

feature

Breast cancer: The relentless killer

by Dionne Stephens

"The most highly prized curve of all is that of the bosom. The degree of attention which breasts receive, combined with the confusion about what the breast fetishists actually want, makes women unduly anxious about them. They can never be just right; they must always be too small, too big, the wrong shape, too flabby. Her breasts are only to be admired for also, as they show no signs of their function: once darkened, stretched or withered they are objects of revulsion."

—Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*.

TORONTO (CUP) — Tits. Hooters. Bonkers. Jugs. Trucks. Melons. Handfuls. Breasts have always been viewed as a central symbol of womanhood. They are one of the most obvious physical distinctions between men and women, although hormone pills are increasingly making this an unreliable method of analysis.

Women have been fighting for years against male-defined breast expectations and its impact on our self-image. From the early stages of puberty, some girls remember the trauma of boys in class teasing them about the "golf balls" in their t-shirts — or lack thereof.

But breasts also play a central part of the ceremony into womanhood — the purchase of our first bras will never be forgotten once the boyish vest is no longer adequate to hold back the bulge.

As we get older, we realize that our bodies shouldn't be constrained by male standards, so we let them hang. Sometimes we even use them to defy patriarchy — like the infamous bare-chested Gwen Jacobs from the University of Waterloo — as a visible symbol of our liberation.

As we grow older still, some women will lift, cut and paste their breasts in an attempt to regain their youthful appearance — or perhaps it's an attempt to preserve a fading symbol of power.

Last cup of coffee

by Jennifer Roos

Like all great things, the coffee shop tour of Halifax sadly must come to an end.

To celebrate this fourth and final episode, I visited the all-new location of Café Mokka, situated in the heart of downtown on Granville Street. I was surprised to see that Café Mokka, formerly a little shop nestled in the Spring Garden area has been transformed into a huge café with tremendous appeal.

Entering, I was immediately struck by the remarkable interior design — a combination of materials such as marble, wood, metal, stone and brick come together to give this café a unique atmosphere and a sort of New York appeal.

The size and layout of Café Mokka provides its patrons with a choice of atmosphere. If you prefer a bright place to sip coffee and read the newspaper, the main level is for you. Here, the decor, brightly painted walls and exposed pipes give it a look that's at once modern, avant-garde and industrial. There are plenty of tables to choose from, and even a display of international items, gifts, and cards for your browsing and buying pleasure.

These attempts, regardless of motive, show just how important breasts are in our society. But what happens when they are taken away entirely?

"I felt at first that I was now really different from other women; like I wasn't the norm anymore," said one cancer survivor, who asked not to be named. "Don't get me wrong, I was first and foremost happy to be alive, but this feeling was in the back of my mind."

Although breast cancer is attributed to several different genetic and

about 17 percent of cases involve women under 35

environmental elements, there is no hard evidence of its cause and no solid cure.

Right now, once the disease has been diagnosed, the options are chemotherapy (medication that destroys cancer cells by interfering with their growth or preventing their reproduction), mastectomy (surgical removal of a breast to contain a cancerous tumour) and lumpectomy (a partial mastectomy which rarely requires the removal of more than one-quarter of the breast).

Groups across Canada are actively promoting October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. However, when you consider the great importance and attention society places on women's breasts, it is surprising that many people are unaware about this campaign, or even the issue itself.

Breast cancer is the number three killer of women, with one in nine Canadian women expected to develop the disease in her lifetime.

According to the Canadian Cancer Society, one in 23 women will die because of the illness. Arlene Tubman, coordinator of the North York branch in Toronto, said that

Canada has one of the highest number of breast cancer cases in the world, surpassed only by the United States.

And recent studies indicate that black women have a greater chance of getting cancer in a more deadly form than white women.

Researchers have found that the cells appear to divide at a more rapid rate among black women. But some who work in this field see other external factors playing a major role.

"Because women of different ethno-cultural backgrounds tend to come from marginalized communities, many do not go to the doctor for various reasons — economics, cultural beliefs," says Shebina Amlani, a Health Promotions Officer with the Ontario Breast Screening Program.

"When these women are diagnosed, it is usually in the later stages and often it has already spread."

Also, for many people, breast cancer has an image of being an old woman's disease. Awareness campaigns are mainly geared to women over 50, for instance.

And while it's true that women are most at risk after 40, about 17 per cent of cases involve women under 35.

Twenty-four year-old Sandra Dumas said she has regular breast examinations, mainly because breast cancer runs in her family.

Dumas's grandmother and aunt both died from breast cancer. Women who have a family history associated with the disease have an extremely high risk of getting breast cancer.

But even for those younger women that want to be tested, there are obstacles to face. Currently, digital mammography and a controversial bone marrow transplant are the newest — and most expensive — systems on the market for checking breast cancer.

The most common and cheapest form of checking is through a mammography. But not all patients are impressed with it.

Essentially, it is a way for doctors

to see inside the breast by compressing the breast between two plates. Some women describe the process as feeling "like you're putting your breast in a trash compactor."

Doctors complain that mammography is not that accurate in young women. Breast tissue has an opaque appearance, so the looser it is, the easier it is to detect lumps. However, younger women's breasts are more firm and dense, making the mammography results unclear and inaccurate.

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There is also the issue of the doctor/patient relationship, especially when there is a male doctor involved. Because of the rise of reports in sexual harassment, women may be uncomfortable asking male doctors how a breast self-exam should be done.

"He would have to demonstrate on me — it would be like he's feeling me up," one woman said.

Beyond this, there is the basic need for younger women to be more aware about their bodies. Since 80 per cent of all breast lumps are dis-

covered by women and their partners, this is crucial. But can you describe what a normal breast looks like? Do you know what a normal breast should feel like? Are your own breasts normal?

"We show you how to stand in front of a mirror since it is just as important to see yourself visually as well as touch," Pat Ogborne of the centre said.

"We like to do programs for young mothers and encourage mothers to bring their daughters."

"We target Mother's Day," Amlani says. "We are good at nurturing everyone but ourselves, so sometimes we need to be reminded."

The Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation feels that these types of programs need to be initiated earlier. In the secondary school system, women learn all about their reproductive capacities — from menstruation to AIDS.

However, beyond stressing the importance of wearing a sports bra for gym class, breast health and breast cancer are virtually overlooked. For these high school women, the foundation is in the process of creating a breast self-examination instruction program.

The best time to do a breast self-exam is seven to 10 days after your period when there is the least amount of hormonal influence.

"The tissue is most normal then," Amlani said. "So that is the best time to become familiar with your own breast and its particulars."

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november
11 and 12
GRAWOOD

can enjoy bagels, various soups and sandwiches, and fresh fruit with yogurt. For the sweet tooth there are cinnamon buns, squares, cheesecakes and more. And for the early riser, Café Mokka also offers a light breakfast. In terms of beverages, there are both regular coffees and various styles of specialty coffees made fresh to perk you up. You can also enjoy various cold drinks such as shakes, smoothies and ice-tea. Whatever you choose, the staff are happy to whip it up and serve it to you at your table. The staff at Café Mokka are also pleased to substitute regular milk with soy or skim should they be more to your liking.

It's now officially that time to put my Halifax coffee shop crawl to rest. I hope that these four issues have been enlightening, or at the very least, made you aware of some of Halifax's wonderful cafés. Before I go, just one last word — make your way downtown, walk around the waterfront then drop in to Café Mokka for an experience that is altogether original.

Go and discover why staff member Wally Vaters says "it seems to have a life of its own."

You won't be disappointed.

Café Mokka...
both relaxing and
upbeat

old stone and brick walls has an ambience that's conducive to chatting with friends or perhaps whispering sweet nothings in the ear of a loved one. Overall, the atmosphere at the new Café Mokka is curiously, both relaxing and upbeat. Don't worry about fitting in with the crowd; it's composed of people of all ages and types.

Along with the friendly service and laid back environment, Café Mokka offers you a wide variety of delectable foods. On a daily basis you