

**World Cancer Day
Wednesday, February 4**



Not Beyond Us – Breast cancer survivor Geraldine Cox, AM shares the day she became ‘one of those women’ and gained a seat on the ‘two-tit-table’

The bid to increase awareness and education about preventable deaths caused by cancer is a plight Geraldine Cox, AM knows all too well.

Ms Cox is the founder of Sunrise Children's Villages (SCV) in Cambodia. But to the 400 orphaned, disabled, trafficked and disadvantaged Cambodian children who call SCV home, she is simply 'Big Mum' – a supportive, reliable and trusted mother who promises to love them unconditionally.

On Wednesday, February 4, Ms Cox will be one of the millions of people from across the globe who will unite in support of World Cancer Day, which this year centres on the theme 'Not Beyond Us'.

"First, I have to apologise for every time I read a story of a woman's journey with cancer over the years. I thought, 'Not another cancer survival story....'. Now I am one of those women," Ms Cox said.

Ms Cox was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2009 and underwent a double mastectomy not long after. For the past five years she has had routine checkups every six months.

While she is now in remission, the threat of the cancer returning is very real. Ms Cox still has two tumors, one in the lungs underneath where the biggest initial tumor was and one in the stomach. However, Ms Cox says doctors have told her that while the tumors – which could be benign - are not moving or growing, to operate on them would be "an overreaction".

"After my double mastectomy, I lunched with two of my oldest friends in Adelaide and told them they can relax as only one in three women get breast cancer and it's me, so they were safe," Ms Cox said.

"In the following year both of them lost a breast.

"So now when we get together for lunch and I make the booking, when asked what name the booking should be in I say, 'The Two-Tit-Table.' It always gets a laugh."

Despite the strength and witty humour she mustered throughout the course of her treatment and the years that followed, like many cancer patients would know, cancer takes its toll – both emotionally, physically and financially.

Constant nausea – a side effect of the strong chemotherapy medication - sleep apnea and vertigo hit Ms Cox hard.

As the founder and sole fundraiser at SCV, the need to continue her public speaking engagements and lengthy trips abroad in order to raise the \$1 million needed to cover SCV's operating costs each year became even more critical as the value of the Australian dollar dropped.

Unfortunately you can't choose how your body reacts to the ongoing cancer treatment, or how long the periods of unrest will last. Just last week Ms Cox was diagnosed with bone disintegration in her knee joints – a long-term side effect of the cancer medication which may eventually see her confined to a wheelchair.

Despite the challenges, Ms Cox is determined to remain upbeat and do her best to continue providing the children at Sunrise with the unconditional love, support and guidance that comes so naturally to her.

She said during the most painful moments, it was the love and support of her 400 children at Sunrise Children's Villages that brought a smile to her face and encouraged her to continue the fight, every day.

"When I returned to my children in Sunrise, Cambodia, I had warned them that I would look flat chested without my breasts and they should be prepared for this," Ms Cox said.

"In fact I was more concave than flat and after a few days, little Daneth, aged 7, wrote me a little note in Khmer which was translated by the staff in English.

'Dear Mum, I noticed since you came home from Australia, that you have no more your breasts. I think it is very unfair, because I thought they were very, very, very, very nice!'

"This made my day.

"Hang in there to all women worldwide who are battling to survive this disease."

Ms Cox has credited early detection, access to treatment, ongoing medical support and consultation and a healthy lifestyle as contributing factors to overcoming the disease.

Editor's note - About Sunrise Children's Villages:

- Sunrise Children's Villages provides residential care, education, health and medical care, counselling, emergency support and most of all a loving and supportive home environment to more than 400 orphaned, disabled and disadvantaged Cambodian children and their extended families.
- Geraldine Cox founded Sunrise in 1993. Since then three centres have been established in Phnom Penh, Siem Reap and Sihanoukville.

- Sunrise Children's Village in Sihanoukville is funded by Computershare Australia and cares for children who are HIV positive.

Photo captions:

001 – Founder of Sunrise Children's Villages Geraldine Cox, AM shows off the mastectomy bra fittings she wears each day after having a double mastectomy in 2009.

002 – Geraldine Cox, AM has a range of mastectomy bras and breast prosthesis in all different sizes. Each day Ms Cox decides which 'size' she will be.

For more information about Sunrise Children's Villages visit www.scv.org.au

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