

An evening of "Healing Through Art" at the Cancer Center—what's up with that? You are probably thinking: "Art? I can't draw, I'm not artistic, everyone else will know what they're doing, and I'll feel stupid." Then there's the "healing" part. I know—you've already dealt (or are dealing with) chemotherapy and/or radiation. You're eating healthy foods and trying to exercise. You're wondering if you really need another session of any sort of "healing" process.

Well, art therapy is really rather fun. It gives you the opportunity to express yourself in ways that are not usual for most of us. Seven patients and one supportive husband participated in a recent session of "Healing Through Art" at the NCS Vancouver Center location. After we introduced ourselves, presenter Sheila Hutchison showed some examples of her artwork journal and explained how these images helped her get through treatment for breast cancer. Seeing a journal done in drawings and pictures with very few words was an eye-opener for me. I've been journaling since high school, and have yet to draw anything in my journal. Sheila then invited each of us to make a totem image for ourselves. She demonstrated how to draw a basic human figure and face, so we wouldn't end up with stick-figure portraits if we wanted to portray ourselves realistically. Or we could use symbols to represent ourselves and loved ones—any image that would have meaning for us. We could express our feelings about having cancer or make an image that would give us peace and encouragement, both in the making and the viewing later on.

An array of supplies was spread out on the table—watercolors, chalk pastels, colored pencils, markers, scissors, stamps and paper. We all got to work, and in an hour, we had made something meaningful for ourselves. Plus, it was fun! Then we each showed what we had made and explained its significance. No one had made a masterpiece, but we were all satisfied with what we had produced. As we picked up the supplies, we all asked Rosemary McDermott, the Program Coordinator, when we could do it again.

What did I get out of it? As I said, I'm a word person, so having to express myself in images made me use a different part of my brain for an evening. I have a wonderful image on the wall to look at when I need encouragement, and I met some interesting people. If NCS presents another "Healing Through Art" session, I will certainly sign up.

--Sue