

Bridges

Connecting Cancer Survivors



Second Chance at Life

By Pearce W. Hammond

My mother's fight with cancer began in Savannah in September 1995, when she was diagnosed with colon cancer. After extensive chemotherapy treatments, a year later the cancer had spread to her liver and she was not given much hope for survival from her hometown doctors. At this point my father, my brothers, and I decided to get a second opinion and took my mother to Memorial Sloan Kettering.

Despite the fact that my mother's condition was life threatening, she faced it with courage, toughness, and faith that few people have and was not about to give up. She also continued to always think of others instead of herself.

The first doctor we saw at MSK was very encouraging after reviewing the film of my mother's liver. "I think your condition is operable, Mrs. Hammond, and I'll talk with another doctor on our staff who is a world-renowned liver surgeon and try to get you an appointment," he said.

Two days later we were in the surgeon's office and were anxiously awaiting his reply after reviewing my mother's file.

"Well, Mrs. Hammond," he said, "instead of one tumor on your liver, there are two. But I think I can get them out of you and you will have a 30 to 40 percent chance of a cure. However, I cannot

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Elizabeth Mercer Hammond is a cancer survivor who was given a second chance at life at MSK. Now at age 97 and shown here with her newest great-grandson, she continues to always think of others and enjoys staying involved with her large family. Her son, Pearce W. Hammond is an accomplished writer and author of eight books. He is a native of Savannah but now resides in Okatie, South Carolina.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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Please visit www.mskcc.org/bridges



Editorial

By Eileen F. Gould

A common quip in the World of Cancer is that cancer is the club that no one wants to join, and no matter how many years one has been a cancer survivor, the fear of rejoining that club is always present. With worries of recurrence or even a new cancer diagnosis, scans and tests can swiftly bring back a flood of bad memories for many people. Both old and new anxieties surface during and leading up to these visits — and pushing them away is easier said than done.

Help and support often come from both family and friends, but MSK offers assistance as well. Clinicians in the Counseling

Center can provide individual therapy; Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC) has many support groups; and specially trained social workers can give guidance. Everyone handles anxiety and fear in their own way, and we are fortunate that MSK offers so many types of assistance to those who want or need help.

In the end, the common thread among cancer survivors is not so much about possible recurrences or new diagnoses as it is about the fear and anxiety that nearly all cancer survivors face. It's not something that is ever erased, even if cancer is a distant memory.



Where Are They Now?

Rachel Rusch

Rachel Rusch was treated for neuroblastoma in 1984 as an infant in Texas. She is now being followed in the Adult Long-Term Follow-Up clinic at MSK and is deeply thankful to this interdisciplinary team for their continuous support. She is currently pursuing dual master's degrees in social work and child development from New York University and Sarah Lawrence College and has a special interest in working in pediatric palliative care. Rachel has a background in the performing arts and is an active volunteer with the 52nd Street Project and a founding member of SPACE on Ryder Farm, an artist retreat and workshop space on a working organic farm in Brewster, New York. Rachel remains thankful every day for her health, her incredible friends and family, and the opportunity to pursue her dreams.



Ask the Survivor

By Clare Thomas

Clare was diagnosed with intrahepatic cholangiocarcinoma, a bile duct cancer, in April 2014. After surgery and chemotherapy, she has been cancer free ever since. She and her husband are empty nesters in New York City but for a demanding though lovable 12-year-old Labrador.

Fear of a relapse is the issue nearly every cancer survivor deals with. I find I am flooded with euphoria after every clear scan. I make long-term plans — to take a trip or a course or start a new project. After a few weeks the feeling begins to fade and a little bit of fear creeps in. It might be a new twinge in my stomach that brings the angst back, or I might think about how the only person I have found who has the same cancer has relapsed. When this happens, I remind myself of strategies that seem to help.

How do you deal with post treatment anxiety?

I make it a point to stay off websites about cancer. The information is often incorrect or inflammatory. My doctors are smart and know the most about my cancer. They want me to stay healthy as much as I do.

Humor is an important element as an antidote to anxiety. If I am really anxious, I seek out funny books, TV shows, or movies. I often read the funny cards in a card store and laugh out loud. A good laugh helps to clear the mind.

What tools have you used to help cope when anxiety takes over?

Keeping busy is the most important action I can take. The busier I am, the less time I have to worry. Whether it's working for pay or volunteering, it is essential for me to get out of the house and see people on a regular basis. Volunteering for a nonprofit can be particularly rewarding and keeps me from focusing too much on myself. I volunteer in the Pediatric Department of MSK. Witnessing the strength and resolve in both the children and their parents is inspirational.

Exercise also clears my head and puts me in a good frame of mind. It is well documented that exercise or raising your heart rate significantly raises your mood and lessens anxiety. Taking a walk or hopping on a bike is one of my tools.

Have you sought professional help to treat your anxiety?

Although not everyone needs formal counseling, I have found that speaking to a professional therapist has been helpful in controlling my anxiety. A cancer diagnosis is a life-changing event — getting psychological advice does not mean you are weak or crazy. My therapist helps me distinguish what is a valid concern and should be brought to the attention of my doctor from what is anxiety-driven, coming mainly from my imagination. Talking to someone, even a good friend, can help me release some of the tension.

Has anxiety affected your relationships?

My cancer diagnosis and treatment has made my relationship with my husband much closer. He attends all of my appointments and is the second pair of ears. He is the calming influence.

My daughters may have suffered the most from my angst. After surgery I found myself correcting them more than usual. I was preparing for my job as a mother to end. The longer I go without a relapse, the more relaxed I am as a mother. (My daughters might disagree!)

Has anxiety affected your quality of life or prevented you from moving forward or accomplishing tasks?

If anything, the anxiety has spurred me on to clean out the closets, get organized, and do those things I put off. I always accomplish more with a deadline and I don't want my family or friends to have to deal with the junk I have accumulated! Before cancer I would tend to procrastinate and think, tomorrow, tomorrow. Now I know better.



Weathering the Storm

By Meg Gleason

Meg Gleason is a lifelong resident of New Jersey and has been a special education teacher for more than 25 years. She has been married to her husband, Mike, for 16 years and they have two sons. She was inspired to write this survivor story after watching her husband fight his cancer with quiet strength and determination, knowing that his strongest motivation during his battle was that he was doing it all for his family.

For years to come, people will have stories to tell about the aftermath of Super Storm Sandy. Unfortunately, for my husband and me, our memories of that time period focus mainly on his cancer diagnosis. As much as the storm will always be remembered, my most vivid memory of that time is hearing his doctor say that he had prostate cancer. This was followed by a discussion about a great prognosis for a full recovery. As we drove home in a daze, our thoughts and conversation focused on our children. How would we tell our 9- and 11-year-old sons that their father had cancer?

The next two years went by in a blur. Mike had surgery with a non-MSK doctor. Unfortunately, the surgery was not as successful as hoped and his PSA (prostate-specific antigen, an indicator of potential cancer) never went down to an undetectable number. He had a second surgery and spent several more months watching and waiting, but his doctor was not able to determine why he still had a persistent PSA. I finally convinced him to go to Memorial Sloan Kettering, and it turned out to be one of the best decisions we have ever made. By our third visit, his team of doctors determined the cause of his persistent PSA. He then underwent radiation therapy at MSK Basking Ridge. The support of the wonderful staff there made this difficult time so much easier to handle.

Their compassion and professionalism on a daily basis helped give Mike the strength to move forward. He made it through his 40 treatments with flying colors! His PSA is now at a manageable level and he can move forward with confidence and optimism. Of course, we don't know what the future holds — no one does — but we do know that he is receiving the best care possible.

As it turns out, it was our children, as well as our love for each other, that gave him the strength to move forward and to become a cancer survivor. He has never wavered from exuding quiet strength and determination to weather his own storm and beat cancer. And how does he celebrate survival? He is not the type of person who needs to jump out of an airplane or climb a mountain to celebrate. His celebration is his appreciation of life's simple pleasures during every day that he has with his family. Eating dinner with his wife and sons as we discuss our days, attending their sporting events, and having an occasional date night together is celebration enough. With each additional day that he comes home to his wife and family, he shows his way of not just surviving, but thriving.

RESOURCE REVIEW

Summer Camps and Outdoor Adventures

By Ellen J. Greenfield and Ann Pfister-Brown

Summertime, and the livin' is easy.... For children, teens, and young adults, planning for summer often means looking into camp programs and outdoor experiences. For those currently in or recently out of treatment for cancer or related diseases, the search for a summer adventure has become a little easier thanks to programs that provide cancer survivors — especially those in their teenage or young-adult years — a life-altering outdoor experience surrounded by supportive and enthusiastic guides and knowledgeable medical staff.

We have selected a few well-respected examples that we discuss below. However, this is only a sampling and there are many other excellent camps throughout the country.

Camp Mak-A-Dream, located in Missoula, Montana, has five- to seven-day adult camps for four groups: the Young Adult Conference (ages 18 to 40), which is designed for campers in various stages of therapy and treatment; the Heads-Up Conference (ages 18 to 35), for those who have been treated for brain cancers; and two women's retreats, one for those who've had ovarian cancer and one for cancer survivors in general. These four experiences encourage hope and strength while campers enjoy the magnificent views of the Montana mountains. Whether traveling on the zipline, climbing the rock wall, or hiking the butte, campers share how these experiences reflect obstacles they faced during their disease, then conquer them. Add in a mix of serious talk around the campfire, and participants feel a sense of empowerment and encouragement while developing relationships with others who understand what they've been through.

First Descents, a program for adults ages 18 to 49, provides an outdoor adventure with an intimate group of 15 members. Participants may choose to climb, paddle, or surf at various locations throughout the country. They overcome the challenges they encounter

in their outdoor adventures surrounded by the support of the group and experienced staff. Although participants discuss their cancer, there are no forced conversations.

In 1988, Paul Newman opened the Hole in Wall Gang Camp (named after the gang in his film *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*) in northeastern Connecticut to host children with cancer and their families. Two-week programs running from spring through fall offer all the traditional sleepaway camp pleasures: horseback riding, boating, swimming, fishing, crafts, archery, mini-golf, and other sports and recreation in a setting that conjures up the image of a Wild West town. The camp also conducts outreach to hospitals and clinics and offers a range of services throughout the year.

The unprecedented success of this camp, and the joy it brought its many participants, encouraged the Newman Foundation to extend the age range. The camp now offers weeklong wilderness experiences for older teens (16 to 18) and a leaders-in-training program for campers who have aged out of the summer programs. The leadership training and the chance to work with campers under the supervision of mentor counselors encourages the natural step for these previous participants.

Today, the Newman Foundation has expanded its mission to support similar camps throughout the country and the world under the SeriousFun Children's Network umbrella. More than 600,000 children and teens with a range of illnesses have now enjoyed programs at SeriousFun camps in more than 50 countries — all entirely free of charge. There are nine camps in the SeriousFun Network within the United States, with some specializing in activities such as equestrian sports or skiing. Camps include Boggy Creek,

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ASK THE PROFESSIONAL

Physical Therapy for Cancer Survivors



*By Danele Silverman, PT, MSPT, SCS, ATC, and
Linda Gonzalez, PT, MSPT, CST, CLT*

Danele Silverman is a senior physical therapist at MSK's Sillerman Center for Rehabilitation. She holds an American Physical Therapy Board of Physical Therapy specialty certification in sports rehabilitation and has a special interest in working with the orthopedic oncology population.

Linda Gonzalez is a physical therapy advanced clinician at MSK's Sillerman Center for Rehabilitation. She holds a certification in craniosacral therapy and has a special interest in working with individuals post-mastectomy.

What are some important ways that physical or occupational therapy may help cancer survivors?

Treatments for cancer, including surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy, can lead to changes within the joints, soft tissues, organs, and connective tissues. These changes can cause pain as well as problems with function and performance of daily activities. Physical therapists can help people learn exercises to regain their strength, range of motion, and endurance after cancer treatment. They can also perform manual therapy to help restore flexibility, improve mobility of the soft tissue and organs, and optimize movement or mechanics of the joints.

Both physical and occupational therapists can treat multiple systems of the body, helping people to improve their balance, coordination, awareness of the position of their body, and posture. They can also help people to reestablish safe, normal walking patterns. Many people who participate in physical and/or occupational therapy programs are able to improve their ability to function and complete the activities that they want to or need to do each day. These treatments are individually chosen to address each person's functional limitations and goals.

Does this type of therapy need to be prescribed by a physician?

At MSK, a physician, physician's assistant (PA), or nurse practitioner (NP) must prescribe physical or occupational therapy at the Sillerman Center for Rehabilitation. Once a referral is placed, a licensed outpatient physical and/or occupational therapist will perform a thorough evaluation to determine the individual's rehabilitation needs and establish a tailored plan of care designed to restore maximal function and quality of life.

What is manual therapy and how is it different from standard physical or occupational therapy?

Manual therapy is, in fact, part of standard physical or occupational therapy. Manual therapy techniques are hands-on treatments that physical and occupational therapists can use to help decrease pain and problems in the muscles, bones, and joints of the body. They include joint mobilization, soft-tissue mobilization, myofascial release, craniosacral therapy, and visceral manipulation, among other techniques. When therapists determine that these techniques are appropriate, they typically use them together with strength training, gait training (which improves walking), postural reeducation (which helps with posture), and endurance training to help individuals achieve their rehabilitation goals.

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guarantee that cancer will not come back in the future. There is also the risk of dying during the surgery, but I have only lost about two percent of my patients during their stay in the hospital.”

He then told her, “Chemotherapy cannot cure these tumors. If I don’t get them out of you, they will kill you. The decision is yours. Though if I take you on as a patient, I’ll take care of you for the rest of your life.”

It didn’t take my mother long to respond, “I want you to operate on me. I’d rather die on the operating table than die a slow and painful death.”

On October 17, 1995, my mother underwent major surgery at MSK. The operation was a success and we knew that God had guided the hands of the surgeon that day. A week later she was back home in Savannah. Each year she returned to MSK for tests, and each year there were no signs of cancer returning.

Without the surgery, she would have died within a year and would not have been able to celebrate her 73rd wedding anniversary with my father before he passed away in 2011 at the age of 98. She would also not have been able to welcome many new family members into this world and spend quality time with them. Today, more than 20 years after her successful surgery at MSK, my mother is a cancer survivor and still so full of life.

On August 10, 2015 — her 97th birthday — she celebrated with a family reunion with her three sons; three daughter-in-laws; nine grandchildren; 15 great grandchildren; and three great-great grandchildren.

My mother’s survival has made everyone in our family realize how precious life is and how quickly it can be taken away from you. We also now have proof that anything can be attained despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles through faith in ourselves, faith in God, and trust in others.

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in Florida; Camp Korey, in Washington state; Double H Ranch, in New York; Flying Horse Farms, in Ohio; North Star Reach, in Michigan; the Painted Turtle, in California; River Roundup Ranch, in Colorado; Victory Junction, in North Carolina; and, of course, the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, in Connecticut.

If you’re interested in any of these programs, visit the websites below:

www.campdream.org

www.firstdescents.org

www.seriousfunnetwork.org

Rising Voices

is a fun and lively singing group just for patients and survivors. Open to all MSK patients, Rising Voices is a free, supportive activity sponsored by the Integrative Medicine Service.

To join, please contact Jackie Konkowski at konkowsj@mskcc.org or call 646-888-0800.

Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC)

RLAC welcomes survivors to participate in programs that encourage healing through education and support.

Please see the online calendar at: www.mskcc.org/livingbeyondcancer.

Visible Ink™

A One-on-One Writing Program for MSK patients

Interested patients will work individually with the guidance, encouragement, and support of a professional writer on a topic and project of their choice. This program is FREE. All levels and writing interests welcome.

For more information or to arrange a writing session, please contact Judith Kelman at 212-535-3985 or kelmanj@mskcc.org.

Memorial Sloan Kettering Blood Donor Program

Help MSK patients by donating blood or platelets to the MSK Blood Donor Program. Both general and directed donations are welcome. Please call for hours and more information.

MSK Blood Donor Room
Schwartz Building Lobby
1250 First Avenue
212-639-7648/212-639-8177

Connections

is an online community for patients and caregivers. It provides a venue for conversations, support, questions, and companionship.

To register, visit: www.mskcc.org/connections.



The Climb

By Laura DiTalia

Laura DiTalia is a temporarily retired stay-at-home mom of two active young boys. She is a survivor of stage I breast cancer. This poem was written as a way to cope with the uncertainty and fear of receiving a new cancer diagnosis.

Hope is like a long and difficult journey
Up a mountain and high into the clouds
The road is full of bumps...unknown territory...surprises at every turn
But as the climb continues and presses on, worries start to drop, one
by one, down Through the clouds and fall softly to the earth.
There is no need for them anymore as they melt away into the ground.
The climb continues but it is now much easier, much lighter...the apex
is within reach.
One more leap of faith is all it takes...



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Patient and Caregiver Volunteer Program

The Patient and Caregiver Volunteer Program connects current patients and caregivers to volunteers who have experienced a similar diagnosis or circumstance related to cancer. If you are a former patient or caregiver of someone who has completed treatment, please consider becoming a Patient or Caregiver Volunteer.

For more information, contact
Maurisha Osi at 212-639-5007 or
patient2patient@mskcc.org.

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