

# Keeping busy

**Montmorency mother-of-two Blaise Van Hecke co-founded independent publisher Busy Bird which supports new and emerging writers. Its latest book, *Journey*, is an anthology of personal experiences about breast cancer**

I met my writing partner Les Zigomanis while I was studying professional writing and editing at NMIT in Greensborough. I've always dabbled in writing and I actually did the course because I wanted to complete a novel, but I really liked the editing and publishing side of it. That really took off for me.

We were lamenting the fact it was really hard for new writers to get published. We thought, why not start an anthology to help get new writers noticed? There are a few around but many of them are focused on literary works rather than more mainstream writing.

Two years ago, we started Busy Bird publishing. We now publish a biannual anthology of writing by new and emerging writers called *Untitled*. We're about to publish our fifth edition in April.

Submissions are always open. For each edition, we probably get 100 submissions and we only choose about 15.

My husband does all the illustrations for all of our books.

We've just released *Journey*, which is an anthology of stories about breast cancer.

My sister went through breast cancer about three years ago. At the same time, Les' sister-in-law was going through cancer treatment. I found it hard to find any books written by people who had had the experience of living with cancer.

I felt quite useless being close to

someone with breast cancer. We thought we would collect stories from people. We sent out emails and spread the word through our website, and we asked for submissions from writing centres and writing groups.

I was overwhelmed by the response. There are 38 contributors all together. There are some poems and short stories. We got quite a few more stories than we had space to include.

Something that really took us by surprise was the depth of the stories. Some were quite moving, some were quite sad, some are very humorous and some are beautifully written. Five of the stories are about people who didn't make it. We wanted the book to reflect what cancer really is.

Some of the proceeds will go to Women Helping Other Women, which is raising money to buy breast screening machines for women in Bali. ■

*Journey is available at [busybird.com.au](http://busybird.com.au)*



STEPHEN MCKENZIE