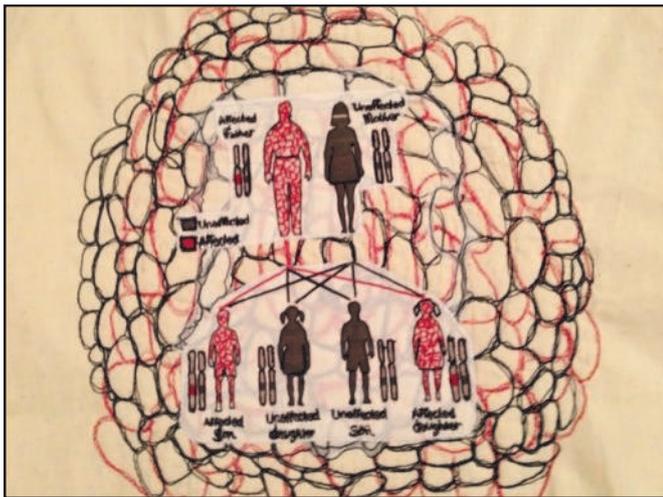


Familial Cancer Centre Newsletter

Client Contributions: My Ancestral Inheritance *By Penelope Campbell*

Since 2004, the creative arts has been the way for me to express the effects of my cancer diagnosis and subsequent treatment. I, like millions of others had my life thrown into a vortex of anxiety, physical and mental misery. At the time, what seemed to be the worst thing that could happen, had happened: *-breast cancer*.

Many say that cancer brings your life sharply into focus and for me the burning desire was to catch up on my interest in the arts. In 2006 I set off on an amazing journey and in 2009, my dream came true and I completed my BA (Hons) Visual Art. Life moved on and my art work became 'my work' and my passion! In 2011, I chose to return to study and enrolled in an MVA. This was the challenge I needed to really think about and explore what it was I was trying to say in my



works. I loved that I could do just that! I chose as my topic family history via ancestral searching, in particular a very little known side of my father's family. The only thing we family members knew was that my grandmother (father's mother) had come from Russian/Polish Jewish heritage. That's all we knew!

My researching explored historical facets of ancestry, focusing on the obvious such as where they had lived in England, where and when they had actually come from in Europe and the revelation of names we had never heard of. I also thought about my relationship with my grandmother and the inheritance of possessions as well as traits, characteristics, and talents! I became more interested in the intrinsic and unknow-

able and what might have been laid down in the genes beyond our control or knowledge.

With another breast cancer diagnosis last year, I considered myself extremely fortunate that it was the opposite side and a new primary and so relieved to have much lesser surgery. The bitterest pill was having to have chemo again and radiation. So life saved again! Get on with work! Aging parents very ill. Distraught, when they both passed away, I somehow finished the Masters. Sadly the shine had gone out of that a bit, as by now my research had come across this genetic thing, this BRCA gene mutation and its prevalence in those of Ashkenazi Jewish heritage.



I voiced my concern to my doctor and was immediately referred to the FCC and the rest as they say is history. By the amazing work of genetic scientists and counsellors I was able to find out that my father's mother had died (aged 66) from secondary ovarian cancer in 1960, twenty years on from her primary event. My mother who died from bowel cancer (May 2013) was found not to have the gene mutation. This proved Dad had been the carrier. He never developed any cancer in



his life and died age 91 last November. I am so glad he never knew about the gene mutation found in me.

Life goes on and happily this year, we have celebrated our son's wedding. I have completed surgery for removal of ovaries and tubes and recently took the much deliberated decision, to have a prophylactic mastectomy..I need to be

around for my daughters and son and grandchildren one day! We are still waiting for their testing...more anxiety. In the



meantime my art keeps me going. It is physically therapeutic and mentally challenging. In the works shown here, I have used recycled textiles as my medium and they are hand and machine stitched, and some have free machine embroidery. I also use text printed on fabrics, including silks, cottons, as well as repurposed embroideries and lace. My work is quirky and can often be literal,



most of all a window into my thoughts. In some, I have visualised the microscopic legacy of the ancestors flowing around in the cells. I make my own humorous interpretation looking at ancestral inheritance as a filtering system down through the generations. The use of some “scientific” text added to images is designed to suggest a pseudo-documentary feel but are really a nod to the many facts and diagrams we can access but not necessarily understand, on closer inspection they remain a mystery.

The white works *Mutations Series*, 2014, are the result of my moving into the acceptance phase of inheriting the BRCA gene muta-

tion, by visualisation and construction, then developing more sculptural 2D works. I have deliberately chosen old unwanted and preloved embroideries and table linens to represent ancestral inheritance, unwittingly concealing a more sinister legacy. These are part of new and currently ongoing works.

I feel privileged to be able to share my story and my artworks with others who will read this newsletter. I hope in some small way it may help others in dealing with an 'unwanted' inheritance.



I will be eternally grateful for the medical team that have been part of my life so far and can only say how fortunate I feel that my children and siblings also have the ongoing support of the FCC.

Photos (in line with text): Inherited Genes, DNA Filter, DNA Code, Mutations I, Mutations II, Gene Pool

From the Editors—We would love more patient contributions like JK's to our newsletter. Please feel free to send us your stories, poems, artwork or anything that helps tell your story. You are welcome to contact us for more information.

Lynch Syndrome Australia

Lynch Syndrome Australia is an organisation founded and governed by individuals with Lynch syndrome, their families, and health care professionals who specialise in Lynch syndrome. Their vision is to provide support for individuals impacted by Lynch syndrome, and to promote awareness of the condition among the general public and health professionals.

Their scientific advisory board includes leading experts in Lynch syndrome, including Professor Finlay Macrae of the Royal Melbourne Hospital.



Through the website, www.lynchsyndrome.org.au, interested individuals can access information links to current research and information about Lynch syndrome, opportunities to get involved in events, and the Lynch Syndrome Australia newsletter.

Lynch Syndrome Australia welcomes you to contact them on 0416 070 036 info@lynchsyndrome.org.au. You can also join the Facebook community:

www.facebook.com/LynchSyndromeAustralia