

bloom

Issue

02

October
2009

Reach to Recovery International - RRI

Reach to Recovery International is committed to working to improve the quality of life for women with breast cancer and their families.

04

Conference wrap up

07

My Reach to Recovery experience

11

Tour de Taiwan





Did you know?
 Facebook has more than 300 million active users and the fastest growing demographic is those 35 years old and older



YES!

We have a fan page on FACEBOOK now!

While some of you still can't forget the beautiful scenery of Brisbane, we have started to learn to be a good host for the upcoming 16th Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference, 2011 in Taiwan.

Our official website is under construction and will be released as soon as it's ready. Meanwhile, we have created a fan page on FACEBOOK and are looking forward to start the dialogs with sisters and brothers from all over the world.

Please look for [16th RRI Breast Cancer Support Conference, Taiwan] and become a fan. For now we have posted some wonderful pictures we have took with you back in the 15th RRI

Conference. Please help us to identify you by tagging your name on the photos!

Stay tuned for more information about the 16th Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference on our fan page. Hope to see you there!

*Sometimes when search error occurs on FACEBOOK, you may not be able to find our fan page. Please simply add [tbca-npo@msa.hinet.net] into your friends list.◦

Sep. 09, 2009
 16th Reach To Recovery Breast Cancer Support Conference
 Executive Team

Contents

4 Conference wrap up

From May 13-15 we celebrated the 15th UICC Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference, a world first global conference for women affected by breast cancer.

5 Outstanding breast cancer advocates awarded at Brisbane RRI Conference

A highlight of the gala dinner at the Brisbane RRI Conference in May was the presentation of the four Reach to Recovery Awards.

5 My conference experience

By Dr Cheng Har Yip, University of Malaya Medical Centre, recipient of the 2009 RRI Health Professional Medal

6 Adventure workshop

A highlight of the 15th UICC Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference was the adventure workshop.

7 My Reach to Recovery experience

By Nancy Bellen, breast cancer survivor.

8 Brisbane RRI Conference report

By Malaysian delegates Tammy Tam and Margaret Gabriel.

9 Eve's Garden

Although Reach for Recovery has been difficult to keep going under extreme circumstances in Zimbabwe, our life seems to be getting a little easier.

10 Taiwan celebrates Pink October

Light up the pink ribbon, sing up the new vitality!

10 What Reach to Recovery meant to me

By Edith Cooper, recipient of the RRI 2009 Award for Outstanding Australian Breast Cancer Volunteer

11 Tour de Taiwan: 1000 kilometres in 13 days

Public education sessions and a 1000 kilometre, 13 day bicycle ride around Taiwan helped educate the public about the importance of cancer screening.

12 Kayi Ngunta

Message Stick for the 15th UICC Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference

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We respectfully acknowledge the Indigenous women of our global community, the traditional custodians of our environment.

Reach to Recovery International is supported by the UICC and Cancer Council Queensland



Message from Ann Steyn

President of Reach to Recovery

Welcome to the 2nd issue of our new look and online Bloom!

The Brisbane RRI Conference has come and gone! Anyone who was fortunate enough to have been there will remember it for a long time to come.

This issue will remind you of some of the experiences we shared. With 650 delegates from 43 countries, it was a wonderful opportunity for learning, and sharing knowledge and skills on all aspects of breast cancer; from supportive care and advocacy; to improving collaboration and developing partnerships across regions. And who could forget the Adventure Workshop with delegates abseiling down cliffs and kayaking on the Brisbane River!!

As always, the Teresa Lasser Award for the Outstanding Reach to Recovery Volunteer was a highlight of the gala dinner. The recipient, Gloria Lin, richly deserved the award in recognition of her founding the Taiwan Breast Cancer Alliance. This program is an excellent example of peer support that started from small beginnings and today supports thousands of breast cancer patients and their families.

The Reach to Recovery Medal for Outstanding Health Professional was awarded to Dr Cheng Har Yip, a worthy recipient for her

work with breast cancer patients and her support for the Reach to Recovery program.

During the gala dinner, it was announced the 16th Reach to Recovery Conference will be held in Taipei, Taiwan, from November 9-12, 2011. If the enthusiasm of the Taiwanese delegates is anything to go by, it will be an enthralling and worthwhile conference. Megan Dwyer, Project Manager for the Brisbane RRI Conference and a key player in its success, visited Taipei in July to share her expertise with the local organising committee. Please put those dates in your diaries!

As you know, for the next five years Cancer Council Queensland has kindly agreed to manage RRI. Megan Dwyer and Kristy Stewart from Cancer Council Queensland will both be involved in the ongoing support of RRI.

One of the first priorities is to update our database which is hopelessly outdated. **If you or your organisation has changed your contact details, please let us know.** The easiest way to update your contact details and make sure you receive future updates is to use the online form, which can be found at: www.reachtotherecoveryinternational.org/Join_RRI.html.

You can also email your details to info@reachtotherecoveryinternational.org.



I am proud to say that RRI listens to the changing needs of women and works to ensure that we reflect those changing needs.

With the excitement of the Brisbane RRI Conference behind us, it is now time to use the knowledge we gained in May to improve the services we offer in our countries. Do keep us informed of the work you are doing.

The Zimbabwe delegates returned home full of enthusiasm and held a tea party to raise funds to train more volunteers. Read about their fun afternoon with belly dancing, yoga and laughter therapy on page 9.

Despite adverse economic times, there are still many ways to raise money for the important work we do, and have fun at the same time. Keep up your great work!

Warm Reach to Recovery greetings to you all. ◦

Ann Steyn
President, Reach to Recovery
annsteyn@reachtotherecoveryinternational.org



Some of the brave participants of the Adventure Workshop, kayaking on the Brisbane River

Conference wrap up



From May 13-15 we celebrated the 15th UICC Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference, a world first global conference for women affected by breast cancer.

It was the first time the conference was held outside of the Northern Hemisphere, drawing together more than 600 breast cancer survivors, support organisations and health professionals from 43 countries in a 'Journey of Hope'.

The conference, hosted by Cancer Council Queensland in Brisbane, was themed 'One Journey, Many People', and centred on survivorship, capacity building and peer support.

The conference gave women affected by breast cancer the opportunity to build new peer support networks with other women from all corners of the globe, and empowered women to take action to raise awareness of breast cancer issues globally.

An online Message Stick Relay for breast cancer was a world first, travelling around the world to more than 30 locations, before arriving in Brisbane for the conference opening. The Relay connected breast cancer patients and survivors in the 'Journey of Hope'.

Conference speakers from around the globe talked about breast cancer issues globally, including: the importance of breast cancer organisations working together; surviving and coping with breast cancer; and the impact of breast cancer on family.

The Celebration of Hope, a two week festival showcasing outstanding examples of community engagement with breast cancer in Australia, was a highlight of the conference, raising awareness of breast cancer.

Activities included dragon boat adventures, a Queensland Firebirds pink netball match, Breast Cancer Network Australia's Mini-Field of Women, and an Amazon Heart Thunder motorcycle adventure. ◦

The Pink Ribbon – one purpose, many languages

Arabic:	وردی شریط
Urdu:	ردنگ لابی
Spanish:	Lazo Rosa
Filipino:	Lasong Rosas
French:	Ruban Rose
Italian:	Nastro Rosa
Galician:	Lazo Vermello
Catalan:	Cinta rosa
German:	Rosa Schleife
Dutch:	Roze Lint
Danish:	Lyserøde Sløjfe
Croatian:	Ružičasta vrpca
Czech:	Růžová stužka
Finnish:	Roosa Nauha
Hungarian:	Rózsaszín szalag
Norwegian:	Rosa Sløyfe
Korean:	핑크리본
Latvian:	Rozā lente
Lithuanian:	Rožinis kaspinas
Persian:	صوره ی رودان
Polish:	Różowa Wstążka
Portuguese:	Fita Rosa
Romanian:	Panglica Roz
Russian:	Розовая Лента
Slovak:	Ružová stužka
Swedish:	Rosa Bandet
Catalan:	Llaç Rosa
Turkish:	Pembe Kurdele
Japanese:	ピンクリボン
Chinese:	粉紅絲帶
Hebrew:	ורוד סרט
Serbian:	Ružičasta mašna
Slovenian:	Rožnati trak
Ukrainian:	Рожева стрічка



Outstanding breast cancer advocates awarded at Brisbane RRI Conference



Gloria Lin
Terese Lasser Award winner

A highlight of the gala dinner at the Brisbane RRI Conference in May was the presentation of the four Reach to Recovery Awards.

The first was the Teresa Lasser Award for Outstanding Reach to Recovery Volunteer, which goes to a RRI volunteer who has introduced, initiated or contributed to the development of a new Reach to Recovery program in an exceptional way.

The coveted award was presented to Gloria Lin, from Taiwan, in recognition of her important work in founding the Taiwan Breast Cancer Alliance.

The second award to be presented was the RRI Health Professional Medal, which goes to a health professional who has demonstrated a strong commitment to voluntary breast cancer support programs and who has made a significant contribution to the creation and evolution of such programs.

The recipient was Prof Cheng Har Yip, of the University of Malaya Medical Centre, for her work with breast cancer patients and her support for Reach to Recovery.

The third award was the 2009 Award for Outstanding Australian Breast Cancer Volunteer, which honours an Australian volunteer who has positively impacted the lives of those diagnosed with breast cancer.

Breast cancer survivor, Edith Cooper, from Brisbane in Queensland, proudly received the award in recognition of many years' work in supporting local women affected by breast cancer.

The fourth and final award presentation was for the 2009 AstraZeneca Breast Cancer Care Award, which recognises general practitioners, surgeons, medical oncologists, pharmacists, nurses, and social workers, and celebrates their exceptional commitment and compassion for their patients.

The award was presented to breast cancer nurse Sandra Gregg, from Cairns in Far North Queensland.

Delegates made sure the award winners celebrated their achievements in style, dancing late into the night, in true Reach to Recovery spirit. ◦

My conference experience

I was honored to be invited to be a plenary lecturer at the 15th Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference in Brisbane from 13-15 May 2009.

I was honored to be invited to be a plenary lecturer at the 15th Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference in Brisbane from 13-15 May 2009.

This was my first experience attending an international RRI Conference although I have previously attended at least two Asia-Pacific conferences.

I was thrilled to find that there were over 600 delegates from 43 countries, and being from a middle income country, I was happy to see that a number of delegates were also from low and middle income countries.

The breast cancer journey is one shared by all these women from different countries, each with their own unique stories. For some, the journey may have been tough, with many bumps along the way. While for others it was a smooth ride. For all, this is a journey of hope.

For those in low-resource countries, there is a sense of hopelessness as they try to

negotiate the defective health care systems in their countries. During the three days in Brisbane, I heard some sad stories from various women, especially from some of the African countries. One woman told me that her husband left her after she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Another woman said her estrogen receptor status was not done and when she requested her tumor blocks, the hospital had lost it.

This conference has brought to light the problem of equity of access to care, not only between the developed and the developing world, but also within the same country.

The proudest moment of my time at the conference was when I won the RRI Medal for Outstanding Health Professional. There are others who have done a lot more than me for women with breast cancer, and I consider this award a tribute to all health professionals working with women with breast cancer. ◦

**By Professor Cheng Har Yip,
University of Malaya Medical Centre,
recipient of the 2009
RRI Health Professional Medal**



Professor Cheng Har Yip

**“For all,
this is a
journey of
hope.”**

Professor Cheng Har Yip

Adventure workshop

A highlight of the 15th UICC Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference was the adventure workshop, on the first day of the conference, Wednesday, May 13.

Following an informative morning on survivorship, delegates were transported by ferry down the Brisbane River to Riverlife at Kangaroo Point for an afternoon of peer support adventure activities.

Conference organiser, Megan Dwyer, says the adventure workshop was enjoyed by all.

“The adventure workshop was a great opportunity for the group to come together in a relaxed setting and join in activities that really captured the imagination.

“For many women, the experience of breast cancer is a life changing event.

“Joining with others who understand the cancer journey helps survivors build strong peer support networks,” she says.

Delegates attended the adventure workshops and joined in a variety of adventure activities, including: observing and participating in Aboriginal dance; boomerang throwing followed by painting boomerangs; a cruise on the Brisbane River; laser clay shooting; and rollerblading.

The more adventurous participants bravely abseiled down the Kangaroo Point cliffs, kayaked down the Brisbane River, or went rock climbing.

Once the adrenalin had died down, the group shared an Aussie barbecue dinner overlooking the Brisbane River. ◻

“Joining with others who understand the cancer journey helps survivors build strong peer support networks”

Megan Dwyer



My Reach to Recovery experience

By Nancy Bellen, breast cancer survivor

The 15th UICC Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference in Brisbane was pretty terrific, 600 delegates from 331 organizations. The best part for me was to have conversations with women representing the developing countries. I also had the opportunity to be a speaker, it was an great honor to speak among such a distinguished crowd. The essence of my talk was about we as survivors telling of our stories and the small daily braveries that surround that.

The first evening I arrived, some of the speakers were lucky enough to be invited to the Governor's mansion for a very formal reception. I had the opportunity to converse with the Governor and the Chairman of the conference organising committee, Jeff Dunn, for about ten minutes. The next morning, I was surprised during the opening ceremony welcome, when Jeff Dunn quoted the conversation he had had with me the night before when I shared with him about small braveries. I was honored.

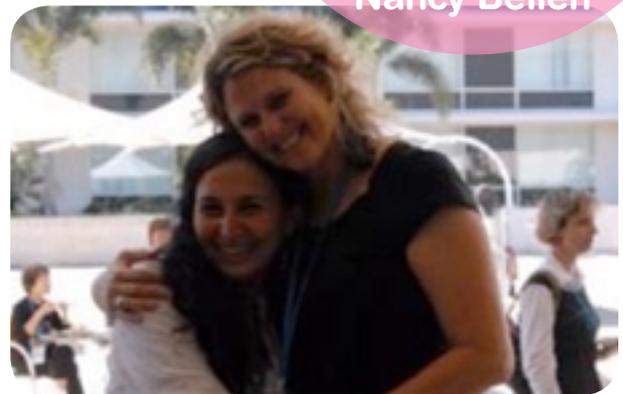
“These are just three of the many, many stories from new friends I met; I was treated to such a rich exchange during the week.”

Nancy Bellen



Mary Onyango, Executive Director, Kenya Breast Health Programme.

I met a terrific friend from the Kenya Breast Health Programme in Kenya, Mary Onyongo, is the Executive Director. In addition to sharing with us that poverty and shame are the biggest obstacles in the way of treating or even identifying breast cancer in her country, Mary has a wicked, funny sense of humor and I enjoyed her immensely. Did I mention Mary wants Amazon Heart to bring ours bike to Kenya and ride? When I suggested we might also help by building something, she said it was more important for the women to see us on our bikes and to bring them out of their homes, and hopefully face the shame.



Aliza Dolev, Head of Rehabilitation and Welfare, Israel

Another great pal was Aliza Dolev. Aliza served 20 years as a psychologist in the Israeli Army specialising in post traumatic stress disorder before leaving to work in the world of cancer.

Aliza developed a program for young women diagnosed with cancer, between the ages of 19-35, who fall between the chairs (cracks). They send the young women into the desert in jeeps - sound familiar? Also they have a program once a year where the young women are sent out in groups to navigate together for a week sailing. This is to help them realize what they can do for themselves.

Aliza has offered for my family to come and stay with her family next summer, sounds good!



This group was one of my favorites. They are all survivors of breast cancer, and delighted with their camaraderie. They assured me that just their group was enough to keep their beloved surgeon in business and that he did not have to practice with any others. They dragged one husband along for the trip this year but were hoping to bring others along to the next conference!

29 Malaysian survivors, their surgeon and one husband!

Brisbane RRI Conference report

Malaysian delegates Tammy Tam and Margaret Gabriel



Tammy Tam

The conference held at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre was attended by participants from 43 countries. The theme of the conference, One Journey, Many People, brought together breast cancer survivors to share their experiences and understand the journey they have gone through.

It also provided an opportunity to foster lifelong friendships and networking with other organisations to achieve their goals toward managing breast cancer.

I attended the conference with the President of the Breast Cancer Welfare Association (BCWA) of Malaysia, Ranjit Kaur, who was also on the conference organising committee, and fellow BCWA members, Margaret Gabriel and Connie Yee.

The welcome reception was held at Queensland Parliament House, with the guest of honour being the Queensland Governor. Delegates were treated to refreshments and had the opportunity to mingle and get to know each other.

At the official opening of the conference, delegates were welcomed by an Aboriginal Dance Troupe that performed a special ceremony to acknowledge Australia's traditional land owners and ensure the conference's success.

The conference addressed the

full range of topics related to survivorship, capacity building, and peer support. Concurrent sessions and workshops were held on the challenges of secondary (metastatic) breast cancer; lymphoedema and breast cancer; models of peer support; and survivorship and quality of life after cancer, to name a few. It was hard to select which sessions to attend because all the topics were highly relevant and interesting.

We were given the opportunity to participate in a benefit-finding adventure workshop to experience first-hand peer support adventure with small groups of delegates. Some of the adventure workshop activities were boomerang throwing and painting, kayaking, a Brisbane River Cruise, and Aboriginal dance.

Exhibitor booths at the conference sold pink products and distributed many books and brochures in relation to breast cancer.

The gala conference dinner, held at Brisbane City Hall, was a highlight, with the presentation of awards. We were proud to congratulate BCWA Technical Adviser, Professor Cheng Har Yip, when she received the Reach to Recovery International Health Professional Medal. Our congratulations, Prof Yip!

We now look forward to attending the 16th Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference in Taiwan in 2011.

The sharing of knowledge and experiences was greatly beneficial and I made many new connections on my own journey.

Margaret Gabriel

What I liked most about the Conference was the people – the organisers, my Homestay Hosts, and other delegates from around the world.

It was uplifting to be surrounded by so many inspiring women in an atmosphere of celebration, and I thought I was supposed to attend a breast cancer conference – a serious matter!

An exciting activity was the adventure workshop. I was able to fulfil my wish – to abseil. Of course, I had jellied legs when I started to go down the cliff, but it felt great when I reached the bottom. I even went for a second try!

I stayed in two homes and my hosts were simply marvellous. They met me at the airport, transported me to and from the conference venue, and provided dinner – wow! And wow! The weather was obliging too – days in paradise! It was a world class event in every sense, from the initial registration and selection of Homestay Hosts to the conference and post conference follow-ups.

As Tammy mentioned, a proud moment for Malaysia was when the 2009 RRI Medal for Health Professionals was awarded to

Professor Cheng Har Yip of the University of Malaya Medical Centre, for her strong commitment to voluntary breast cancer support programs. Prof Yip - congratulations!

On a more serious note, below are my learnings from the sessions I attended.

Cancer Survivors: Creating a Call for Action

Participants in this session listed what their unmet needs were and these were discussed in the following session. It was no surprise that the unmet needs were similar, irrespective of which country a woman came from.

Developing Successful Breast Cancer Programs: from Needs Assessment to Evaluation

This was an interactive presentation where aspects of the 'Continuum of Care' and programme processes were shared with participants. The Continuum of Care relates to:

- Screening
- Diagnosis
- Treatment
- Survivorship/Follow-up care

Survivorship: Quality of Life after Cancer

The section on diet and exercise reinforced the need to eat healthy food and get regular exercise, even while undergoing chemotherapy. Continuing with one's exercise while

having chemotherapy is what I subscribed to, and I feel that should be encouraged. I believe it works, from the positive remarks made by friends on my wellbeing. I did continue with my exercise and regular walking when I was having chemotherapy. And it seems a healthy lifestyle can protect against reoccurrences too. Chemo-brain – this needs further study to determine whether it is a myth or a reality. Aaah...I thought I had a proven excuse!

Capacity Building: Breaking the Sound of Silence!

I think the name of this session appropriately described the personal experience (of breast cancer) to advocating for a broader cause. A Simon and Garfunkel's song, "The Sound of Silence" was a fitting end to the speech. This session highlighted the need for a strong advocate to champion our cause.

Capacity Building: Fundraising events and programs: Case Studies from small to large

A wide variety of fundraising events and programs were presented and many can be applied to the Malaysian scene. These programs can be very effective ways of building our influence to reach women in Malaysia.

Capacity Building: Topical issues and advances

To me this was an informative session on breast cancer data, medical therapies and environmental and hereditary factors.

Peer Support: beyondblue – Raising awareness and developing skills for addressing depression and anxiety amongst people living with breast cancer

Having breast cancer is a major life stress and it seems that the stress then is potentially a precursor for later stress. The beyondblue website provides good information and could be tailored to provide psychosocial support at a local level in Australia.

My only regret was that I did not have enough time to attend the other interesting sessions! And not to be able to thank enough those wonderful people who I met and made my stay so enjoyable and enriching. I still cannot get over the kind gesture of a gentleman who carried my luggage in the pouring rain from a bus stop to the train station. It had been raining for two days in Samford, my second homestay location, and I had to take a bus to the next train station as a section of the track was flooded. And special thank you to Natalie Wust, from Cancer Council Queensland, who drove me, Tammy, and Connie to the Gold Coast. A truly memorable time. ◦

Eve's Garden



Although Reach for Recovery has been difficult to keep going under extreme circumstances in Zimbabwe, our life seems to be getting a little easier. We have a stable currency and we now have food in the shops.

Having had two of our volunteers attend the wonderful Brisbane conference, they felt so full of enthusiasm on their return that they decided it was high time we started holding our tea parties again. We had our first one on the first Wednesday of the month and will continue to do so for the rest of the year. We were very pleasantly surprised to have 28 ladies attend our tea party and they really enjoyed a much needed get-together, sharing thoughts, experiences and offering support to each other.

Not satisfied with that, we then organised an afternoon of fun showing ladies some complementary therapies. With the beautiful setting of Eve's garden in the background, everyone was given the opportunity to try belly dancing with Odette, followed by yoga with Luanne and if that wasn't enough, we gave everyone a taste of laughter therapy with Shilpa Shar. What a wonderful afternoon. It was filled with fun and so much laughter it made your sides ache, laughter is certainly the best medicine in the world.

In one afternoon we successfully raised breast cancer awareness, had a huge amount of fun and raised a little money to assist us with our much needed training programme for new volunteers.



One survivor sang
with her husband,
hand in hand.



Taiwan celebrates Pink October

Light up the pink
ribbon, sing up
the new vitality!

Since 2004, the Taiwan Breast Cancer Alliance (TBCA) has hosted a variety of activities, including cycling and swimming events, and street parades, to celebrate Pink October, and raise awareness of breast cancer prevention and early detection.

This year, TBCA introduced a new breast cancer campaign, combining the sharing survivors' stories and a popular pastime in Taiwan – singing.

The new campaign, *Light up the pink ribbon, sing up the new vitality!*, aims to communicate a key message, that a breast cancer diagnosis is not a death sentence – women with breast cancer can go on to live normal, positive, fulfilling lives.

As singing is full of energy and vitality, TBCA hopes the survivors'

songs will encourage and inspire others.

The *Light up the pink ribbon, sing up the new vitality!* competition includes three stages:

1. Internet presentation
2. Final competition
3. Live, outdoor concert

Each participant prepares a home video, telling her story and singing her song, which can then be voted for online. Those with the highest votes move onto the second stage, to compete in the final competition. For the final stage, the top ten become 'Pink Angels' and perform in the live outdoor concert. The 'Pink Angel' winners then visit hospitals and sing to other survivors or families, spreading hope to those affected by cancer.

Many survivors are thankful for the online space to present

their stories. One participant, who used to be afraid of people knowing her as a survivor, is now brave enough to share the website with her friends and neighbours, encouraging them to vote for her.

"My film is on the internet, vote me," she says.

Since August 5, more than 10,000 people have enjoyed watching the music videos online, and sharing the survivors' stories.

Increasing numbers of visits to the website show that the brave survivors, who have shared their stories through song, have helped encourage women to be aware of their health.

One event can change many lives. To find out more about *Light up the pink ribbon, sing up the new vitality!* visit <http://tbca.npo.org.tw/activity>

What Reach to Recovery meant to me



The months of preparation for RRI were exciting, with lots of speculation about how it would all go. Being on the Hospitality Committee gave me an insight into what a huge job it all was, especially when speaking with those on different committees, and Megan Dwyer in particular.

I found myself speaking incessantly about homestay for the conference, encouraging my friends to rally behind my badgering and offer their homes. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed their hosting experience with only small problems.

We found we had too many hosts, and not enough applicants, so there were some

disappointed host families. I wanted more time with my new friend to learn even more about her country and this sentiment was echoed by other host families.

Conference days just blew me away, with so many excited open faces around me. I wanted time to speak with every one of them, which proved impossible. One of the most exciting outcomes has meant we are collecting breast prosthesis to send to our African friends in countries where costs prevent many from owning a prosthesis. Anyone who can help out with this project is welcome to contact me on murraye@bigpond.net.au.

How could I listen to every presentation? How did I choose which one to attend? What inspiring presentations there were! It was amazing to learn about how women cope in different situations and how their problems are overcome, but always knowing just how fortunate we are to live in Australia.

Lastly, I felt overwhelmed to receive my award, which should go to so many of you who strive towards helping those who have undergone breast cancer. ◊

By Edith Cooper, recipient of the RRI 2009 Award for Outstanding Australian Breast Cancer Volunteer

Tour de Taiwan: 1000 kilometres in 13 days



Local survivors and others wore pink T-shirts and joined the group on bikes.



Ishiuhan and her little son.



With early detection of breast cancer improving survival rates, the Taiwan Breast Cancer Alliance (TBCA) has recently started promoting a three year campaign for breast cancer and cervical cancer prevention.

Even though an affordable national healthcare system has been established in Taiwan for over a decade, less than 20 per cent of women 50 years and over undergo breast cancer screening.

Survivors rode bicycles in suburban streets and across the countryside, stopping to share tips on being breast aware and doing self-examinations.

Ishiuhan Hargrove, a breast cancer survivor, participated in the ride. She shares her story.

This year, public education sessions and a 1000 kilometre, 13 day bicycle ride around Taiwan helped educate the public about the importance of cancer screening.

In 2006, aged 33, while nursing my six month old second child, I was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer. I suffered through chemotherapy, lost both breasts to double mastectomy, and underwent radiation treatments. Then, making the terrible tragedy even harder to bear, in 2007 I also had to have brain surgery to remove a brain tumour.

While I was lying in the Emory hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, all I could think of was my birthplace – Taiwan. I wanted to go back to the land where I was born.

When I was 14, I had travelled all over Europe. When I was 16, I moved to the United States, where I have since married and raised two boys. I have been to many countries of Asia. But yet, I had not fully explored my own homeland. So my husband and I sold all our belongings, put our US house on the market, auctioned off just about everything we owned, and returned to Yilan, Taiwan.

What came after that was like a dream. After we returned to Luodong, a local breast cancer survivor group called the Orchid Sisters contacted me. Through the local chapter, I became involved with TBCA. Through working with other survivors in Taiwan, I found the strength to make my life meaningful again! The survivors in TBCA consider the number of years they have survived their cancer, to be their ages. There with them, I was two years old. I found many joys of life once more!

In June 2009 we wrote a chapter of history in Taiwan. We were the first group organised by cancer survivors to take up the challenge of a bicycle tour around Taiwan. The Taiwan National Department of Health held a press conference for us a couple days prior to our departure on June 8. We were in several national newspapers and on the evening news during the 13 days we were on the road.

It had always been my dream to see Taiwan by bicycle with my American husband and our two small boys. It is something I had wanted to do at least once in my life. The stark beauty of Taiwan's sheer mountain slopes, green jungles, and rocky beaches cannot be truly appreciated from a car. My husband Adam and I had been talking about seeing Taiwan up close and personal since we were in college. However, after I got sick, I gave up that thought altogether. After my tough fight with breast cancer I simply gave up my ambitions – I still cannot believe this dream came true.

On this trip, the oldest survivor was 63 years old and I was the youngest at 36. We bought two attachable trailer bikes for my two sons (aged 6 and 3 years) to ride with us. TBCA and the Taiwan Cyclist Federation arranged a great support team to travel with us. Two professional cyclists and a van followed us the entire trip. The whole event was very well organised. On top of this, there were different local survivor groups, religious groups, schools and avid bikers to welcome and guide us through each of the cities we passed.

Many of my family members say that I was crazy and my mother even at one point urged my husband to stop me. His reply was, "I am her husband, not her father. I am here to support her, not order her around." We were both excited to show our American-born boys my birth country's natural beauty. It was such a gift to give our oldest before he starts first grade this autumn.

I sometimes wonder if I did not get breast cancer, would we ever have dropped everything we had in the United States to do this? Would I have met all the lovely Orchid Sisters in Taiwan? I frankly agree that God must have a plan for everything. During the trip, I kept a daily journal which was posted on TBCA's blog, sharing my thoughts and feelings on the road. To my surprise, a lot of people followed our story daily. After our "Tour de Taiwan" experience, I realised I am ready to accept my life back again. So after 15 months of convalescing in Taiwan, I accepted a position as a senior medical physicist at Watson Clinic and moved to Lakeland, Florida. My job is to treat cancer patients with radiation.

Now I feel I have so much more understanding of how my patients feel deep inside. I hope to contribute some of my abilities to helping more women to live beyond breast cancer.

.....
Ishiuhan Hargrove
Written at home in Lakeland, Florida
25/08/2009



Kayi Ngunta

Message Stick for the 15th UICC Reach to Recovery International Breast Cancer Support Conference

The Message Stick is a symbol of the ongoing connection between us, engaging breast cancer survivors in a lifelong journey of hope.

The message stick is named *Kayi Ngunta* which means 'the pathway to knowledge' in Muruwari, an Indigenous Australian language from far northwest New South Wales.

The message stick design depicts the pathway of knowledge with the circles of life, symbolising eternity; rays of sunshine, symbolising hope and courage; and a meeting place, symbolising our connection to one another.

The message stick also features three female spirit dancers, to symbolise strength, empowerment, and beauty. They dance together and share in our journey of hope.

After an amazing journey of 34 days through 23 countries and greeting 34 different breast cancer survivors around the world, the Message Stick arrived back at its starting point in Brisbane, Australia.

Today, the Message Stick plays a symbolic role in guiding our path, helping to inspire our focus on building capacity and support networks for women around the world who are affected by breast cancer.

We'd like to share some of the Message Stick's journey with you...

Greetings from Toronto, Canada

I am excited to see the message stick pass through our great big country bringing greetings to my sisters around the world. In the 20 years since my breast cancer diagnosis, it has been my great privilege to meet and share with hundreds of women on this shared voyage.

Eleanor Nielsen

Bermuda joins the relay with delight

Greetings from one of the smallest and most isolated island communities. The survivors in Bermuda lend support to one another and to all of you.

Reach for Recovery Namibia

Reach for Recovery Namibia is designed to provide a network of support to all newly diagnosed patients and their families irrespective of religion, culture or social order.

Our mission is to diligently strive to reduce the mortality rate and combat the social stigma associated with the disease as well as promote awareness for the growing breast cancer problem in Namibia. Women in rural areas rely on physicians and other health care professionals for treatment and even breast care education. In our experience, during our 1st ever breast cancer awareness campaign, we soon realised that their psychosocial needs can be and should be addressed through support and awareness programmes. We are currently trying to engage the our Ministry of Health to become involved in our drive to encourage women and men to take responsibility and to let them know that breast cancer is not a death sentence but can be cured if detected in the early stages.

Cheryl Ferreira, Co-Ordinator Namibia

Reach to Recovery in Baltimore!

Greetings from the shores of the beautiful Chesapeake Bay, where Spring has just arrived and residents are gearing up for a season of boating, fishing, crabbing, and general fun in the sun. Reach to Recovery has a strong program in Baltimore, Maryland, as it does throughout the U.S. Hundreds of volunteers in the Baltimore area spend countless hours talking with new breast cancer patients and providing strong, powerful examples of survivorship.

I am proud to participate in the Message Stick Relay. No one chooses to have cancer, but those of us who work with local breast cancer peer-support programs or with Reach to Recovery International have chosen to see our experiences as opportunities rather than endings. Countless people supported and helped me while I battled breast cancer, and working with these peer-support programs allows me to "pay it forward" to new patients. I am grateful to be in a position to offer women who are facing breast cancer one of the things that they need most — hope.

Mwanirizibwa e Uganda

It is really exciting that the relay has connected us globally from different cultures, languages, nationalities, age and social status. There is much hope that breast cancer will be ultimately conquered. Indeed it's a journey of hope!

Greetings from Cape Town

Greetings from Cape Town at the southern-most tip of the African continent. We are delighted that the Message Stick has reached us on its Journey of Hope around the world.

Volunteers of the 27 South African groups are proud to be members of the RRI family. Our volunteers can be found educating communities about breast cancer, helping promote suitable breast health policies and supporting breast cancer patients and their families on the road to recovery.

Nono and Joy we salute you and all other women whose lives have been cut short by this dreadful disease. As the Message Stick moves on we send our fervent hope that the common threads that bind us will be increased and strengthened. Let's take hands together and look to the future when there will be no breast cancer. Until then let's stand together, as united we can achieve so much more.

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www.themessagestick.com

Friends

In the last edition of Bloom I advised that the UICC had appointed Ann Steyn (RRI President), Ranjit Kaur (Immediate Past President of RRI and Board Member of the UICC) and I as a Transition Group to consider the future of Reach to Recovery. This came about as a consequence of a shift in the strategic focus of the UICC from direct intervention and service provision to advocacy, networking and activities directed at the development of member organisations.

It is the opinion of the RRI Transition Group and the UICC that the most appropriate way forward is to transfer responsibility for the management of RRI to a supportive UICC member organisation. Obviously, this organisation would require the capacity to take on this task but would also need to demonstrate a commitment to the RRI movement and the support of women diagnosed and treated for breast cancer.

On behalf of the RRI Transition Group and the UICC I am delighted to announce that the responsibility for the RRI programme will pass to the Cancer Council Queensland. Elsewhere in this edition of Bloom, Ann and Ranjit speak of their experience of the Cancer Council Queensland and the organisation's capacity for the task and commitment to the RRI programme. I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the

Cancer Council Queensland and I am honoured to accept this responsibility and welcome the opportunity to continue my longstanding involvement with RRI.

We are currently working on a number of initiatives and will be in communication with you in the near future. A particular priority is updating our member data base and building mechanisms by which members, both individuals and organisations, can share

information and work together.

I trust you enjoy this edition of Bloom and I look forward to working with in support of women diagnosed and treated for breast cancer on a global basis.

With best wishes,

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Jeff Dunn
Advisor to RRI and UICC
Chairman, Conference Organising
Committee



Prof Jeff Dunn, Edith Cooper - recipient of the 2009 Award for Outstanding Australian Breast Cancer Volunteer, Ann Steyn – President Reach to Recovery International

Our mission

Reach to Recovery International is built on a simple yet universal principle: a woman who has lived through breast cancer and gives of her time and experience to help another woman confronting the same experience is a valuable source of support. Reach to Recovery International is committed to working to improve the quality of life for women with breast cancer and their families through a wide range of services offered worldwide.

For more information about RRI and bloom, please email info@reachtorecoveryinternational.org or visit our website at www.reachtorecoveryinternational.org

