

Cancer survivor participates in unique conference

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Ten years ago, Annex resident Lisa Kramer was a cancer patient in her mid-20s. She was featured in a documentary called *Chasing Rainbows*, an upbeat film about the lives of young cancer patients who candidly discussed their thoughts on fear, anger, finances, sex, infertility, family relationships, death, faith and the future. Fast-forward 10 years after the documentary, and Kramer is married, has a successful career as a professor at the University of Toronto, and will be taking part in a unique conference in downtown Toronto next weekend. The *Surviving Cancer and Living Well Conference*, for cancer patients, survivors and loved ones, is the first such province-wide initiative to be organized by the Ontario division of the Canadian Cancer Society. It's being held Nov. 14 to 16 at the Toronto Marriott Eaton Centre Hotel, 525 Bay St.

The two-day event "aims to give people living with cancer and their caregivers some tools, skills and information to help them live well during their cancer journey and beyond," Donna Czukar, director, Cancer Information Service, Canadian Cancer Society (Ontario Division), said in a press release. "We're excited to offer a forum in which cancer stories can be shared and information can be gathered on the most up-to-date developments in total cancer healing for the body, mind and soul." Cancer survivors, patients and their caregivers are invited to participate in the conference to gain practical tips from speakers and each other. The fresh and unique outlook of the conference's various sessions allows participants to benefit from a wide range of informative topics such as: yoga/tai chi, complimentary therapies, recurrence/secondary cancers, cancer research, long-term/late effects of treatment, genetic predisposition and testing. Room is still available but people interested in participating are asked to register by Saturday, Nov. 8. For the complete itinerary, to register, or for more information log on to the conference website at www.cancer.ca/ontsurvivorconference.

Kramer will discuss her role in the *Chasing Rainbows* documentary at its Sunday morning screening. "The young woman who made the documentary, her name is Sara Taylor. She just found that there were too few resources for young adults experiencing cancer so she was determined to put together a helpful documentary that would just help people navigate the system a little bit, try to bring together young people to help each other. "She unfortunately died before it was completed but her mother finished the documentary and she'll actually be at the screening as well on Sunday." Kramer will also take part in an informative session on how those who struggle with cancer can also struggle over feelings about themselves, their partners and intimacy. She'll be joined by husband Mark Camstra and the two will share how they "got through the whole experience together" with their relationship still intact. Kramer was diagnosed with lymphoma in 1996 when she was in her mid-20s, for which she went through eight months of chemotherapy. "I relapsed on the anniversary of the initial diagnosis, and had more chemo, eventually had a bone marrow transplant and that thing darn near killed me," she said, with a quiet, rueful chuckle. "It took another three years for me to recover, and so I got back in the workforce in 2001." During her struggle with cancer she managed to complete her PhD. "Two weeks before my bone marrow transplant, I defended my PhD dissertation, just because I was very stubborn and pessimistic. I thought I might not survive the transplant, and I just didn't want to go without finishing my degree." She didn't need much convincing to help out with the Canadian Cancer Society's first ever Ontario-wide conference. "The oncologists and their team of professionals get you through the crises," she said. "But really there's so many medical complications that can arise after the fact and the cancer team, they're just not equipped to help with so many of those issues. They're really there for the crises and chemotherapy. Organizations like the Canadian Cancer Society,

she said, "can just bring people together and help them find access to the kinds of tools you need to continue surviving." One of the most important resources, she related, "is fellow survivors". "Back when I was going through it, it was really hard to find other people who were going through similar experiences so I think it's really so important to come together with others who are going through similar challenges. "Even just talking can help in so many ways. "There are things that oncologists just don't know because they've never gone through cancer themselves but talking to other people who have is just so helpful, it's hard to even put words on it."

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