

Rise: Wellness for Every Educator

Five Foundations to Nurture Health, Balance, and Resilience

by Betty-Jean, NSTU Executive Staff Officer (Ret.)

“Am I going to die?” This was the first question I asked when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Years later, when my cancer returned as stage IV, I asked it again. Both times, my physicians reminded me that research, new medications, and lifestyle choices would allow me to continue living an abundant life.

As educators, we know that challenges will come. Some are unexpected and heartbreaking. Others are part of the natural journey of teaching and living. What I have learned through my own health journey is that we can rise to meet them. I share this message not only through my book *RISE: Living Life Over Cancer*, but also through presentations and conversations across our province and beyond. My goal is simple: to offer hope, tools, and inspiration so we can all live well, no matter the challenges before us.



Aucoin is shown with retired teacher and former Colchester-East Hants Local president Robert George who is battling pancreatic cancer.

The Five Foundations

Integrative Care

Healing takes more than one approach. I focus on healthy nutrition by following the Mediterranean diet, daily movement through walking, yoga, and weight training, and complementary therapies such as massage, acupuncture, and naturopathic oncology. I am grateful for my NSTU health insurance, which has supported me in accessing many of these services.

Self-Care

During my time with the NSTU, I led many workshops on self-care. In retirement and through my cancer journey, I have taken my own advice to heart. Self-care is not selfish. It is health care. Creating space for rest, reflection, and activities that nurture our spirit is essential to sustaining wellness.

A Supportive Network

You cannot heal in a toxic environment. It is vital to surround yourself with those who uplift and encourage you. I am blessed with a supportive family, friends, and colleagues who have walked beside me. In our profession, we know the power of community. Healing and growth are not solitary pursuits.

Mindset

Our bodies listen to the words we speak to ourselves. I remind myself daily to speak as kindly to myself as I would to a good friend. I picture a hula hoop around me, keeping out negativity and unnecessary drama, while inviting in healthy interactions and positivity. For educators, mindset is a tool as powerful as any lesson plan.

Advocate for Yourself

For 13 years as an Executive Staff Officer with NSTU, I advocated for teachers and

public education. Before that, I advocated for students and school communities. Today, I advocate for myself within a health care system that is under stress, but filled with dedicated professionals. I remind myself and others: you are worthy of the best care available. Advocate, advocate, and advocate again.

A New Classroom

In writing *RISE: Living Life Over Cancer*, I expanded my classroom. For many years, my focus was on teaching teachers, supporting their professional growth, resilience, and well-being. Now I share these same lessons more broadly with communities, families, and individuals who are navigating life's challenges.

My book is not solely about cancer. It is about rising above the challenges we each



Cape Breton District Local teacher Donaldda Westcott is shown with Aucoin at a recent book signing event in Cape Breton.

face in life, whatever they may be. My wish is to inspire hope in every reader and to give them confidence to defy limits. Just as we do in education, we can create environments where people feel safe, supported, and empowered to grow. Together, we can rise.

“Self-care is not selfish. It is the new health care. You are worthy of the best care available.”

Resources & More

- livinglifeovercancer.com
- YouTube: Living Life Over Cancer with Betty Jean Aucoin
- RISE: Living Life Over Cancer — Available on Amazon (Canada, US, UK, Australia), FriesenPress, and Indigo

About the Author

Betty Jean Aucoin is an educator, wellness coach, and author of RISE: Living Life Over Cancer. A retired Executive Staff Officer with the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, she now shares lessons in resilience, self-care, and healthy living through her writing, presentations, and Living Life Over Cancer Wellness & Coaching.

