

Susanne, OAM, 70

Writer & children's book author diagnosed with osteoporosis after sustaining multiple rib fractures, **SYDNEY**

Originally a teacher by trade, Susanne, 70, Sydney, spent 10 years teaching high school students and at University before choosing to pivot her career at 40 years of age, to pursue writing.

In 2011, Susanne was subsequently awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for her outstanding contribution to children and adult literature.

The renowned writer, and children's book author, was diagnosed with osteopenia (low bone density) in 2009 after falling and fracturing her ribs on multiple occasions.

In 2005, she was diagnosed with osteoporosis – a “silent disease” that tragically, stole the lives of her mother and mother-in-law.

Susanne has concerningly, fractured her ribs, both ankles, her left elbow and left foot, to date.

She nonetheless, remains upbeat, and does all she can to lead a normal life, writing, socialising, and working proactively to manage her disease.

This is Susanne's story.

Susanne lives with some underlying health conditions.

“I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis at the age of 19, but never noticed my bones weakening.

“About 15 years ago, I tripped and fell a couple of times, and broke my ribs. I didn't think much of it at the time,” said Susanne.

“My doctor suggested I have a bone density scan. To my complete surprise, I was diagnosed with osteopenia. Many years later, my osteopenia progressed to osteoporosis.

“I nonetheless, continue to live my life, and thankfully, my osteoporosis has not affected my writing,” Susanne said.

Armed with a family history of osteoporosis, Susanne is determined not to let the disease define her, or to ultimately, steal her life.

“My own mother lived with osteoporosis. Although I had some understanding of this potentially devastating disease back then, I later watched my mother-in-law also live with it, and did not want the same outcome for myself.

“Both my mother and my mother-in-law died from osteoporosis. Each had a horrible death,” said Susanne.

Despite the significant challenges of living with osteoporosis, Susanne is nonetheless, determined to live life to the fullest, by proactively managing her disease.



"I've endured multiple fractures, but I will not let osteoporosis define me.

"While it's another challenge, and illness that I'm forced to contend with, I treat it like any other, by remaining proactive, taking my medication, and undergoing a bone density scan every two years," Susanne said.

"I don't go bungee jumping, but I do swim regularly, and lift light weights. I focus on strengthening my bones, and preventing further breaks.

"Unfortunately, I do fall from time to time. I recently tripped over one of my granddaughter's toys and broke my rib again. But I'm confident it will heal naturally with time."

Susanne reflects on the nature of the "silent disease."

"You don't feel osteoporosis creeping up on you. But once it arrives, it becomes part of your life.

"My goal now is to keep active, and to avoid sustaining any further injuries," said Susanne.

"Today I'm a writer first and foremost. I will not be identified by my disease.

"I have a new picture book coming out next year – 'Guess How I Was Born?' inspired by toddler Violet Rose and my daughter Tory. The grandma is feisty and saves Violet Rose. That is me, because I am not a person defined by my illness," Susanne said.

"I also won't let osteoporosis slow me down. I still have much more to accomplish – many more books to write, and many more friends to make.

"My ultimate goal is to prevent further bone loss, and to rebuild my bones," said Susanne.

Susanne has a simple, but poignant message for other Australians living with osteoporosis.

"Living with osteoporosis is a challenge, but don't let the disease define you.

"Keep moving, stay engaged, and importantly, continue to lead a full and active life," Susanne said.



Scouts NSW and author Susanne Gervay collaborate as part of anti-bullying project

Susanne was so proud of addressing nearly 2,000 cubs about bullying at their recent Scout camp.

"It matters what we do.

"While osteoporosis may carry a heavy physical, emotional and social toll, try to manage it as best you can, avoid falling over, and get on with your life," said Susanne.

"We must thank Healthy Bones Australia for bringing community awareness and support to those living with osteoporosis. They have many resources on their website to help you manage your disease."

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