

From all walks of life, these women have joined to share stories, sorrows, smiles and support in their battle against breast cancer. They are together,

# United *by the* fight

By Chris Martell

Wisconsin State Journal

The Madeline Island tourists had gone for the summer when the ferry dropped off a group of about 30 women for a weeklong retreat. It's unlikely most of them would have met anywhere else.

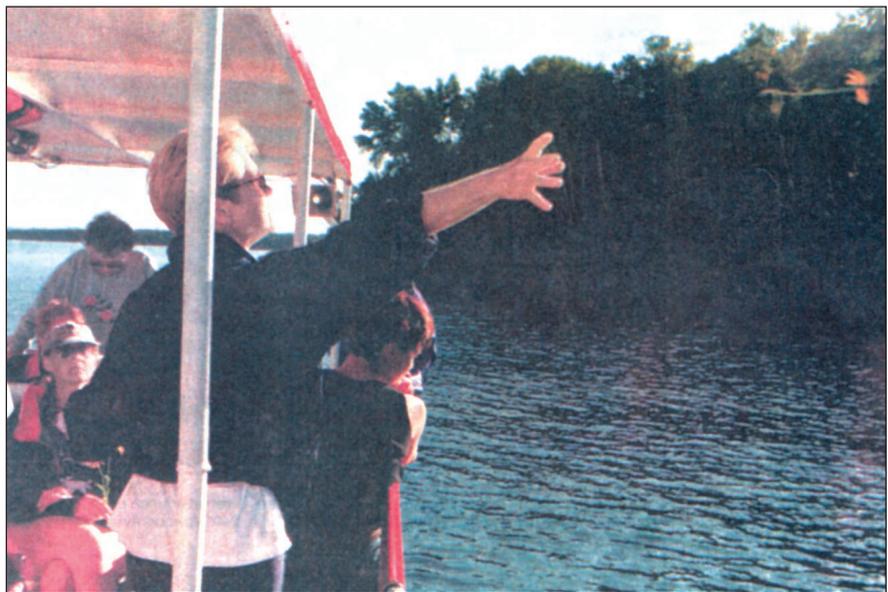
There were doctors' wives who lived in luxurious city homes, and women who lived with extended families in cramped quarters on Indian reservations. Sue Ann Thompson, Wisconsin's first lady, was there, too.

What they had in common dwarfed all their differences—every member of the group had battled breast cancer.

At the center of it all was Ann Haney, one of the state's most prominent women. It was Haney, 48, who came up with the idea for these "mental spas" for breast cancer survivors when she was administrator for the state Division of Health under Gov. Tommy Thompson.

In a striking bit of irony, Haney had started the wheels in motion for the camps well before her own diagnosis of breast cancer in May 1996.

Now, on Madeline Island, it was time to try out all those ideas, for herself and for the others, at the second of two pilot camps. When Haney invited the participants to Madeleine Island, she warned them that they were "guinea pigs" for the nonprofit Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation. "We might do things wrong. We might say something that would offend someone."



Photos/FIONA MCTAVISH and SUE TOWNSEND

**Above:** Women participating in the Madeline Island "mental spas" for those with breast cancer took a boat out to the sea caves for a "letting go" ceremony. Each of them was given a wildflower and asked to think of something she wanted to release after the week on the island. One by one, they tossed their flowers into the lake and watched them drift into the dark sea caves. **Below left:** On the way back from the "letting go" ceremony, the women celebrated with a glass of wine. **Below right:** Wisconsin first lady Sue Ann Thompson, right, with Grandma Jenny, an elder of the Red Coud tribe, center, and Linda Hardy, executive director of the Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation.



So, by word of mouth, they were recruited for the pilot camps. The women ranged in age from 33 to 79. Women who beat the disease 30

years ago, and those expecting to die any day.

Retreating to the remote island in the Apostle chain "is a metaphor for leaving behind the disease, and

the medical establishment.” said Haney.

The Madeline Island Music Camp lent the group its property (there is talk of donating 100 prime acres on the island for the foundation’s permanent home). The women sailed and kayaked, took long walks and had bonfires. Elders from the Red Cliff tribe taught them bead work and how to make baskets.

Mostly, they talked about things

that nobody else could possibly understand. “We didn’t need ‘experts’ to lecture to us.” Haney said. “We needed other women to share their secrets about how they handled this.”

The verdict on the first two pilot camps, rendered by the women, was that they were a huge success. Ultimately, Haney believes, it will save lives because women with fighting spirit are known to have higher survival rates.

“After all the medical stuff is done, after the surgery, the chemotherapy, the radiation, it’s ‘bye.’ You’re on your own. It’s like falling off a cliff. That’s what these camps are for.”

What follows is the beginning of Ann Haney’s diary from the second Madeline Island camp in September. The remainder of the diary will be printed in Daybreak this week, in four more installments to run through Thursday.

## Extending boundaries by extending a hand — a diary



Ann Haney

### Day 1

Everything is set. Fiona and I take the ferry from Madeline Island to Bayfield to meet our participants—the ferry becomes a little like Noah’s Ark.

Our women are so diverse—and at different stages in their recoveries. They are happy to connect with us; we give them ferry passes and directions to the camp.

Crystal walks with a cane, doesn’t make eye contact and tells us “she’s gone.” She’s come to Breast Cancer Recovery Camp to do things she’s always wanted to do before she dies.

Joy walks with a walker. She comes to camp to show her joy with life—in spite of her metastatic cancer and prognosis.

Hope is a one-woman support group in herself. Breast cancer 11 years ago, she shares her belief in the power of woman-to-woman relationships. She’s always smiling, and more than willing to share the secrets of her happiness with Mark, the love of her life, whom she’s taken up with since her mastectomy.

Mara is good and solid. In her 70s, she had breast cancer 18

## Infinite boundaries

months ago. She’s been divorced 27 years. She’s crusty and proud of it. She’s the first person to ask about early morning body movement and tai chi lessons. She’s come here to learn new things.

The women are all so different and still we have the common denominator: breast cancer.

The name of our retreat is Infinite Boundaries and for many women, just attending the camp on Madeline Island is already extending their boundaries.

We’re all finally on the island together—around the fireplace at the Madeline Island Music Camp. Diane Defoe of the Red Cliff tribe and Pastor Marina Lachecki of St. John’s Church here on the island join us for dinner and each do their blessings. We’re all moved by the power of the room—the remote island we’ve come together on, the joy of being with other women who are going through similar life journeys.

Rachel, our chef, is very ill. She’s just gotten out of the hospital with her fourth bout with cancer—she only has the strength to do one meal per day. She insists on cooking for us even though she’s been told that she has only three to four months to live. She wants to do this even though it is

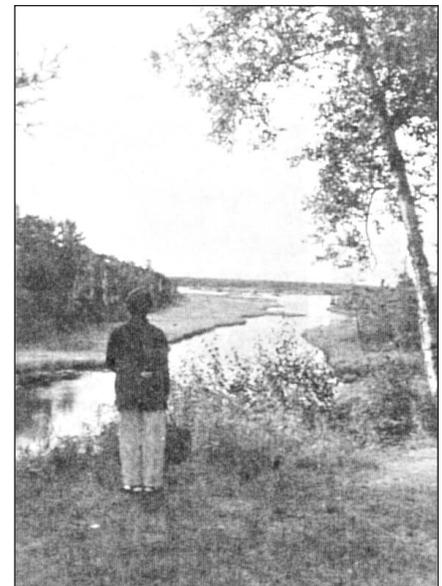
unclear if she’ll make it through the week on her feet.

We talk to Pastor Marina, Rachel’s good friend and confidant. Pastor Marina tells us that if we don’t let Rachel cook, then she most certainly won’t make it through the week.

Practicalities: Staff and volunteers need to pitch in and do the cooking for two of three meals each day. Problem: Instead of being with the women and running the program, we’ll be peeling vegetables.

Every woman here feels her own heartbreak for Rachel and feels her own vulnerability.

We call it a day at 9:30 p.m., and we regroup as staff and volunteers



Water holds special significance for many of the women involved in the September retreats to Madeline Island, in part because of its calming qualities and perceived healing powers.

at Shiitake Cabin. How did today go? How do we think tomorrow will go? Who's assigned to kayaking, canoeing, sailing, nature hike, etc.?

Our concerns and thoughts at the close of Day 1:

■ Rachel may not make it, but her situation seems to have spurred on her as well as others in the group.

■ Are tomorrow's activities too strenuous for several of the women who are "terminal"? Oddly, they seem to be the first to sign up.

■ In our enthusiasm to provide choices and yet encourage the women to make this time their own, have we created option glut?

■ The women seem eager to share, but the real moving force at this retreat seems to be the simple gathering of women.

Our real job this week may very well be setting the stage for these women to recover from a lifetime of being a woman and all the sorrows and responsibilities that entails—rather than just recovering from a chronic disease.

## Day 2

Linda is in the kitchen with two volunteers stirring up breakfast. Jean is on the screened porch with 10 women doing body movement and now a tai chi blessing. I'm at the sewing machine finishing the edges for "prayer flags"—we need to get a few ahead—so the women can just sit and create flags with fabric pens.

Breakfast is delicious and wholesome. Really! The women are enjoying fresh muffins, fruit and oatmeal.

The morning's discussion topic: "Getting Mental About Getting Physical." We talk about how the way we feel physically has so much to do with how we feel mentally, and vice versa. Everyone gets it.



Rachel was a competitive surfer living in Hawaii when she was diagnosed with breast cancer four years ago. Now the single mother of a 2-year-old girl, she is fighting for her life. She moved to Madeline Island because she heard the legends of its healing powers.

Actually every already knew it. We just said it.

Time to sign up for the day's activities: Island hiking, sailing, nature walks, canoeing in the lagoon and kayaking. We set out food for the women to make their own lunches and we're all off.

I drive the kayakers to the ferry—we need to be "foot traffic" on the ferry back to the mainland to Trek 'n' Trail, our kayak provider and trainer for the week. There's room in one of the tandem kayaks for me, a first-time kayaker. I'm oper-

ating the rudders with my feet and paddling at sea level on the greatest of the Great Lakes. What a phenomenal sensation!

My left arm gets very, very tired. I have to ask to stop and rest three times. Ever since my mastectomy, I've had to be careful with that arm. They took so many lymph nodes, and I don't want to get "milk arm" (a chronic swelling of the arm caused by removal of the nodes).

Nakoma, a young Native American woman in our program, has told her roommate that she has less than a year to live. She absolutely sparkles, however, when she tells us about her visions and other Native American folklore of Lake Superior.

## Retreat Schedule

Upcoming retreats of the Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation:

■ **Oct. 30-Nov. 2:** "The Springs" in Spring Green

■ **Nov. 6-9:** Potter's Farm in Bayfield; a rustic, outdoor-focused retreat.

■ **Dec. 11-14:** Milwaukee area, for women who live alone. They may gather in the shipyard to help build a schooner for the state sesquicentennial celebration.

■ **January:** Big Sky, Montana

■ **February:** Door County

■ **March:** Lutsen Mountain, Minn.; the first ski camp, at the highest mountain in the Midwest.

■ **April:** Sisters' choice; an all-nun event (nuns have one of the highest rates of breast cancer).

■ **May, June, July, Aug., and September:** Madeline Island.

■ **October 1998:** "The Springs" in Spring Green.

Prices vary, and there is a sliding scale based on income.

Nakoma and I are from two different worlds and life experiences. Even our cancers are uniquely different, but we have the same profound respect and belief in the lake.

According to Jill, Lake Superior is "the mother of all lakes" and time of the powerful "Mashomis." The grandfather rocks who lay in the lake's womb, the deep waters. The "Mashomis" get their power from the moon, and that is why they shimmer in the moonlight.

We all enjoy her stories and the warmth of our first bonfire at camp on Madeline Island.

## About Ann Haney

Ann Haney is director of development for Dean Health Plan, Madison, and founder of the Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation. She was diagnosed with Stage Two breast cancer in May 1996, and is now taking tamoxifen to prevent a recurrence. Her prognosis is good. Haney recently hired Linda Hardy as executive director for the foundation. Dean Health Care provided \$50,000 to start the foundation, and allowed it to use its Middleton facility. Other corporate contributions are being sought for the foundation.

Previously Haney was state insurance commissioner under Gov. Lee Dreyfus, and was administrator of the state Division of Health under Gov. Tommy Thompson. She has been active in Republican politics, and twice ran for the congressional seat held by Scott Klug. She is married to Jim Haney, and they are the parents of Peter, 19, and Eric, 27.

For information on the Breast Cancer Recovery Foundation or its camps, call (608) 827-4100.