



Designers give patient a Haven of Healing

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A year ago, Oakville resident Rosemary Halls-Dawson went home and asked her husband, Colin Dawson, if he wanted the good news or bad news first.

She then blurted out that there was no good news — she had cancer and burst into tears.

A year later, the couple was off to England to see their newborn granddaughter Brooke, Halls-Dawson's hair is regrowing into attractive tufts, she is well past her surgery and chemotherapy, is trying to learn her new tap dancing steps — and has a new Haven for Healing in her home.



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CONDUCTIVE TO HEALING: Ovarian cancer patient Rosemary Halls-Dawson's bedroom before it was redesigned as a Haven for Healing, by local residents and entrepreneurs Dede Hacking and Lyn Gilchrist.
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For the latter, Halls-Dawson has Oakville residents Dede Hacking and Lyn Gilchrist to thank.

Hacking and Gilchrist, both of whom recently established new interior design firms, volunteered their time to design a Haven for Healing for Halls-Dawson.

Both Hacking and Gilchrist attended the Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning interior design program.

Both later took a redesign/staging association course and both belong to the Canadian ReDesigners Association (CRDA), which has adopted Ovarian Cancer Canada (OCC) as its charity of choice.

Through that partnership, Havens for Healing are designed for ovarian cancer patients.

They are a room in the patient's home that is tailored to be a personal place conducive to the person's healing as they go through their ordeal with cancer and journey toward recovery.

Halls-Dawson said she thought it a little odd when Hacking and Gilchrist first called her to suggest a Haven for Healing, but believed she may as well find out what it was about.

That positive, open attitude is typical of Halls-Dawson, in fact it is evident within minutes of meeting her.

"We were happy to do it and we got to meet Rosemary and that was the real bonus," said Hacking who operates Eleanor Hacking Design.

"She's a real inspiration," agreed Gilchrist who operates By Design.

Halls-Dawson is 68, a mother of three grown children (Tracey, 39, Sharon, 31 and Tim 35), who moved from England to Canada in 1981 and settled in Oakville in 1984.

Though she had a benign cyst diagnosed some time before her cancer diagnosis, Halls-Dawson said it wasn't until her dog died and she cried so much that the cyst began hurting.

It was afterward that a large tumor was found, located in behind the first cyst, and both were deemed cancerous.

"They call ovarian cancer the silent killer," said Gilchrist of the cancer that is difficult to diagnose and lacking many overt symptoms that facilitate early diagnosis.

"As such, the outcomes are not the best," said Hacking.

According to Halls-Dawson, who had just resumed a lifelong interest in tap dancing that began when her own daughters were young, a continued focus on tapping helped keep her positive as she progressed through treatment.

The loss of her hair and eyelashes was difficult for the woman who'd been working occasionally as a movie extra with a modelling and talent agency (if you watch closely, Halls-Dawson is in a crowd scene in *The Fly* starring Jeff Goldblum and Geena Davis).

And, as a member of Oakville's Happy Tappers, tap dance troupe, Halls-Dawson performs regularly throughout the community and in an annual summer jubilee held at Toronto's Roy Thomson Hall.

"I was shocked," said Halls-Dawson of her diagnosis. "We'd just returned from England and I was feeling fit as a fiddle."

Her immediate reaction, however, was to get the cancer out of her body, fast.

After having quick surgery at Toronto General Hospital in December 2007, Halls-Dawson began chemotherapy several months later with sessions at Credit Valley Hospital every few weeks. She also participated in a trial of a new drug, which she later discontinued, but for which, she is still being monitored.

Halls-Dawson said she's happy to have been part of the clinical trial because it means she's monitored more closely than had she not taken part.

Hacking and Gilchrist came across her through Wellspring Halton/Peel. Though the CRDA hooks up designers with patients, Hacking volunteers at Wellspring, so a local connection was easy.

Redesign began 25 years ago in New York and is making into Canada, said Gilchrist.

It sees interior designers strip a room and then redesign it using furnishings, art and other items already in a home.

It differs from staging, according to Hacking, as staging is about stripping and redoing a room when the owners have moved and no longer live in a home.

Redesign is all about making a change while homeowners continue to reside in their abode.

Hacking and Gilchrist met with Halls-Dawson and toured her home and then one Friday in early November, they rolled up their sleeves and went to work in Halls-Dawson's home.

"They sent me away, they told me it would be a surprise," said Halls-Dawson.

It's all about simplifying a room and finding the right balance, explained Hacking about the principle of redesign.

For Halls-Dawson, whose bedroom the pair of redesigners simplified while adding comforting touches like a photo of Halls-Dawson's grandmother when she was a child, coping with cancer is about balance, too.

By focusing on her tap dancing, which is a real passion for the Oakville resident, Halls-Dawson was able to remain connected to life outside of cancer treatment and had something on which to focus.

"It's so important to keep active with something," said Halls-Dawson.

If you are, or know, of a woman undergoing treatment, contact OCC toll-free at 1-877-413-7970 to find out about the program.

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