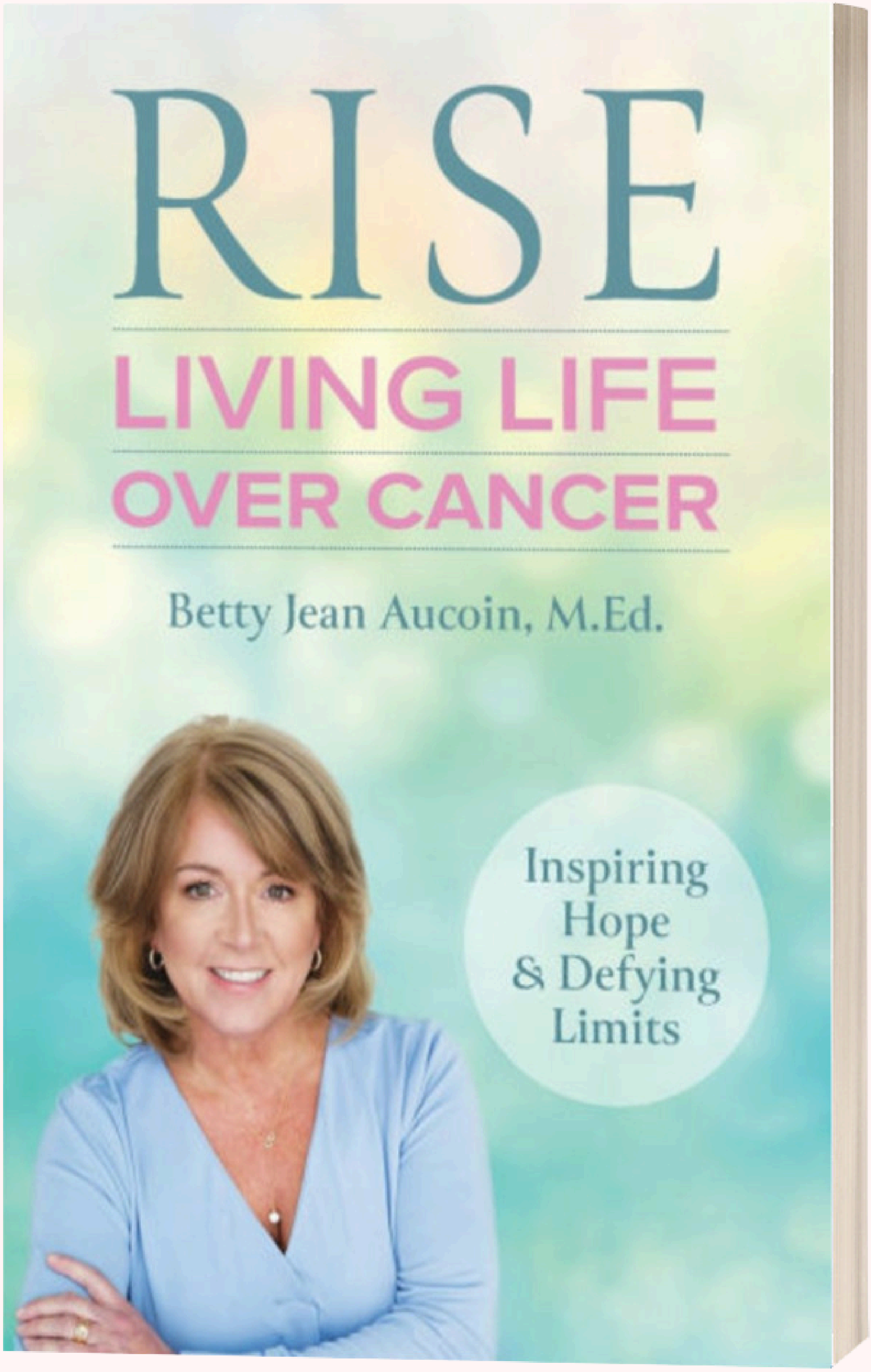
RISE: LIVING LIFE OVER CANCER
BY BETTY JEAN AUCOIN



Prepared by Seraphina Caelis

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CONCISE READER GUIDE

BLURB

Rise: Living Life Over Cancer is a warm, practical, and deeply human memoir and guide from a teacher and educator turned patient and advocate. Betty Jean Aucoin is the author of RISE: Living Life Over Cancer, a retired educator, speaker, and wellness advocate living with stage IV breast cancer. RISE blends honest storytelling about diagnosis, treatment, and grief with clear, doable tools for nutrition, movement, mindfulness, and self advocacy. The book moves between intimate moments and concrete how-to guidance, offering hope and a road map for people living with cancer, caregivers, and anyone seeking a sustainable, integrative approach to long-term health.
This guide is intended for educational discussion and is not a substitute for medical advice.

Ideal for book club, library community reads, and cancer support groups seeking meaningful conversation and practical wellness tools.

Available on Amazon (Canada, US, UK, and Australia)

Learn more at www.livinglifeovercancer.com

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This document helps book groups, library hosts, and community organizers run one thoughtful meeting, or a short series of three weekly sessions. It includes chapter signposts so hosts can assign reading, a short list of key voices, core themes, discussion questions separated by depth, trigger and sensitivity notes, and a few activity and pairing ideas that move the conversation off the page.

SUGGESTED MEETING FORMATS

One meeting, 90 minutes

- Quick welcome and ground rules, 10 minutes.
- Opening hook and a short reading from the book, 5 minutes. Suggested reading: the opening scene of the Introduction where Betty Jean describes hearing her diagnosis.
- Discussion, 60 minutes, using the entry and mid meeting prompts below.
- Closing reflections and next steps, 15 minutes.

Three sessions, each 60 to 75 minutes, split into reading blocks

- Session 1, Introduction and Chapter 1, focus on diagnosis, foundations, and personal why.
- Session 2, Chapters 2 to 4, focus on relationships, community, and practical self care including food and movement.
- Session 3, Chapters 5 to 7 plus Appendix, focus on information choices, mindfulness practices, moving forward, and next steps.

Chapter Signposts

These signposts give hosts quick talking points and suggest short readaloud moments.

- Introduction and Chapter 1, Creating Your Foundation

Betty Jean tells the story of diagnosis and recurrence, and lays out five cornerstones for living with cancer: integrative care, self care, support networks, mindset, and advocacy.

- Chapter 2, Family, Friends, and Cheerleaders

This chapter explores the role of close relationships, chosen family, and the concrete ways supporters can show up across grief and treatment. Use this section for conversation about boundaries and practical support.

- Chapter 3, Healthy Eating

A generous, practical chapter on food as medicine, pantry rules, mindful eating, and recipes. Hosts can pick one recipe or the nutrition rules for a short readaloud.

- Chapter 4, Self Care: the New Health Care

Creating healing spaces, prioritizing rest and rituals, and small daily practices that protect energy and build resilience.

- Chapter 5, Navigating Your Information Highway

Practical advice on how to find trusted information, when to pivot from panic researching, and how to be an effective self advocate. Good for a skills workshop.

- Chapter 6, Mindfulness

Mindful breathing, movement, and visualizations that support the parasympathetic system and the immune system. This chapter includes recommended practices to try in group meetings.

- Chapter 7 and Appendix, Moving Forward

The final chapter and the Appendix include forward-looking reflections, intimacy, and a substantial appendix of easy, Healthy recipes and a song playlist for gatherings. Use these as take-home resources.

Integrative Care

Where medical treatment and supportive practices work together.

Reflection: What does my current care plan include, and what might be missing?

RISE: The Five Cornerstones
Living Life Over Cancer

Self-Care

Daily practices that protect energy and build resilience.
Reflection: What does my body and spirit need today?

Support Networks

Family, friends, and chosen community.
Reflection: Who is in my sustainable circle of care?

Mindset

The daily decision to live with intention and hope.
Reflection: What truth can I hold onto today?

Advocacy

Using your voice within the medical system.
Reflection: What question do I need to ask?

Readers who would like to explore these ideas further can download Betty Jean Aucoin’s 5 Cornerstones Guide, a practical companion resource designed to help individuals take small daily actions to support physical and emotional well-being. Available at www.livinglifeovercancer.com

KEY VOICES, IN ONE LINE EACH

- Betty Jean Aucoin, author and teacher, narrates both lived experience and practical lessons.
- Family members and close friends, steady, truth-filled support and practical care
- Health practitioners and integrative experts, referenced throughout as sources of guidance.
- Peer survivors and meta sisters, whose lived testimony supports community wisdom.

This short list helps hosts remind readers who is who without long pauses in conversation.

CORE THEMES TO SURFACE IN DISCUSSION

- Integrative care versus singular conventional treatment “models,” and how integrative and conventional approaches can work together.
- Self advocacy, the power of informed questions, and how to hold medical teams to account.
- The quiet labour of daily self-care and the emotional cost of caregiving.
- Mindfulness, nervous system regulation, and small practices that compound healthy results.
- Community, grief, and the ethics of receiving and offering help.
- Food, movement, and routine as sources of agency.

TRIGGER AND SENSITIVITY NOTES

Suggested short warning for programmes: This book contains frank discussions of cancer diagnosis and treatment, grief and loss, and medical details that some readers may find distressing. Please let the host know if you would appreciate trigger-friendly seating or an option to participate by listening only.

Why include this: the manuscript moves between tender domestic scenes and clinical detail, so a simple heads-up helps meetings remain safe and generative

10 DISCUSSION PROMPTS

ENTRY LEVEL, ICEBREAKERS

- What single sentence or scene from the Introduction felt most honest to you, and why?
- What one small habit Betty Jean describes would you be willing to try for a month?
- Who in the book felt like a model for the kind of support you would want or offer?

MID MEETING, MOVE THE CONVERSATION DEEPER

- Betty Jean outlines five cornerstones for health. Which do you think is most urgent for readers and why?
- The book asks readers to manage both medical choices and everyday life. What parts of that balancing act surprised you?
- How does nutritional guidance, including the recipes, reshape your sense of control while living with illness?

DEEP DIVE, FOR CLOSE READINGS AND ETHICAL DEBATE

- Betty Jean describes curating her information sources. What principles would you use to build a trustworthy personal information plan?
- The author writes about the cost of being a fixer. Discuss the tension between wanting to help and needing to protect energy. What boundaries felt helpful?
- The book is hopeful but realistic. What does it ask us to do differently in how we talk about breast cancer and recurring breast cancer.

FACILITATOR PROMPTS, TO KEEP THE ROOM SAFE AND HONEST

- Invite one person at a time to speak and use a talking piece if helpful.
- If discussion becomes intense, pause for a two minute breathing exercise drawn from Chapter 6.
- Encourage members to anchor their reflections in specific passages from the book rather than speaking in broad generalities.

Q&A with **Betty Jean Aucoin**

WHEN YOU FIRST RECEIVED YOUR DIAGNOSIS, WHAT EMOTIONAL TURNING POINT SHIFTED YOU FROM FEAR TO ACTION?

When I was first diagnosed, a friend sent me a blog with practical steps for coping after hearing the word “cancer.” As I read it, I realized I was already living many of those practices: staying active, eating well, practicing mindfulness, caring for myself, and staying connected to others. Recognizing this grounded me. It reminded me that I still had agency and could actively participate in my own healing.

Facing recurrence felt very different. At first, I was overwhelmed. I thought of two women I knew who had died from metastatic breast cancer. Then my oncologist told me something I will never forget: “This is not a death sentence. It is more akin to a chronic disease.” That changed my perspective. Hope returned, not as a guarantee, but as a possibility. I began imagining a future again, one that included time with my husband and, if I am fortunate, future grandchildren.

OF THE FIVE CORNERSTONES YOU SHARE IN THE BOOK, WHICH WAS THE HARDEST TO EMBRACE AT FIRST, AND WHY?

Self-care was, and still is, the hardest. After my first diagnosis, I slowly returned to taking care of everyone else. I was lulled by statistics suggesting a small chance of recurrence and resumed answering every “you should,” every “help me,” every request to lead.

I continue to work at stepping out of that role when necessary. As a lifelong educator and leader, stepping forward comes naturally. But cancer has taught me that caring for myself must come first. Self-care is not selfish. It is essential.

HOW DID FACING RECURRENCE CHANGE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF RESILIENCE?

Facing recurrence deepened my understanding of resilience. It does not mean being fearless or constantly positive. It means returning to yourself again and again, even when everything around you shifts.

Living with cancer continually calls me to revisit that resilience, whether facing a new side effect, growing weary of appointments and needles, accepting a new reality, or adjusting to treatment changes. For me, resilience is not a single act of courage. It is a daily recommitment to living fully within uncertainty.

WHAT SURPRISED YOU MOST ABOUT THE WAY YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS SHOWED UP FOR YOU?

During my first diagnosis, a dear friend stepped forward and organized support on my behalf. I did not have to ask, something that can be very difficult for many women. The meals, messages, and cheerleading lifted me more than I can express.

With my second diagnosis, I chose a different approach and shared the news with only a small circle. When people hear the word incurable, fear often rises, and I wanted to protect my energy. I realized I would need to become my own steady anchor while also seeking connection with women online who truly understood life with Stage IV cancer.

Unlike early-stage treatment, there is no bell to ring and no clear finish line. Living with metastatic disease is ongoing. I have come to understand that, as humans, we can sustain intense support only for a limited time. People have their own responsibilities and lives unfolding. I often remind my metastatic sisters that it is unrealistic to expect daily, ongoing support from others. We must intentionally build sustainable circles of care.

And yet, when I truly need support, whether recovering from a broken back or launching my book, my family and friends show up wholeheartedly.

WAS THERE A SPECIFIC CHANGE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD THAT FELT TRULY TRANSFORMATIVE?

After my second diagnosis, I researched integrative and functional oncology to better understand how nutrition could support my treatment. I attended sessions with researchers who emphasized that food is the medicine we eat three times a day.

I had always eaten well, but with deeper knowledge, I gradually replaced foods in my pantry with ones my body could better digest and that would support the medications keeping me alive. I no longer focus on calories. Instead, I ask, Can my body digest this well, and will it work in harmony with my treatment?

I am not always perfect in my choices, and that is okay. Many cancer patients live with guilt and regret about what they did or did not do. I refuse to let guilt shape my healing mindset. Each day offers a new opportunity to nourish myself wisely. And sometimes, I eat the cake.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE READERS WHO FEEL OVERWHELMED NAVIGATING THE MEDICAL SYSTEM?

First and foremost, understand that you are worthy of excellent care. You must either take the lead in your medical journey or bring someone who can advocate for you. Speaking up may feel uncomfortable, but settling for less than thorough care can affect outcomes more than we realize.

Your relationship with your doctor or oncologist should be built on mutual respect. Before appointments, I often use AI tools to help generate thoughtful questions. Afterward, I use them to better understand decisions and clarify next steps. There is an overwhelming amount of medical information available, so narrowing it to what applies specifically to you is essential.

Over the years, I have walked alongside many women who found the courage to ask harder questions, seek second opinions, or change physicians when they felt unheard. Watching them step into their voice reinforced my belief that we must trust our instincts and remember that we deserve thoughtful, respectful care.

Your voice matters in every room within the medical system.

WHICH MINDFULNESS PRACTICE BECAME YOUR ANCHOR ON DIFFICULT DAYS?

If I had to name one practice, it would be breathing. Going to the mat is both a physical and spiritual ritual for me, but I do not reserve mindful breath for yoga alone. I use it throughout the day to bring myself back from worry, anxiety, or regret into the present moment.

Breathing has supported me immeasurably on this journey with Stage IV breast cancer. In the book, I share that if readers take one concept and one action from my experience, it is to understand and practice a simple parasympathetic breath. This gentle breathing style signals safety to the body and helps calm the nervous system. It reminds me that even when circumstances feel uncertain, I can return to steadiness within myself.

HOW DID YOU LEARN TO ACCEPT HELP WITHOUT FEELING GUILTY?

Learning to accept help has been challenging because I am usually the one offering it. During my first diagnosis, a friend organized the support I needed while I was receiving IV chemotherapy. That allowed me to focus fully on healing. After treatment, I hosted an evening to thank those who supported me. Gratitude helped me receive without guilt.

When I was diagnosed a second time, the path felt less defined. It is difficult to ask for help when you do not yet know what you need. I leaned more quietly on my husband and my own inner strength.

I have long believed in abundance. The more we give, the more we receive. Even with Stage IV cancer, I have continued supporting others. When I broke my back and required bed rest, support returned to me. Accepting help now feels less like weakness and more like trust in the natural exchange of care.

HOW DO YOU PERSONALLY DEFINE HOPE TODAY?

Hope is a feeling I have carried throughout my life. Living with cancer has made me more aware of its importance. Today, I choose hope intentionally. It keeps me grounded in the present, even when the future is uncertain.

Hope is not denial or unquestioning optimism. It is a daily decision to focus on what remains possible and to live fully in the moment I have.

IF READERS COULD TAKE AWAY ONE DAILY HABIT FROM RISE, WHAT WOULD YOU WANT IT TO BE?

Pause each day and ask yourself, “What do I need today?” Then honour the answer.

At its heart, self-care is the belief that we deserve to nourish our body, mind, and spirit. It does not need to be dramatic. It may be rest. It may be movement. It may be saying no. What matters is that we listen.

When we consistently check in with ourselves, we build trust within ourselves and in our lives. Self-care is the new Health Care

SUGGESTED PAIRED ACTIVITIES AND NEXT STEPS

- Invite a local oncology nurse, dietitian, or mindfulness teacher for a Q and A.
- Run a 10 minute guided breathwork practice from Chapter 6 at the start of a meeting.
- Cook one recipe from the appendix together or assign pairs to bring a small taste and a short reflection on how the meal felt.
- Pair this book with readings on integrative oncology or patient advocacy for a two-book mini series.
- Include a dedicated discussion segment on stage IV breast cancer, including education about the teal, green, and pink ribbon and the differences between early-stages and metastatic diagnoses. Many women are not fully informed about recurrence risk or long-term realities, and education remains essential.

CLOSING NOTE TO HOSTS

This is a book that rewards curiosity, not certainty. Encourage readers to hold two truths at once, that practical choices matter and that emotions will not be tidy. Keep the conversation rooted in short passages and concrete practices and you will find generous, surprising talk.

“Connect with the Author: Betty Jean Aucoin welcomes opportunities to join book clubs, libraries, and community groups for virtual conversations about RISE: Living Life Over Cancer.” If your group would like to include a short Q&A or discussion with the author, you can reach her through:
www.livinglifeovercancer.com
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