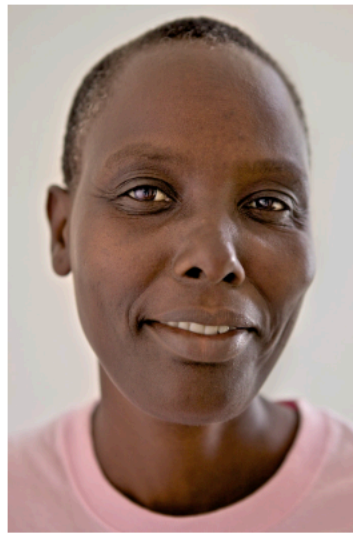
Carolyn stepped out of her comfort zone because she felt the images she was compelled to create would bring light to GFC and document the challenges patients face globally. "Every sort of person does suffer from cancer," Carolyn said, and she hopes her photographs help to underscore why Global Focus on Cancer's work is so vital.



Cervical cancer ward, Ho Chi Minh City Oncology Hospital, Vietnam



Breast cancer patient, K Hospital, Hanoi, Vietnam



Zainab Masatu, breast cancer patient, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania



Sabrina Kryger, metastatic breast cancer patient, Copenhagen, Denmark

We're Proud to Report...

W2W In the media

In September, we recognized Gynecologic Cancer Awareness Month, and members of the Woman to Woman community were spotlighted in the media. Here are a few recent press highlights we're especially proud of, along with two videos from Mount Sinai recognizing the hard work of staff and volunteers who make W2W possible.

CBS: [Harlem woman starts group for young gynecologic cancer survivors](#)

Today: [After being diagnosed with 2 types of cancer at once, woman starts global nonprofit](#)

From Mount Sinai:

[Gynecologic Cancer Patient Pays it Forward](#)

[Woman to Woman Program Builds A Community Of Hope](#)

Questions about our programming or resources? Please email womantowoman@mountsinai.org if you would like more information.

Woman to Woman's patient assistance fund is completely philanthropically funded. If you would like to support these services for future patients, [please click here.](#)

Cultivating a Writing Practice

[Guest Columnist Emily Rubin on the therapeutic elements of writing](#)

*Emily Rubin is an author and writing instructor who has lead writing workshops for Mount Sinai patients for eleven years. She has written about her cancer journey and Write Treatment Workshops for [cancerletter.org](#) and [poets&writers magazine](#). The workshops, which she founded in 2011, were featured on NY1's *New Yorker of the Week Series*. Rubin's award-winning novel, *Stalina*, was an Amazon Debut Novel Award winner. Here, Emily speaks to the impact she's seen while leading Write Treatment Workshops – and shares writing prompts that you can try out at home.*

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008 and underwent treatment until 2010 at Mount Sinai Beth Israel. It felt like my writing life was interrupted, even though I kept a journal. One of the first things I did when I finished treatment was resume working on my novel. Shortly after I had a publishing contract – and another cancer scare.

When my tests came back negative, I realized I'd been ignoring the fact that cancer was still a part of my psyche in that way, and that's when I had the idea for these workshops. For many participants, it's very therapeutic to know they always have a writing practice to go to, whether it's part of the workshop or private writing. All the things that patients face going through cancer – vulnerability, making choices, taking risks, being treated differently than you were before – can be used as a toolkit.

There's a freedom that comes into your writing when you express those things. Even if it's just for an hour, writing takes participants back to themselves. We are more than cancer, but it's still a part of us – so let's explore all sides of ourselves. –**Emily Rubin**

Join [the next Write Treatment workshop online](#) – and try these prompts at home.

WRITING PROMPTS

Write about a sound. Bells, wind, gum snapping, a voice, an inner voice. It should be a sound that moves you in some way—elation, anger, frustration, bliss—write about the sound as if it surrounds you.

Write about your favorite color, or colors. Write about where you see these colors and how they capture your attention. Do the colors make you think of something from your past? How do others around you relate to your favorite colors?

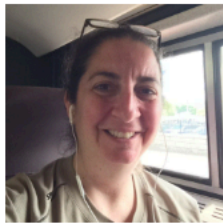
Start by writing down a question someone asked you recently. This can be as simple as: How are you? What time is it? Can I ask you something? Write the dialogue you remember, adding to it by writing what you were thinking, but not saying. This can take off into the realm of fiction.

We Asked, We Listened:

A W2W roundtable on creativity in our community

To showcase the range of perspectives in Woman to Woman, we asked three wonderful community members the same question. They were kind enough to share their wisdom with us, and we're excited to pass it along to you.

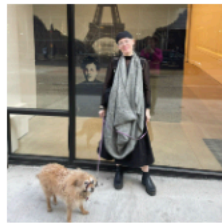
How has engaging with a creative practice connected you to your community?



Sharon Kass

Woman to Woman volunteer
Sharon is an avid birdwatcher, has a dance background, plays numerous instruments, and leads a robotics program for children

"As a Woman to Woman volunteer, my creative passions are often a conversation starter, whether they serve as inspiration or just a point of curiosity. Having a shared creative endeavor helps me form positive, personal connections with patients."



Jacqueline Mabey

PhD candidate, curator
Jacqueline is a curator of contemporary art and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in History of Art at University College London

"Creativity and community have helped me approach understanding my illness and what comes after. Engaging with art is essential to my journey through the 'wilderness of survivorship,' as Suleika Jaouad calls it."



Justin Lyttleton

Mount Sinai Business Associate
Justin, who works on KP4, is a comedian and host of the YouTube channel ThisWeekNerdStuff

"After trying comedy, I channeled my passion into a YouTube channel. It's rewarding to do something just because it makes me feel good, and learn there's an audience who also finds it interesting."

In Case You Missed It:

Creative resources to improve your day

Since our fall newsletter is centered around creativity, arts and culture, we've assembled a list of enriching resources that anyone can take advantage of. Whether you're in the mood for a joke, a relaxing night in, or some quiet reflection, we've got you covered.

- Next time you need a pep talk, you can call a hotline and hear uplifting messages from kindergarten students. Call 707-873-7862 – that's 707-8PEPTOC – and listen to kids' advice on what to do when you need life advice, feel nervous or frustrated, or just want to hear words of encouragement.
- If you're in the market for a laugh, try another hotline: you can listen to a joke at the Comedy Cures laugh line at 1-888-HAHAHAH (1-888-424-2424).
- Or, head to the Woman to Woman Video Library – last year as a holiday gift to W2W community, we gave the gift of laughter with help from [comedian Ahri Findling](#), and you can re-watch his standup set any time.
- The Poetry Foundation has [a section on its website devoted to poems about illness](#), including special sections on treatment, recovery, and catharsis. We love [The Lilies](#) by Karenne Wood.
- Relax and recharge with coloring pages – it's an easy way to get in touch with your creative side, even when you aren't feeling the muse. [Faber Castell](#) offers free, printable coloring pages in a variety of themes and styles.
- Choose a [soundtrack for your day](#) with Zen Radio, which offers over 35 channels of relaxing, spa-inspired music. Pick from different categories including acoustic and soft vocals, and try the "Perfect Sunset" or "Tranquility and Healing" channels to start or end your day.

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Our mailing address is:

The Mount Sinai Hospital
One Gustave Levy Place Box 1252
NY, NY 10029

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