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Under 30s conquering cancer

Halifax News Net

By Lori McKay – The Weekly News

A photography exhibit highlighting stories of cancer survivors opens next month in Halifax.

Local photographer Shari Tucker has photographed 17 participants for her second Young & Fearless - Inspiration of Cancer Survivors show, which will open at Art & Jules Street, 2089 Gottingen St., on Oct. 6.

"The show's about survivorship," said Tucker. "People often focus on the mortality rates of cancer, but there are so many survivors out there."

This year's show focuses on people under the age of 30, because she says that's a group of survivors that people don't often think about.

"A lot of people that are younger when they get cancer don't have a support group, or people their age to talk to. Having cancer as an adolescent brings a different group of issues," Tucker said.

"Someone approaching their 20s is dealing with so many things like childbearing years, university and self image. It's very different for them losing their hair, than say someone in their 80s."

She said the project isn't about people getting sick, but the positive attitudes people have and how having cancer has changed their lives.

"Once you beat cancer, what can be any harder than that."

Tucker said stories like that of survivor Cheryl Kinsman, who was diagnosed when she was 22, remind us how precious life is.

Kinsman was a student at Acadia University when she felt she wasn't feeling well enough to write one of her exams. She needed a doctor's note, so she went to outpatients. The doctor who examined her thought she was 12 weeks pregnant. She had put on some weight, but she knew she wasn't pregnant. As it turned out, she had a tumour on her ovary that was 12 centimetres in diameter. A week and a half later, she had surgery to remove the ovary. The results on the tumour came back to show she had cancer.

Kinsman started chemo and lost all her hair.

The doctors told her the type of cancer she had doesn't usually spread to the second ovary, so her fertility shouldn't be affected. But it's something she still worries about.

This year, Kinsman reached the two-year mark cancer free. She just graduated with a Bachelor of Education and is excited about starting a career as a teacher.

"Everyone has a story," said Tucker. "Every participant I've photographed had a different take on how they got through it and what was important to them. I've met some truly amazing people."



Photographer Shari Tucker (second from right) with Nora Gross, Erin Burgess and Ryan Joudrey.

Five of Tucker's photographs from the 2008 Young & Fearless collection are currently on display at Dalhousie University as part of a national traveling exhibit called Cancer Connections by PhotoSensitive, a photography cancer project based in Ontario. The photographs are on display until Sept. 27.

Tucker, 31, had a cancer scare of her own seven years ago. "I felt all the fears that came with not knowing," said Tucker. "Thankfully, it came back benign."

She said it was that scare, along with the PhotoSensitive project, that gave her the inspiration for the show last year, and this year's show was just a natural progression. She had planned to photograph 30 subjects under 30 for the 2009 exhibit, but was only able to complete 17 of the shoots. The remaining participants will be a coffee table book which she hopes to launch in 2010.

"It was a very busy spring and summer," said Tucker, who takes a great deal of time with each subject. A writer also interviewed each of the participants for a story that will later accompany the pictures in the book.

A portion of proceeds from the show are going to the Canadian Cancer Society.

lmckay@hfxnews.ca

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Young and Fearless - Inspiration of Cancer Survivors

WHEN: Tuesday, Oct. 6 from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.






WHERE: Art&Jules, 2089 Gottingen St., Halifax

INFO: info@sharitucker.com








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