

Novel comes from a mother's last wishes

Parksville composer and pianist turns hand to writing a second book inspired by parent

BY SARAH SIMPSON
THE STAR

If there's something every artist needs, it's inspiration.

Luckily for Crissa Constantine, she has no shortage of that.

An accomplished composer and pianist with two original CDs already under her belt, Constantine's latest brainchild isn't the result of her dabbles with sound, but it comes in the form of a novel.

For the Vancouver Island musician, it was a certain deviation from her typical form of expression.

But the call to action could not be ignored.

"One of my mother's last wishes was for me to write this story called *Broken Doll*," said the reluctant writer, from her Parksville home.

"I'm mainly a musician, but I felt this was a very powerful story because it's like a contemporary American tragedy with a heroine who has everything going for her and yet at the same time has self-destructive tendencies and ends up in essence, destroying herself."

Broken Doll is the second book penned by Constantine. Her first, *Banished from the Homeland*, was also inspired by her mother.

Banished from the Homeland is a dramatic tale of her mother's Escape from the Russians in Estonia in 1944 and subsequent life as a penniless immigrant to Canada.

She could not go back home even for a visit until 1991, at the end of the Cold War.

But *Broken Doll* is completely unlike her first novel, according to Constantine.

Though the inspiration is similar, "it's totally different," she said.

It was a learning experience.

"In the first one there was so many true

things in there that even though I had to make it like a novel, I still had to make sure my facts were right," she said. "But the second one I guess the ball was in my court a bit more."

While a "very slight amount of truth" is present in *Broken Doll* "again, I had to be very careful not to offend anybody who might still be alive," she said.

"I had to change a lot of things because, as you know, we live in a lawsuit happy world so I had to make darn sure that enough was changed that it could safely be called fiction — but it was inspired by a real person," she said with a chuckle.

"It was a very radiant kind of person who helped me with my own life and I find that in meeting some people that are living fully for the moment, you learn from them not to worry so much and just to enjoy every minute," said Constantine.

"That's something I learned and that's one of the messages I'm trying to put across in the book — living life to the fullest."

That's exactly what Constantine is trying to do now that *Broken Doll* is complete.

An ovarian cancer survivor, having been diagnosed just over two years ago, Constantine is making the most of every minute.

"I had two huge operations in Nanaimo and then chemo and radiation so I'm just glad I'm still alive," she admitted.

"Every day is a bonus for me."

Next up is a return to her musical roots.

"I've been asked to give a solo at Knox United Church with my own compositions. I would like to stick more to the music," she said.

But don't count out a third book from Constantine.

"You never know, in case something good comes up. Some people have told me I should write a third but I'm not planning it right now."

With no shortage of inspiration, and a firm desire to make the most out of her life, Constantine is never saying never.

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