

Launching A Personalized Business To Aid Breast Cancer Survivors By Janice A. Youngwith

Cancer survivor Lucy McCarthy says she's taken her personal breast cancer experience and put it to work to fill a void for mastectomy patients and others.

Her Geneva-based business enterprise, The Natural Woman, will celebrate a special 20th anniversary this year, thanks to the impetus of her own cancer diagnosis and radical modified mastectomy in 1981.

"That's actually 21 years of celebrating breast cancer survival and 20 years helping other cancer survivors," McCarthy explains.

Her doctor discovered her own breast cancer during a routine check up.

"Actually, they found a lump; on each site," she recalls. "Further testing included a mammogram which failed to show any abnormalities and an eventual double biopsy which resulted in the left breast being removed."

An eternally upbeat and innovative individual, McCarthy says her business niche was confirmed by her own challenges in finding appropriate, custom-fitted undergarments and mastectomy bras following her surgery.

"There's a great stigma surrounding cancer," McCarthy notes. "And at the time there was huge void. The surgery really didn't devastate me, but searching for a breast prosthesis and bra almost did."

With support of her husband, Jack, McCarthy borrowed from her life insurance policy and opened her own business, The Natural Woman, out of her home. Specializing in breast prosthesis and custom-fitted bras along with other all-natural products designed to improve health and well-being, McCarthy is the sole owner and operator of a thriving business.

With sizes to fit every customer, even those calling from Europe and Asia, McCarthy says her shop could be anyone's living room. In her casual, home-like setting, McCarthy chats with customers before selecting bras and prosthesis to be fitted to the client's figure.

With her own cancer being estrogen-related, McCarthy says her cosmetic line is estrogen-free. She also carries a wide variety of post-mastectomy swimwear options, caps, hairpieces combinations, hats, ointments for aches and pains, indoor air purifiers, natural vitamins, herbal immune system boosters, essential therapeutic oils and aloe vera products.

Five years ago, following the discovery of another lump, the North Carolina native began taking a special all natural formula of black walnut tincture, wormwood and clovers.

"I told my doctor that faith, prayers and vitamins would eradicate the tumor and two months later it was gone," she says

The long-time minister's wife says faith has always played a big role in family life. She and her husband met in Washington D.C., while both were working for the FBI. They married in 1954 and moved to Chicago area while her husband attended the seminary. The McCarthy's ministered first at a church in southern Illinois where they began caring for foster children. The couple later moved to Geneva after her husband accepted the administrator position at the Franciscan Sisters Retirement Center (no Marianjoy Rehabilitation Center) and became active members at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in nearby St. Charles. Today m, McCarthy says the foster children number 41, including grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Her motto? "Do unto others as you would have them unto you," she says. "My illness has been something of a blessing. If it weren't for breast cancer, I might have missed out on some wonderful relationships."