

# The Impact of Brushes With Cancer





Brushes with Cancer™ is the signature program of Twist Out Cancer. It is a six month program that matches those touched by cancer with artists to create a unique piece of artwork that reflects on their personal journey with cancer. This unique celebration of survivorship and hope pairs previvors, survivors, and caregivers (referred to as Inspirations) with talented Artists working in a variety of mediums. Those touched by cancer share their “twist on cancer” — stories, feelings and experiences with the artist, which serves as the inspiration for the art. The following are a few examples of the more than 350 art pieces created for Brushes With Cancer programs in Chicago, Tel Aviv, and Montreal over the past six years.



“It was a surreal experience to see my image as curated through someone else’s lens. Twist Out Cancer breathes life back into a diagnosis and reminds us that the Arts are always there for us. The organization brings us joy, diversion and sometimes even inspires us to move our bodies in the delight that we are still able to inhabit them despite degenerative disease.”

The Inspiration is Grace Faults Lombardo, who was diagnosed with stage 2a non-BRCA breast cancer as a very healthy, 35-year-old mother of three small children. In the very early days after her diagnosis, Grace’s sister encouraged her to start a blog to keep family and friends in the loop. “Grancer” started as a way to disseminate information and turned into something much larger. Grace said that, “The impact I have been able to have on strangers who have been touched by a cancer odyssey is truly a gift.”

The painting by Bowen Kline is titled, “Bombs Away.” The writing on the bomb is “To Cancer T1cN1. Love, Grace.” This is Grace’s exact medical diagnosis in oncology shorthand. Doctors would look at those letters and numbers before looking at her. T1c means one tumor, and c indicates the size. N1 means that one lymph node was involved.





After seeing the painting at the Brushes With Cancer Gala, Annie said, “David is a genius and his piece absolutely blew my mind away; it still does. I will never own anything as beautiful—or meaningful.”

The Inspiration is Previvor and Ex-Caregiver Annie Watson. She said, “That taking care of someone you love with cancer can rip out your heart and soul so it is incredibly important to heal that pain. And that trying to prevent cancer—or outrun it as I often feel—is exhausting and can be debilitating as well. I think that we can often feel strong but also exhausted by what it takes to try and attempt preventing cancer.”

The painting by Dr. David Turok is titled “Boss.” Barbara Turf was a Boss. Not just as the CEO of Crate and Barrel and not just as an amazing mom, but she defined the term like it has never been portrayed. When she died, employees shared stories of the respect they always felt from her from the higher ups of the company but more importantly from the floor workers who would tell Barbara’s daughter, Annie, how Barbara treated them as equals, no matter their position in the company. She had that magnetic way about her personality. This shines through in her daughter, Annie, who put everything in her life—school, career, etc.—aside to take care of her dying mom. And the presence of her mom is still very much in her life. She sees her mom in her two boys and knows she is upstairs, still using her boss powers to make sure life works out as it should.



Brushes With Cancer in Chicago, November 3, 2018

**“I realized that sometimes you have to break to let the light in.”**

The Inspiration is Triple Negative Breast Cancer Survivor Laura Alexander. She said, “My Twist on Cancer is that hidden in between chemotherapy, hair loss, night sweats, doctor appointments, pills, fertility loss, etc., a journey with cancer can be paved with many little gifts. A cancer diagnosis was definitely not what I expected for my 35th birthday but it truly did deliver gifts ...gifts that keep giving! It brought a

beautiful community into my life and a passion for charity and service. Most of all it slowed me down a bit to not only allow me to heal my heart but to enjoy watching my daughter grow up...to appreciate every moment I could with her. She was only 6 when I was diagnosed and the fear of not being around to watch her grow up crippled me at first. Now I can proudly say we have experienced and celebrated lots of milestones together including getting her off to college. She was the reason I fought so hard and I’m so grateful for this precious time with her. Losing hair and part of a breast is never easy...especially with my vanity issues. I now realize that those scars are what connect me to other hearts, connect me to my own strength and connected me to transformation. They are my badges of honor so to speak. I realized that sometimes you have to break to let the light in. I certainly did...physically and mentally but then the light got brighter each day. And as a survivor we have to shine that light for others to know HOPE.”

The artist is Daniela Herling. She said, “When I met Laura I felt like we instantly connected. As a single hard working mom, the last thing she expected was a cancer diagnosis at 35. One of Laura’s biggest regrets during her time with cancer was not capturing any images of herself, especially with her daughter, going through treatment because she didn’t see herself as beautiful anymore. It wasn’t until later when she began to see that this course in her life was actually going to present itself with gifts better than she could have ever imagined. Slowly the vanity of what she once viewed as beauty was shed and Laura found her new beauty and meaning in her life. From Laura’s words, “Time with loved ones, time for play, time to dream, time for connection, time for exploration, time to heal and time for yourself.” The inspiration for this piece depicts the evolution of change and how when faced with the unfathomable we adapt and become stronger, better versions of ourselves. Photography plays a very important role in both of our lives so it was very important for me to tell her story in a very powerful way.”

Brushes With Cancer in Chicago, November 3, 2018



**“I am not a memory. It still escapes my throat daily as a humbled whisper.”**

The Inspiration is Bret Hoekema, a survivor of Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. He said, “As I turned thirty, I felt the imminence of great things. Though I can’t be certain—my memory isn’t what it used to be. In my twenties, I left home and moved to Chicago. Somewhere in the middle, I lost my faith. Somewhere near the end I met Aura. As I turned thirty, I asked her to marry me. In my twenties, I learned to move freely. I weighed 151 pounds at our wedding—Lymphoma standing by...

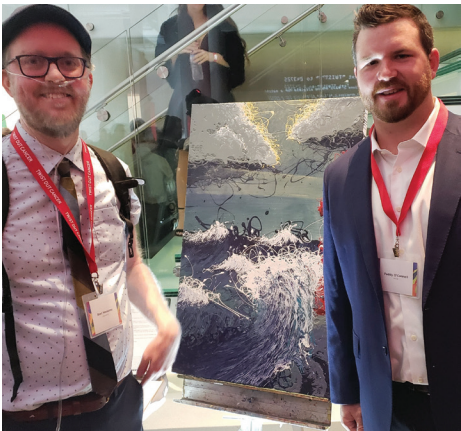
“Chemotherapy brought remission and renewed purpose. But purpose wore off and cancer returned. The 2nd treatment was worse, the 3rd experimental, and the 4th medieval. They harvested my stem cells, obliterated my immune system, and transplanted those cells. Cancer remained. I felt like a memory.

“At thirty-four, a clinical trial offered remission and a donor transplant sealed it—an unmistakable victory, and a muted celebration. This deep, renewed purpose less acute. The heart, in position to attack. And so it did. Four years in, my heart gave out.

“At thirty-five, I no longer saw what life it was they were trying to save. In my twenties, I learned to move freely. In my thirties, I wonder, if I will be stopped still.

“In my 38th year, I’m happy to say, that I’m alive to find out, with my wife Aura and the little twister of my life, Evie Maeve, born February 16, 2017, dancing so sincerely by my side.

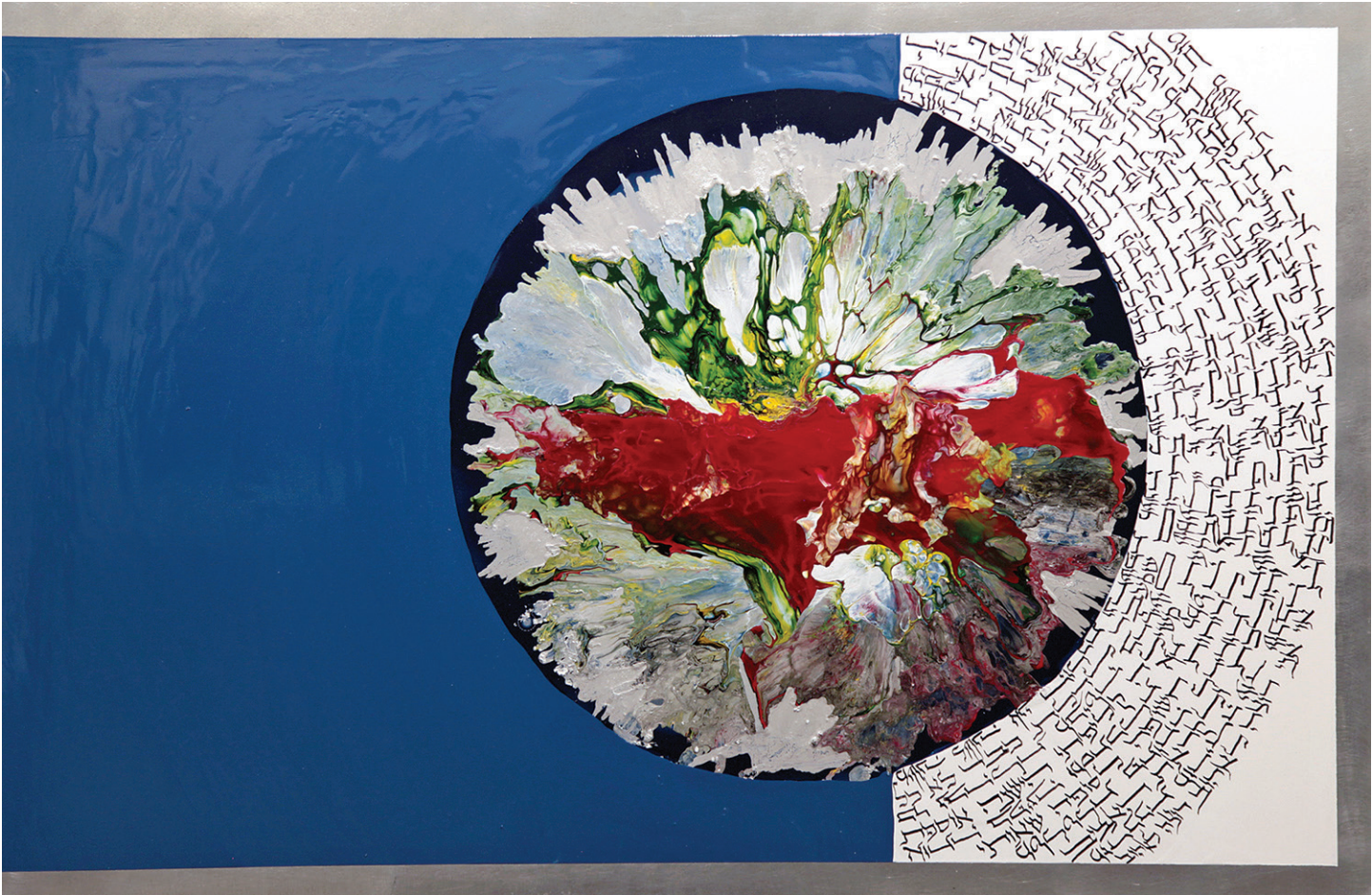
I am not a memory. It still escapes my throat daily as a humbled whisper.”



Brushes With Cancer in Chicago, November 3, 2018

When I first met Bret, he looked like a guy that had a story that needed to be told. He and his family have gone through a lot over the years with his battle with cancer. He told me about all the different surgeries and treatments he had gone through. I had never realized the rigor involved in looking for treatment for something that was wrong with me. I learned the longer your battle with cancer the more finding treatments can become a full time job. Of all the things I learned from Bret and his story the most important was his family and the love he shares with his wife and daughter. I listened to him talk about his wife: how they met, their ups and downs with cancer, and most importantly their daughter. When he talked about his wife, I could hear how much she means to him. Throughout his battle with cancer she has been the lighthouse on the coast while he weathers the storm at sea. She provides light and hope that the unrelenting waves of cancer will soon pass. This is what my painting reflects, the love and devotion between two people and their daughter that seems to be unwavering in the face of great turmoil. When the clouds clear and the waves return to a rolling tide that lighthouse will still stand strong as a symbol of safety just like the love between Bret, his wife and his daughter.

—Artist Paddy O’Connell



Brushes With Cancer in Tel Aviv, March 13, 2018

**“Endless hope, endless wisdom—all holding on to the circle of life.”**

The Inspiration is Stav Stein, who is a breast cancer survivor living in Haifa.

The painting by Igal Fedida is titled “Circle of Life.” It is the result of a unique encounter with an amazing young lady named Stav who used every fiber of courage, intelligence and spirituality to fight back and hold on to life. “Circle of Life” has many symbols that tell the story of Stav and how her life has intertwined with Igal’s. Endless hope, endless wisdom—all holding on to the circle of life. The passion to live and love all aspects of beauty through poetry and art.



The inspiration is Iris Alapin who lost her partner, friend, and family member of 17 years to cancer. Iris' husband was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer and underwent aggressive chemotherapy as well as two surgeries. Throughout the disease, he was strong willed, determined to fight, always dignified and hopeful. Despite the inevitable fatigue and pain, he continued to work, he continued to plan, he continued to live. One could even argue he was more alive during his last year of life than he'd ever been. Iris was five months pregnant when he passed away. What she learned from him was the urgency to live fully, and what she got from him was a beautiful life—her son.

The artist is Clio Honig, who was immediately moved by Iris' sincere kindness and warm soul. Iris was always smiling and you would never know of the incredibly difficult period she endured when losing her husband to cancer. In this watercolor, the poised woman and her bold stare represents the courage and confidence that Clio associates with her dear friend Iris.



Brushes With Cancer in Montreal, May 10, 2018



**Share. Connect. Heal.**

Brushes with Cancer is the signature program of Twist Out Cancer, an international nonprofit charitable organization that provides psychosocial support to individuals touched by cancer through creative arts programming.

More information on Twist Out Cancer is available at [www.twistoutcancer.org](http://www.twistoutcancer.org).  
For all program inquiries, please contact Amelia Hanrahan at [amelia@twistoutcancer.org](mailto:amelia@twistoutcancer.org).  
For media inquiries, please contact Joshua Taustein at [josh@twistoutcancer.org](mailto:josh@twistoutcancer.org).