

A spirit of uncommon valour supports cause

By MS Bruce Joseph Bevil

It has been said that in life, one must choose one's battles wisely. What happens if the battle chooses you instead?

In 2003, while aboard HMCS Calgary, I became part of a *Mission within a Mission*, as my "sailing family" aided me in supporting my family back home. The article then, as I hope this one is, was a small gesture that was well received. A token if you will, but when I wrote the article "Chivalry on the High Seas" to support my sister-in-law Sandra in her battle with breast cancer, my family found it inspirational.

I chose to write another article to raise cancer awareness as Sandra continues her battle today. Her fight is now in opposition to terminal cancer, as the disease has spread into her bones. To that effect, I have asked my sailing family of HMCS Ottawa to help me continue to support Sandra, and all others that face this battle each day. I am proud to say to all members of HMCS Ottawa responded quite readily to my request. Not everyone showed their support by shaving their

head, but each and every member of the Ottawa family responded with spirit and well wishes throughout. In one afternoon together, in the middle of the ocean, and in the spirit of a true sailing family, the crew of HMCS Ottawa raised \$10,590 for cancer research. Imagine how much could be raised throughout Canada in one afternoon? Could it be enough to finally find the cure? I challenge the rest of Canada to discover that answer.

As HMCS Ottawa set sail, deployed on OP Altair, bound by duty, the support of family members from home is so meaningful to me. Can it not be just as meaningful, that I send my love and support back with the same enthusiasm that it was sent our way?

I ask myself each time that Sandra enters my thoughts if I could fight as bravely as she is now. She is fighting for her survival each and every day. Could I stay as positive, and inspire others as she does daily? I cannot in good conscience answer that question, as I hope I will never have to.

Cancer has taken her health, and will one day take her life. What inspires me each day is that, in the face

of such a battle, that cancer is unable to take her spirit. Sandra remains, as she always was, a caring and warm-hearted individual. I can only guess the range of emotions that my brother Andrew and she face daily. Yet despite all they face, as they battle together for her survival, they continue to send well wishes to myself, and each member of my sailing family.

I receive e-mails from home telling me how brave and courageous that I am. Of how proud my family is of what I, and my shipmates are doing, to be safe and to come home. Sandra has been in my thoughts since she first discovered her illness. And throughout it all, her thoughts have been on me.

Before HMCS Ottawa sailed from home, I saw the growing trend of yellow "Support our Troops" magnets on vehicles driving by. That support is so meaningful to me, to us. I have also seen that more and more cars have the pink ribbons as well. That I found just as meaningful.

Cancer affects us all, directly or indirectly. I cannot do much to stop the disease, but I can recognize the bravery and courage of

those that try. I can show my support, knowing that many people are fighting a daily battle simply to survive.

This is my small gesture to raise awareness. The support of my shipmates fills me with pride as I send my support and love home. I hope the duality of my words can both raise awareness and show my support. This disease comes in many forms, and affects many people. My sailing family supports me, and I in turn support them, as they show their support for their own families. Together, we

can all face this disease, not as individuals, but as one voice with singular purpose.

Perhaps Sandra's bravery and courage can inspire others as it has helped me. I am not alone in attempting to raise awareness. It is not only my family that must strive to defeat this disease that strikes at random. I am one of many within the Ottawa family, and I will continue the fight, as they will continue theirs.

To Sandra, I support you as you support me. My thoughts are with you as yours are with me. As you

face your battle each day, I would like to thank you, as you inspire me. I hope I can face what lies ahead for me, with as much courage, with as much dignity, and with such feral spirit.

Sandra, I thank you. You are in my thoughts, now, always and forever.

From the Canadian Navy Web site

Sandra Bevil lives in Bolton. She was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 36. It came back at age 39, metastasizing to her bones.



MS Bruce Bevil (back, 4th from the left) encouraged his shipmates aboard HMCS Ottawa to raise more than \$10,000 for cancer research, in honour of his sister-in-law Sandra who lives in Bolton.

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