

Cancer Up Close and Personal

May 4, 2009 by [Deborah Robinson](#)



After 30 years of marriage, Christine Lister lost her beloved husband Rex, to Melanoma (skin cancer) in the Spring of 2005. For five long years the couple had fought bravely to stay together in this life, but in the end even a love as strong and true as the Lister's couldn't stop Cancer from tearing them apart.

Christine Lister documented the couple's experiences with Cancer in a personal journal which was eventually published as *The Hidden Journey: Melanoma Up Close and Personal* in the later half of 2008. As the title suggests, this book provides the reader with an up close and personal look at Cancer - putting a 'real' human face to the disease that claims 38,000* lives in Australia each year.

Although I am an avid reader, only two books have brought me to tears - *April Fools Day* by Bryce Courtenay and *The Hidden Journey: Melanoma Up Close and Personal* by Christine Lister. Although I knew from the outset Rex Lister was to eventually lose his battle with Melanoma, by the time he whisper's his last words to Christine, I was completely immersed in the couple's story and their love for each other.

Initially I did have some concerns about this book in that I didn't see how a collection of journal entries written by a non-celebrity could possibly find an audience. But as I was soon to discover, the most extraordinary stories can be found in the lives of ordinary people.

In a recent telephone interview with Australian Women Online, Christine Lister said that others had expressed concerns about the way her book is structured. "A few people had said to me that going straight into the story was a bit unnerving because from the beginning you have no idea of who we are or what's happening," she said. "But that's exactly what Cancer does to you - you're actually living your life and then all of a sudden it changes. So the book replicates the experience of finding out how your life can virtually change in one day."

"I could have written the story with hindsight but it changes the reality. So what I chose to do was present a little microcosm of our life and what we went through so that hopefully, when people actually experience it [through the book] they virtually know what other people are going through and understand what Cancer actually does to your mind as well as your body."

Christine added, "One of the important things I want people to understand is that if someone close to you has Cancer, you do too. You have different symptoms and different ways of expressing it and although you don't have all the physical stuff - you have Cancer eating away inside you."

Although the media has given us some insight into what the patient with Cancer goes through, it isn't often those closest to the patient are given the opportunity to tell their side of the story. I can imagine it isn't an easy story to tell and it took Christine Lister 3½ years to revisit the journal upon which her book is based.

"It was really painful and intimate. The book is actually showing me warts and all, and that's not easy to do. It would be easier to have the whole lot remain hidden," said Christine.

One of the reasons Christine Lister chose to share her most painful and intimate moments with the world is because of the way Cancer sufferer's are portrayed in the media. Although no-one can deny it takes courage to face the threat of cancer, the brave faces we see in the media are only giving us half the story and place unrealistic expectations on sufferers and those closest to them.

“One of the things I found most debilitating is this mantra from people ‘you have to be strong’ and the reality is that you are sometimes, but you’re also like people who are fighting in war - you can’t be a hero all the time,” she said.

“The conventional media view is they do stories about heroes and how brave they are battling Cancer. But the reality is, in private they would also be feeling sad and scared because their world is being threatened. So most people think that if they’ve got these weaknesses that they have to be hidden away. But if someone close to you is threatened with the possibility of dying, then you have every right to feel sad and scared along with them.”
On the flip side, being touched by Cancer can also be the vehicle for creating positive change. As Christine Lister explains, “I found that the times we spent during this period were some of the most wonderful times of our life. It puts you in touch with what’s really important in life, so even though your world might be shrinking, you can still value it and love it.”

Another positive thing to come out of the couple’s experiences is that after a lifetime of dreaming of becoming a writer, Christine Lister picked up a pen when cancer began to threaten her world.

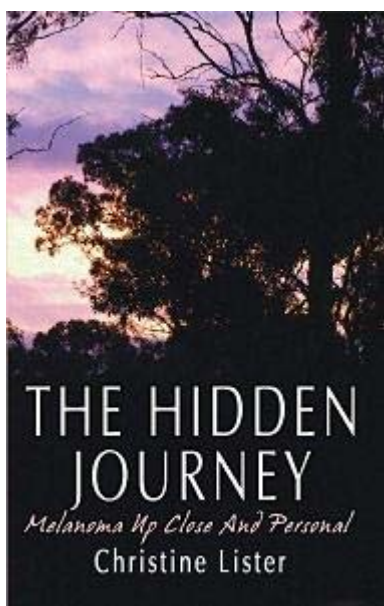
Cancer can take away so much but as Christine Lister will tell you it cannot destroy your dreams and it cannot destroy love. Wherever life may lead her in the future, Christine knows that her beloved Rex is always with her because in her own words, “love never dies.”

The Hidden Journey: Melanoma Up Close and Personal by Christine Lister is published by Brolga Publishing and is available now for RRP \$24.95 from bookstores and the author’s website at www.christinelister.com.au

You can also buy this book online from SeekBooks.com.au for \$22.49

*[Cancer in Australia](#) - most recent national data available on death rates from cancer provided by the Australian Government.

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<http://www.australianwomenonline.com/cancer-up-close-and-personal/>