



## WORDS FROM JANIE

Janie Brown, Executive Director

**ADRIFT**  
by Mark Nepo

Everything is beautiful and I am so sad.  
This is how the heart makes a duet of wonder and grief. The light spraying through the lace of the fern is as delicate as the fibers of memory forming their web around the knot in my throat. The breeze makes the birds move from branch to branch as this ache makes me look for those I've lost in the next room, in the next song, in the laugh of the next stranger. In the very center, under it all, what we have that no one can take away and all that we've lost face each other. It is there that I'm adrift, feeling punctured by a holiness that exists inside everything. I am so sad and everything is beautiful.

Mark Nepo has such command of the English language in this beautiful poem which describes the paradox in living. He articulates a feeling I have every day working at Callanish, witnessing people who hold the sadness of their lives alongside the beauty. I often feel 'punctured by

a holiness that exists inside everything' as I listen to people who want to make space to hold all of their life experiences in one whole.

In our recent community retreat days, we have been contemplating the challenge of living with paradox. One woman talked about straddling two worlds, not knowing whether to think of herself as 'living' or 'dying.' Another spoke of her inside life and her outside life, holding two very different realities: the outer face she puts on to the world and the inner world of worry whether the next oncology appointment will affirm her fears. Another person spoke of the wonder of birds appearing at her feeder, and the joy at hearing her children sing over breakfast, as she sits at home recovering from brain radiation.

Perhaps one of the keys to having peace in our lives is to learn to live with the paradoxes: living and dying, sadness and beauty, hope and hopelessness, fear and steadiness. Recognizing that our states of mind and heart are forever in motion helps—the sadness of learning that another friend has a cancer recurrence moves through my heart, and I give myself space to feel, and then catching the moment when a peony dumps all its petals in one motion, and the table is awash in deep pink; the devastation of a woman no longer able to ride to conquer cancer, and the joy when her team chose her to be their 'virtual' leader from a deck chair on the sidelines.

Jack Kornfield, a well-known meditation teacher, writes about learning to hold paradox as being a condition for developing spiritual strength. He also describes other qualities we can cultivate such as flexibility, patience, kindness, asking good questions, and developing a personal sense of

*Words from Janie cont. on pg 2*



## INVINCIBLE SUMMER

by Sue Robins

*In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer.*

– Albert Camus

My breast tumour was treated well by health professionals over the course of my cancer diagnosis and treatment last year. My mass was identified, removed and destroyed. The remaining parts of my breast were radiated for good measure. Eventually, my physical scars began to heal, my hematoma shrunk and my burned skin faded.

The rest of me - the bits that were attached to my cancerous breast and housed my mental, emotional and spiritual health - were largely ignored by clinicians. I craved kindness in every health care interaction, even trying to make eye contact with the parkade attendants to no avail. I rarely found the loving kindness I so desired in the hospital. To them, I was just another middle-aged breast cancer patient. It was as if I was an unwanted breast mass and nothing more.

*Invincible Summer cont. on pg 2*



## Please Consider Supporting our Cycling Team Callanish

Cycling Team Callanish was founded in 2013, inspired by two young adults, both with Stage IV cancer, Rima Andre and Philip Lee. When they learned that Callanish received no government funding, they inspired a team of 32 cyclists to train and complete the Vancouver to Whistler Gran Fondo in 2013. The symbolism of climbing mountains was not

lost on us, knowing what enormous mountains our people with cancer climb every day! An amazing \$140,000 was raised.

**On August 18th, 2018**, Team Callanish will ride 100 kms in the **Tour de Victoria** ([tourdevictoria.com](http://tourdevictoria.com)). The team is comprised of past retreat participants, staff and Board Members.

**Please consider making a donation to support our team at [callanish.org](http://callanish.org)**

## WORDS BY JANIE CONT.

the sacred, which can help us to make space for everything. When we doubt our strength to hold the corners of our lives together as one whole, it can inspire us to know our spiritual homework, and to see the results of doing it expressed in our lives.

I am grateful to belong to a community of people who understand what it takes to **not** get swept under completely by the tides of life's challenges, but more to keep our attention on the balance point of beauty and sadness co-existing, of living while dying and of finding the still and steady point in the turning world. Then we truly can face all that we have lost while deeply knowing the parts of ourselves, like Nepo says, that no one can take away.

## INVINCIBLE SUMMER CONT.

I endured my treatment deep in a state of emotional suffering. I had trauma from the hospital experience and was rattled by catching a glimpse of my own mortality. Even worse, cancer had triggered all the unresolved issues in my life. It was as if all my sorrow that I had carefully packed away the past 50 years was on full display on my kitchen table. I had no choice but to look at all this ugly pain that stemmed from my family of origin. I had no tools and little support beyond my dear husband and beloved children, who were also healing from my cancer in their own way.

I was discharged from counselling sessions at the hospital after four short sessions. "Where do I go now?" I sobbed at my last appointment. "Google therapists," I was told. Thankfully, Callanish Society showed up in my search results. I embarked on counselling appointments with Susie Merz, trekking across the city for regular sessions as the rest of me slowly began to heal.

I embraced everything about the Callanish house – the streaming light in the building, the warm greeting when I walked in the door, the peaceful hushed atmosphere, the tea offered to me at the start of each session. It was everything I was missing in my patient experience at the hospital. I signed up for the Callanish retreat, but was terrified of the idea of being part of a group. I'm an introvert – fine in one-on-one situations, but I struggle in larger settings.

The retreat date crept closer. But because of my work in therapy with Susie, where she gently guided me through my pain, I was feeling stronger and more resilient. I didn't know what to expect, but I felt ready to be with other people who had cancer too.

To prepare me for the retreat, Susie sagely recommended: "You will have to allow people to be nice to you." As a caregiver, mom to a kid with a disability and classic nurturer and pleaser – as silly as it sounds – allowing people to be nice to me was a challenge. Driving up to the gravel parking lot at the retreat location at Brew Creek Centre, there was a group of lovely women standing there, smiling and waving, awaiting my arrival. My room was beautifully appointed and tucked away on the second floor of a wooden cottage. There was a massive vase of gorgeous flowers to welcome me. This was my first glimpse into what was to come in the next five days.

We began each day meditating, learning qigong and slowly waking up to the sounds of beautiful crystal singing bowls. There was hard personal group work in the mornings, carefully facilitated by professionals, focused on loss and death. The afternoons were for rest and relaxation – with therapeutic touch, music and counselling. The day was studded with joyful meals, prepared with love by the volunteers in the kitchen. There was camaraderie, laughter and tears. Each day ended with an evening council, where everybody – staff, volunteers and participants – gathered in the great room around the crackling fire.

I was treated with unconditional kindness. I did allow people to be nice to me because I never once felt judged. Just being me seemed enough. It gave me comfort to know that every person working at the retreat was there to share her gifts with us. There was a clear belief in the concept of benevolent service – an approach that is sadly missing in today's health care world. Us retreat participants were not a burden – instead we felt like a joy. I had a sense that every touch at the retreat was carefully planned and tweaked based on years of wisdom. I wasn't scared because I was safe.

Here are the fragments of what remains after the Callanish retreat: I have access to a new serenity inside of me. I don't wake up feeling panicked anymore. When worry crosses my mind (and negative thoughts do still come) I now have tools to pull up to let them wash over me. I can close my eyes and breathe, listen to music, walk in nature, or simply remember my time at the retreat. If I start ruminating in the past or fretting about the future, I pause and centre in the moment. I look up in the sky and think, "It's a beautiful day." My husband says that I smile easier now. For anxious, tormented me – these newfound skills are the ultimate gift for me and my family. Despite cancer (or maybe because of it?), I have finally found a sliver of peace in my heart. A deep, heartfelt thank you to all the kind souls dedicated to the Callanish retreat for guiding me towards my own invincible summer.



## COLLECTIVE AWAKENING

by Aimee Taylor

I had been living with cancer for a year and a half before I found the young adult group at Callanish. When I walked through the doors, I had been through a year of treatment in what was supposed to be my maternity leave, and my marriage had unexpectedly ended. I was hurting.

The other participants spoke so openly. I was in awe of how vulnerable they were.

Prior to this circle, I thought I'd been an open book, but I realised then that I'd never really visited the depth of my grief and had barely cried about my diagnosis – about being told I likely wouldn't see my daughter grow up. There was a lot of well-meaning pressure from my community of friends to remain positive in the face of my life-threatening illness, but within this circle, I could finally process some of my grief in a genuine, safe way.

What came next was nothing short of an awakening. I was able to be immersed in a community who truly understood what I was going through, and was able to talk about my grief, connect with other parents of young kids who knew the complexities of parenting with cancer, and finally face my own death in a way that didn't have to be saturated with fear.

Our Western world does not make much room for grief, unlike many indigenous communities around the world, where grief is experienced as a communal ritual. In this community, where death is so much a part of our lives, it is important to turn

to our circles for comfort – there is so much strength in communal grieving. We slowly learn how to balance hope with the acceptance that death might take us. Some of us live and some of us die and there doesn't seem to be a template. But we are here now, we are together, and we show up for one another.

What I've learned most is that it isn't necessarily in the talking, but in the listening, where the awakening begins. In these circles, my heart has broken open many times in hearing someone's story, and as a result, it seems to stay open, to grow, and has slowly become comfortable in this space of vulnerability.

Our job in these circles is to hold space for other people, however they come. It sounds simple, and with practice, it is. I have started to look forward to that moment when I can look across the circle at someone and see their hearts begin to open: I feel grateful to be there as I witness their awakening. And I am so grateful that mine began in that powerful circle.



Megan and MaryAnne, July 2011

## SISTERS

by MaryAnne Brown

I cannot speak of my own cancer diagnosis without including the story of my sister's. We were both diagnosed as young adults but her experience was far more typical of the young adult experience in that her doctors took far too long to suspect cancer because she was so young. Megan had just turned 27 (four days before I turned 35) and she called me right after my birthday to tell me her news. She had breast cancer and the BRCA2 gene mutation. Almost six

months to the day I had my own breast cancer and BRCA2 diagnosis. But mine was taken seriously from the first moment I noticed the lump, in spite of my young age, because of the seriousness of my sister's diagnosis. After a lifetime of protecting my baby sister, she protected me. She saved my life, but she was not so lucky. I recently passed the fifth anniversary of her death. It is still so fresh. I have gotten used to what grief feels like, but I can't imagine ever getting used to the loss of her.

## YOU

There is a paradox in the loss of you that I am destined to live every day. I have moments of awareness that you have died and I can almost accept that this is reality and we all face it at some point.

But then I see something I know you loved and think I ought to call you, tell you all about it, and once more my heart catches on the jagged edge

of your absence and all the colour drains out of me.

They used to say, "This is grief." But no one says much of anything to me anymore for I have long since left off crying on the bus and avoiding sad movies, blocking off dates on the calendar and invoking your name in the places you once stood.

I would appear to have moved on, whatever that means in this hurry-up world and its endless tides of progress and attainment. But in fact I am living in a new municipality with a different area code where the uninitiated may visit but they never stay. For they do not yet understand that life is grief and grief is life and I would not have it any other way in a world where I can no longer have you.



## CHIA SEED CHOCOLATE CAKE

4 tbsp Chia seeds in 1 cup water for 15 minutes

### Mix together:

½ cup Organic raw cocoa  
125 grams Soft butter  
5 large Eggs  
1 cup Coconut sugar (or other sugar)

### Stir together:

1 cup Almond meal  
1/2 tsp Salt  
1 tsp Baking soda (sifted)

Combine all ingredients until well mixed. Pour mixture into parchment-lined cake pan.

Cook @ 350 degrees for 30-40 mins. or until an inserted knife comes out clean - cake will be moist not dry. Cool 5-10 mins. in pan, remove to cool completely.

This can be served as small squares for afternoon tea or with a dark chocolate ganache or whipped cream and berries as an evening dessert.



## SPECIAL THANKS TO A VOLUNTEER GAIL BELCHER

When we learned that our beloved Gail, long time Callanish participant, spent her career working with kids and families in mental health as a nurse and counsellor, we asked her if she would help us with our new monthly family circle. She said Yes and now we know we wouldn't want to do it without her. Gail works with Danielle and Justine in the art room, creating processes for the 8 children (ages 5-14) whose parents are living with metastatic cancer, while their parents have their own group upstairs. The kids call Gail their fairy godmother! Gail brings such joy and warmth, and a deep love and respect for these little beings who need a strong healing space to be together. Gail, we love you and are so grateful for how you show up for these families, and to support all of us. Thank you!

## FAMILY SUPPORT CIRCLE

by Danielle Schroeder

Our monthly Family Support Circle started in January and we have been so inspired by the love and joy the children and parents bring to our Callanish space. The group is for parents living with metastatic cancer, their partners, and their children (ages 4 to 16) to share and learn from each other about the challenges of living with cancer in a family, and the parenting issues that can often arise. The children also have the opportunity to use expressive modalities (music therapy, art therapy, play therapy) to explore their feelings and to learn resilience strategies.

For more information contact Danielle at (604) 732-1012 or email: [danielle@callanish.org](mailto:danielle@callanish.org)

### We Remember with Love

Josie Alaon  
Susan Bridger  
Kathleen Elliott  
Mireille La Fontaine  
Natalie Love  
Beverly Parrott  
Sandra Tremblay  
Richard Wozny  
Christine Kunicki

We send our love and thoughts to the family and friends of these remarkable people.

## Special Thanks to:

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**Danielle Schroeder and musical friends** for their CD launch concert fundraiser.