

# Author writes book to help kids cope with cancer

By JOSEPH CHIN  
Staff

Talking to kids about cancer can be difficult. However, chats that are handled sensitively can be reassuring for young people directly affected by the diagnosis.

And it isn't easy for parents who are suddenly confronted by the bad news and facing shock and emotional turmoil themselves.

Kim Haskan shows how to go about it in her recently-released chil-

dren's book, *Mommy Has a Boo Boo in Her Boob*.

Based on the author's personal battle and victory over the disease, the book, which doesn't use the word cancer, provides fun and practical guidance on how to involve children in the recovery process. Through footnotes, it also gives detailed medical information for adults.

Out of the blue in late 2009, Haskan, a special ed teacher at Settler's Green Public School in Meadowvale, was diagnosed with breast cancer. She and her husband, Gokhan, have three children, who were aged 3, 5 and 7 at the time.

"My husband was scared," said Haskan. "We were scared of what would happen next, scared I would die, scared of the unknown. If, as parents, we were scared, then how were our children going to get through this? What do we say, what do we not say? What do we do, what do we not do? We didn't have the answers."

The way they reacted was to stay positive, use humour and tell as much or as little as they thought the kids could understand.

As it turned out, their kids' inability to comprehend the gravity of the illness helped Haskan in her recovery.

"My plan for Saturday (two days after the diagnosis) was to lie down and cry in my bed the whole day," she recalled. "Then the kids came up to see me. They stood at the foot of my bed and said 'You said we were going to make gingerbread today.' Clearly, I had made this promise before my diagnosis. I pleaded with them 'Mommy needs to rest,' but they insisted.

"So I got out of bed, rolled out the dough, and put on Christmas music. Guess what? I felt better immediately. I rolled and sang and made gingerbread. Who knows how I would have felt with my other plan of crying all day? I felt great."

Even when she began chemotherapy and felt very nauseous, her youngest would knock on the bathroom door asking to go to the park.

"So I would get up and go to the park ... and feel better."

Eventually, Haskan's children took on, with pride and enthusi-

asm, the roles of nurse, decorator and personal shopper. The recollections were noted in a journal she kept during her illness.

When she was first diagnosed, Haskan and her husband did not give her disease a name (they used the word "boo boo" instead).

"At the time, we felt that it was too much for their young minds to comprehend. We worried that they would hear from friends at school that grandmas, grandpas, aunts and uncles had died of cancer. The biggest image school children have of cancer is Terry Fox. He was a heroic Canadian and a positive role model to children. But he lost a leg to

bone cancer and died at the early age of 22. Cancer treatments have improved immensely since, but children don't make these connections as easily as adults."

Haskan wrote her book in sections. It can be read very simply to young children or more in depth to older children.

Since its release a few weeks ago, *Mommy Has a Boo Boo in Her Boob*, illustrated by Izabela Ciesinska, has remained on Amazon's bestseller list of children's disease books. It's also available through other major online stores. A portion of sales proceeds will go toward breast cancer research.

