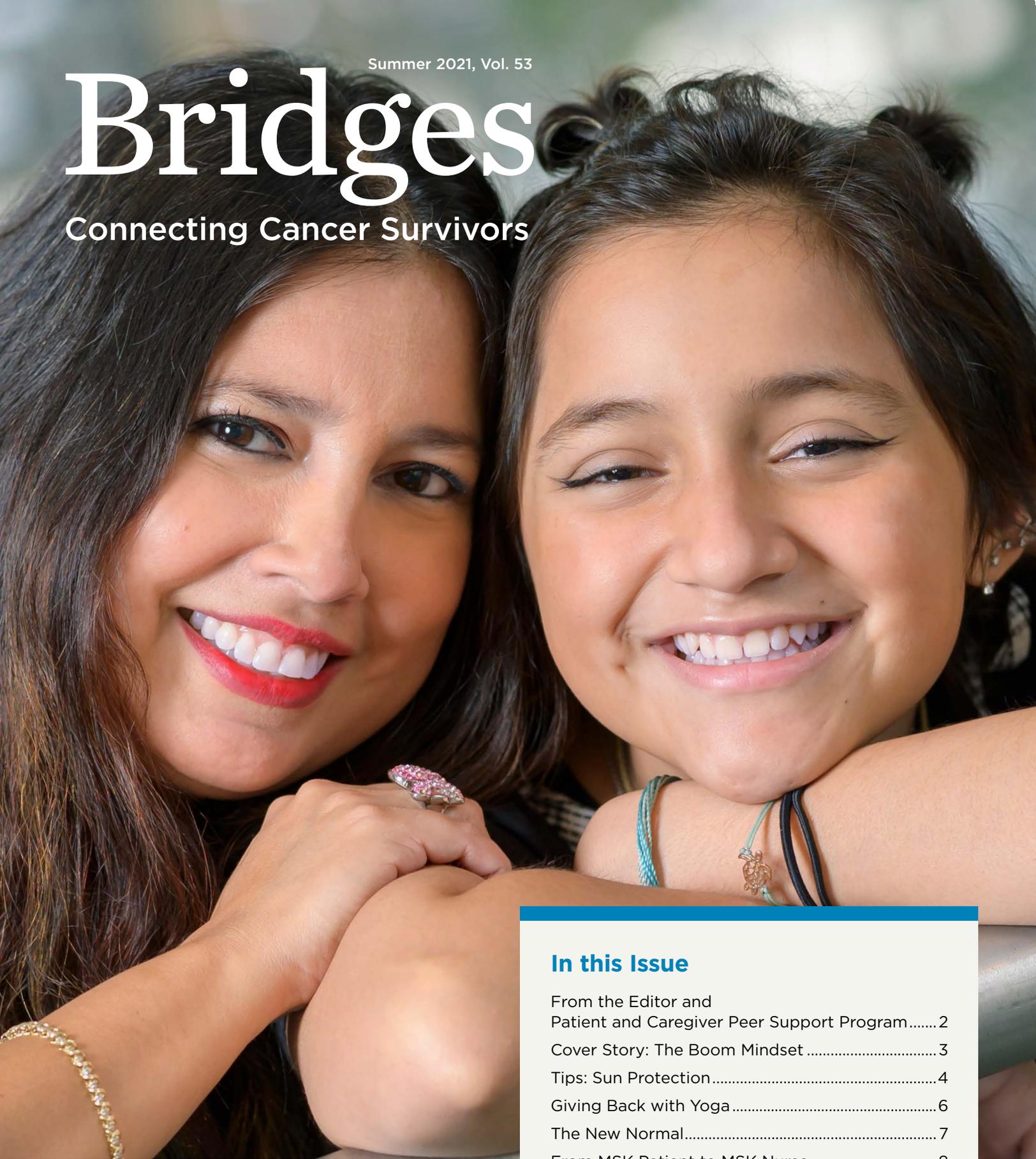


Bridges

Connecting Cancer Survivors



In this Issue

From the Editor and Patient and Caregiver Peer Support Program.....	2
Cover Story: The Boom Mindset	3
Tips: Sun Protection.....	4
Giving Back with Yoga.....	6
The New Normal.....	7
From MSK Patient to MSK Nurse.....	8
Ask the Professional	10
Paying it Forward: A Survivorship Story.....	11
Where Are They Now?.....	12



From the Editor

By Eileen F. Gould



Dear Readers:

This issue of *Bridges* is our 53rd issue and the 13th year of publication of the newsletter. This is also the third time we have published a longer 12-page issue. What started as an idea for a possible volunteer project in 2008 for me has blossomed and grown into an amazing publication and journey, and I am very grateful for the opportunity.

A year ago, at the start of the global pandemic, we wondered if our readership would continue to submit their stories, given all the changes we were forced to make and endure due

to COVID-19. As the world around us changed, would cancer survivorship be at the forefront of people's minds? However, over these last 12 months, we received plenty of submissions – many even discussing the pandemic in relation to their life in cancer survivorship. We also received a lot of very positive feedback from our readers, which is always enlightening. We are pleased that *Bridges* continues to be a resource for both current patients and survivors, even during the pandemic.

Bridges is truly a collaborative effort, and I am so fortunate to work with a fantastic team, so I would like to take this opportunity to recognize them. Alexandria Woodside has been the Managing Editor for over three years, and I am fortunate to work very closely with her on all aspects of the newsletter.

Larissa Regala is the talented and creative designer of the newsletter, and has been so since Day One. Rick DeWitt is the official MSK photographer who

captures the amazing photos of the writers. All of their efforts create our wonderful newsletter each quarter, along with a stellar Advisory Committee comprised of MSK volunteers, staff and clinicians. You can see the full list of the Committee on page 12.

We look forward to many more issues of this publication, sharing amazing patient and caregiver stories, as well as the very informative articles written by MSK clinicians. We look forward to receiving your stories and feedback.

Thank you,

Eileen F. Gould
Patient Editor

If you would like to share your story or receive an email copy of *Bridges*, please visit www.mskcc.org/bridges. *Bridges* is now printed on recycled paper and, as always, is available online.

The Patient and Caregiver Peer Support Program



The Patient and Caregiver Peer Support Program connects patients and their caregivers one-on-one with people who've been through a similar cancer diagnosis, treatment, and/or caregiving experience.

Our trained volunteers share their experiences because they know how helpful that support can be to patients and their caregivers. They listen, talk, and offer confidential support in a non-judgmental atmosphere that only comes from someone who has been through a similar experience.

Speaking with a patient or caregiver volunteer does not take the place of care

from your clinical team, but adds to your support network.

This free service is eligible to all MSK patients and caregivers before, during, and after treatment.

To be connected with a patient or caregiver volunteer, or to become a volunteer* please call 212-639-5007, or email patient2patient@mskcc.org.

For more information, visit our website by scanning the barcode above with your mobile camera, or visit mskcc.org/patient2patient.



***To Become a Volunteer:** If you are interested in becoming a volunteer in this valuable program, you must be a MSK patient and at least one year out of initial diagnosis. Caregivers must no longer be caring for a MSK patient in active treatment.

The Boom Mindset

By Ellen Barrera and Elle Barrera

Ellen is a proud mom to a “1derful” daughter. She’s an HR professional and embraces life each and every day. She loves reality shows and refreshments by the beach!

Elle, aka Boom, because she’s always been a firecracker since she was born, is a grateful survivor and lives life by helping others and is honored in sharing her story. She is an avid tennis player and loves music of all genres.



Ellen – mom to a hero

My 13-year-old daughter was diagnosed last summer in 2019 with ALL (acute lymphoblastic leukemia). It was a battle we weren’t prepared for, but we embraced it. Everything happened so quickly. She was hospitalized and underwent numerous treatments: chemo, immunotherapy, and radiation. Elle’s treatment lasted a little over five months, and then she was in remission and was eligible for a bone marrow transplant. We checked into the hospital for a transplant before the Thanksgiving holiday, and we spent Christmas and almost New Year’s Eve there. But we managed to be discharged the evening of New Year’s Eve to see the ball drop on TV at home. We were sent home with masks, gloves, and surgical gowns. We were confined to our homes and frequent hospital visits.

Elle – a grateful survivor

Despite my recent rocky road, I am thankful for keeping positivity near me. I believe that people are given challenges for a reason, although it was tough. It taught me some valuable lessons in life! I realized over time that without my diagnosis, I wouldn’t be who I am today, and my mom would not have an inspirational reason to write a book about my journey. More than ever, it’s important to keep focus on what you love! For me it’s humor, music, doodling artwork, and keeping close friends and family. I had a wonderful support system - so many cheerleaders. My medical team at MSK was there every step of the way, and of course, my parents. I’m super grateful for this.

Cancer made me stronger, and I love who I am today! Looking back now, I’m able to say hair is only hair. It doesn’t define me.

We avoided crowds and we couldn’t hang out with our loved ones. We had to keep her isolated and away from possible germs that harmed her. We were fanatics with Lysol wipes and sprays at home. It’s bizarre how the whole world joined us in our germophobic habits in March when the pandemic hit. Despite this whole journey, there is a silver lining through it all: the normalcy of wearing masks and not being outside made my daughter feel a little better because she felt like she wasn’t missing much from the world. Not being able to attend school, go to the mall or movies with her friends, or have family over was exactly what everyone was going through. I’m just grateful this journey has given us a new perspective on life.

Still, I’m very happy that finally my hair is growing back! I lost so many things emotionally and physically. But I’m on a road to recovery. Some days are still tougher than others.

A piece of advice that I can share is live a life of love and meaning. During these challenging pandemic times, make the world a better and kinder place. And if you fall, trip, or get pushed down - get right back up and do it again. I kept a blanket close to me to keep me warm and vibed to my favorite songs. Music kept me motivated through my chemo and radiation treatments. A game of UNO also kept me going. Just find an outlet and stay focused, you will get through whatever battle you are faced with in life.

Tips: Sun Protection

By: Anthony Rossi, MD and Britney N. Wilson, MBS

Summertime is here! After months of social distancing and indoor confinement, you're eager to enjoy the warm outdoor weather. Our team has answered these popular questions concerning sun safety after cancer to help you safely enjoy this beautiful season.

What sun safety tips do you recommend for cancer survivors?¹

Although certain cancers may increase your risk for developing skin cancer, and some cancer therapies may increase your skin's sensitivity, we recommend the same safety tips for cancer survivors that we recommend for patients without a history of cancer. Be sure to consult your physician about your medical history to determine whether there are any unique precautions specific to you (e.g., certain medications) that may affect your sensitivity to sunlight.

The following five tips from the American Academy of Dermatology apply to everyone, regardless of cancer history, age, race, or gender:

- **Use sunscreen** that provides broad-spectrum protection, has an SPF of at least 30, and is water-resistant.



Anthony Rossi is a board-certified dermatologist who completed a fellowship in Mohs micrographic surgery and laser/dermatologic surgery. He treats skin cancers such as melanoma, basal cell carcinoma, and squamous cell carcinoma as well as genital malignancies. He also treats benign skin conditions and skin conditions that arise after cancer therapy in pediatric and adult patients. Dr. Rossi has a strong interest in cosmetic dermatology and nonsurgical



approaches to treatment, such as topical therapy, as well as laser and light-based treatments.

Britney N. Wilson is currently a third-year medical student and aspiring dermatologist completing a year-long research fellowship at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center with the Dermatology Service. She has a strong interest in the dermatologic adverse effects that occur as a consequence of chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

- **Seek shade** to reduce the amount of direct sun exposure your skin gets, especially between 10 AM and 2 PM, when the sun rays are the strongest.
- **Dress to protect** by wearing clothing to cover as much skin as possible. Wide-brimmed hats and wrap-around sunglasses are a must. (More on page 5.)
- **Avoid tanning beds and sunlamps** because they emit harmful UVC rays, which can lead to long-term skin damage and may cause skin cancer.
- **Visit your dermatologist** annually for a skin check – and check your own skin regularly (once per month).
- **More frequent dermatology visits**

may be necessary, depending on your risk factors, cancer type, and cancer treatment type.

What clothing should I wear, and are there any brands that are truly SPF?²

Your clothing helps to block harmful UV radiation and is one of the most efficient forms of protection against sun damage and skin cancer. However, not all fabrics and colors provide equal protection. Dark or bright colors provide better protection than lighter shades because they absorb UV rays and prevent the rays from penetrating your skin. The Skin Cancer Foundation (SCF) encourages you to check a fabric's sun safety by holding it up to the light:

if you can see through the fabric, the UV radiation can easily penetrate the fabric and reach your skin. The SCF recommends densely woven fabrics like denim, canvas, wool, or synthetic materials over sheer, thin, or loosely woven cloth.

When shopping, look for the ultraviolet protection factor (UPF), which rates how much UV radiation can pass through the fabric and reach your skin. Look for a UPF of at least 30. Some brands have also been rated by the Skin Cancer Foundation. Some brands to look for include: Coolibar®, UV Skinz®, Fullsand, and Sun50.

Are there any suggestions for protecting my eyes and lips from the sun?^{3,4}

Whenever you are out in the sun, it is important to also protect your eyes by wearing sunglasses. When shopping for sunglasses for outdoor activities, choose a wrap-around pair that blocks 99-100 percent of both UVA and UVB light.

Your lips are exposed to a lot of sunlight, so it's very important that you protect them with a lip product containing an SPF 15 or higher sunscreen. Don't forget to reapply your sun protective lip product every two hours, especially after eating or drinking.

Is lotion or spray sunscreen better?¹

Although the best sunscreen is the one that you will remember to use over and over again, we recommend lotion sunscreen over spray because the current FDA regulations on testing and standardization do not pertain to spray sunscreens. Spray sunscreen may result in inadequate coverage because

it's difficult to gauge when you have used enough sunscreen to cover all sun-exposed areas of the body. If you prefer spray sunscreen, don't forget to rub it in to ensure even coverage.

I'm a person of color and I never burn. Do I still need sunscreen?⁵

Yes, you should still wear sunscreen, even if you have never burned. While it is true that people of color have a lower risk of developing skin cancer than Caucasians, studies show that when people of color develop skin cancer they are often diagnosed later and have a higher mortality rate than Caucasian patients with the same diagnosis.

My sunscreen is water-resistant. Do I still have to reapply?¹

Yes, when using a water-resistant sunscreen, you should reapply after getting out of the water or sweating because sunscreen only provides protection while swimming or sweating up to the time listed on the label. Unfortunately, water-resistant is not synonymous with waterproof. In fact, the FDA has banned sunscreen manufacturers from using misleading terminology like "waterproof" or "sweat-proof." **Water-resistant sunscreen** is effective for up to 40 minutes in water, whereas **very water-resistant sunscreen** is effective for up to 80 minutes in water.

How much sunscreen do I need, and how often should I reapply?^{1,6}

One research study revealed that people only apply 25-50 percent of the recommended amount of sunscreen, meaning that you're most likely not using enough sunscreen. Surprisingly, most adults require approximately

one ounce (the equivalent of one shot glass or two tablespoons) of sunscreen to cover their entire body. Sunscreen should be applied 15 minutes before going outdoors and re-applied every two hours or after swimming or sweating.

Does higher SPF mean I can stay outside in the sun longer?¹

No, higher SPF does not mean you can stay in the sun longer. High SPF sunscreens last the same amount of time as low SPF sunscreens and still require reapplication every two hours and after swimming or sweating, according to the directions on the bottle. High SPF sunscreens block slightly more of the sun's UVB rays, but remember that no sunscreen can block all of the sun's rays.

Does bug spray render the sun protection ineffective, and is one combined product better than two?^{1,7}

No, DEET (N,N-Diethyl-meta-toluamide), a common active ingredient in insect repellent, may cause a reduction in the UV radiation-blocking capabilities of certain sunscreens. According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, studies showed that SPF was reduced by more than 30 percent when certain sunscreen formulations were combined with DEET. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends purchasing and using sunscreen and bug spray products separately. Sunscreen should be applied generously and reapplied every two hours, whereas insect repellent should be used sparingly and reapplied every two to six hours, depending on the concentration.

1. Dermatology TAAo. 2019 American Academy of Dermatology: Sunscreen FAQ. 2019

2. Foundation TSC. Sun-Protective Clothing. 2019.

3. Foundation TSC. 5 Tips for Taking Care of Your Lips. 2020.

4. Foundation TSC. The Sun & Your Eyes. 2019.

5. Dermatology TAAo. Dermatologists provide recommendations for preventing and detecting skin cancer in people of color. 2014.

6. Neale R, Williams G, Green A. Application patterns among participants randomized to daily sunscreen use in a skin cancer prevention trial. Arch Dermatol 2002;138:1319-25.

7. Foundation TSC. Ask the Expert: Which Is Better, a Combination Insect Repellent and Sunscreen or Separate Products? 2019.

Giving Back with Yoga

By Clare Patterson

Clare Patterson, a certified yoga instructor with training in oncology yoga, teaches cancer patients and survivors, both adults and children. She lives on Long Island with her fiancé, two tuxedo cats, and a chihuahua. In her spare time she enjoys jogging, time in nature, and fantasy novels.



One of my favorite things as a child was to spend time in the water - the beach, pool, or Peconic Bay in Eastern Long Island where my family spent most summers. Little did I know that the summer I was to turn ten, my life would change forever; on the last day of vacation as I packed up my bags, I didn't know that the bay waters would never quite be the same. Shortly after returning from vacation, I was diagnosed with stage III rhabdomyosarcoma in the head and neck area. Treated with chemotherapy and radiation under the supervision of my inimitable MSK doctor, I went into remission nine months later.

In my pre-adolescent years, I tried my hardest to return to "normal," selecting a regular summer camp over one for kids with cancer. I endured stares and being poked fun at for my way-ahead-of-its-time pixie haircut, and not being able to keep up with the other kids in sports. Climbing back up the 200 steps from the beach at summer camp, I often found myself lagging behind the other campers and pausing to catch my breath.

As I went through my adolescent and early adult years, I kept with me a belief that I would not make it past the age of 30. I know now I had Survivors Guilt, something not uncommon among childhood cancer survivors. I recklessly switched my major from psychology to theatre during sophomore year at Vassar, and continued to pursue my acting career in New York in my early 20s. One thing I did pick up at Vassar was the practice of yoga. I taught my first class when the teacher did not show up one day, and a dedicated group of us decided to practice in our dorm room. I continued practicing yoga while studying acting at Stella Adler, and continued to take classes as a complement to martial arts practice.

One night more than 15 years post-treatment, sitting in my Brooklyn apartment, my vision suddenly went double. Immediately my mind went to my worst fear - a recurrence. The next morning, I called my long-term follow-up doctor and went in to MSK for an MRI. Thankfully, there was no recurrence, but a rare side effect of radiation treatment that would leave me with partial double-vision. In addition to losing my driver's license and my job as a financial assistant (acting didn't pay the bills), this latent side effect shifted my life in a new direction. I realized that there was no time to

waste in this precious life that has been given to us. One night after work I skipped out on a rehearsal to attend yoga class, and the rest is history.

The practice of yoga has helped me to stay healthy, resilient, and maintain a positive outlook on life as a survivor. Yoga helps me feel grounded and present, both on and off the mat, and has helped mitigate the migraines caused by double vision.

I am so grateful to teach yoga to patients at MSK, and it's a wonderful feeling to be able to give back! When the pandemic began, I was concerned about keeping a connection to my students here at MSK.

However, through our new Integrative Medicine at Home digital membership program, I can continue to provide yoga classes several days a week. Even in these tumultuous times where we can't share the same physical space to practice, it's important to continue to connect online. I'm amazed at how many more patients we've been able to reach through our online service, especially those living far away from the main campus. It's definitely a silver lining of the pandemic.

In some ways, cancer prepared me for COVID-19 - and also for knowing that things never return to the "normal" we expect. But through resilience, creativity, and strength, we develop a "new normal" that is even more vibrant.

Join Integrative Medicine at Home today to try a yoga class with Clare. Membership plans start at \$25 per month and includes access to daily fitness and mind-body wellness classes, including yoga, aerobics, meditation, and more. Visit [MSK.org/AtHome](https://www.msk.org/AtHome) or call 646-888-0800 to learn more.

The New Normal

By Jeannine Baart, MS,LMHC

My story begins with being turned away by one doctor and the next doctor telling my husband to prepare for the worst.

I was diagnosed with late-stage ovarian cancer in 2014. A second doctor said treatment would be a five-hour surgery and chemo. Then I met my doctor at MSK. He looked me over and said, "I think I can save you." Very long debulking surgery would be required (it ended up being 11 hours). As he left the room for me to have a few moments to decide, he said no matter what I decided, if a doctor said the surgery would be about five hours they would kill me. Chilling, since he had no idea I had heard those exact words.

Before I was diagnosed, I started a project that gave my students a chance to write what they wanted to do before they die on a huge piece of paper and I posted them on the wall of my classroom. After I was diagnosed, all I could think of was that I needed to survive to see my sons graduate high school. I saw one graduate in 2018, and my younger son will graduate in 2022. I'm now shooting for their college graduations!

I finished a second master's in Mental Health Counseling, believing that surviving would make me a better teacher and therapist. I received my official license the summer of 2020, and I treat a small number of patients and charge them whatever they can afford.



Jeannine is teaching as an adjunct psychology professor for Westchester Community College, which brings her such joy, and she volunteers as president of the Academic Division of the Westchester County Psychological Association. She teaches water aerobics (even after a hip and ankle replacement) and takes yoga twice a week!

Recently, I sat with my friend, who at 90 is full of amazing strength and wisdom. She understood long before I that I needed to accept myself and embrace what I had. She was right, I am enough; I am kind, thoughtful, dependable and warm. I have a wonderful supportive husband and two teenage sons. I have amazing childhood friends and cousins who love me. I needed to relax and enjoy the life I created: my family, my friends, my teaching, my little world. I had a miracle recovery, but I am happy knowing, "I was one of the sickest patients my doctor ever saw, but always had a positive attitude."

Nothing was the same
Now that her body had betrayed her
It was harder
Harder to be who she wanted to be
Harder to remember
Harder to smile
Harder to walk
Hardest to make peace with it
But to survive she needed to
Work harder to change
Work harder to move on
Work harder to accept
Nothing was the same
now that her body had changed
but it could still be good.
Nothing was the same
Now that her body had betrayed her
It was harder
Harder to be who she wanted to be
Harder to remember
Harder to smile
Harder to walk
Hardest to make peace with it
But to survive she needed to
Work harder to change
Work harder to move on
Work harder to accept
Nothing was the same
now that her body had changed
but it could still be good.



From MSK Patient to MSK Nurse

By Lauren Peyton

Even though time has passed, I can still vividly remember the doctor saying, “You have cancer.”

“Not me,” the almost 15-year-old, excited to start high school, thought. “I am too young.” My parents’ thoughts, “Not her, our only child,” - with doctors reassuring them that cancer was very unlikely - even though my mom had had the same disease at 21.

It was a difficult time for all of us. I had stage III B Hodgkin’s lymphoma and went through an exhausting eight cycles of chemotherapy and six weeks of radiation, all while trying to live a somewhat “normal” teenage life - which was anything but typical, now as I look back on it. However, by April 2002, my treatments were done, and I was excited to get back to this “normalcy” I was craving. By November 2002, I could tell something was not right. The school days were long, and I was extremely weak and tired. The fear of relapse became a reality on January 2, 2003, as I vividly remember the look on my doctor’s face when she said I had a pre-leukemic condition, myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS), which would eventually turn into leukemia.

My only chance for survival was a stem cell transplant. Again, I was isolated from the world I so longed to embrace. I still kept up with my schoolwork, but was completely homeschooled, spending most of my time on the pediatric unit at MSK, three times a week for blood and platelet transfusions while we searched for my miracle. My condition worsened in mid-June 2003, now diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia (AML). I knew we were on the clock for a stem cell transplant donor. In early July 2003, my doctors found the miracle I had been hoping for. An almost perfect stem cell donor match! I was admitted to the hospital on August 3 to begin the transplant process, which was arduous, but finally received my miracle on August 21, 2003, my “second birthday.”

I spent the next year keeping up with my schoolwork from home, and learning to recuperate again, since I was very weak and immunocompromised. I am very blessed to have met the person who saved my life - my Frank, my hero, and now my brother. We are family and I cannot thank him enough for all he has done for me.

Being a survivor has taught me many valuable lessons. Some of these lessons include: never judge a book by its cover, and always be kind - you never know what another person may be going through. I learned, personally, that laughter is the best medicine. Lastly, it taught me to live life to its fullest, with an “you only live once” (or YOLO, as us millennials call it) mentality. I enjoy the small things in life: a conversation with a family member, friend, or stranger, a walk, a nice glass of wine, and I try not to sweat the small things. I rely on my fellow survivors from young adult cancer events and support groups to help me through difficult times. I have found a new appreciation for meditation, being present in the moment, and having a positive and happy outlook. As I continue to face many hardships with the long-term effects my treatment has had on my body, I know all I can do is take each day one at a time and live in the moment.

Because of Frank, I am able to give back to MSK, working as a nurse to help provide care for others as my nurses did for me. My nurses were rock stars: my strength, my confidants, my sideline supporters. If I could change even one life the way my nurses did for me, I consider my work successful. I know what it is like to be on the other side, to be part of the club that no one ever wants to join. Although cancer has taken so much from me, it has also given so much: put me on a career path in life, helped me find my true passion, and allowed me to live life to its fullest every day. I am forever grateful, MSK. Thank you forever and always.

Lauren is from Staten Island, NY and continues to live there today with her fiancé. She has been a nurse at MSK for her entire career, over 11 years thus far. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling, trying new restaurants, dancing, and spending time with all of her family and friends.

Ask the Professional:

Telemedicine

By Eugenie Spiguel, MSN, ANP-BC



Eugenie Spiguel is a certified Adult Nurse Practitioner and a licensed Holistic Nurse Practitioner, who works in Integrative Medicine at MSK.

What is Telemedicine?

Telemedicine is a way for you to see your healthcare provider without having to go into a medical office or hospital. It can be done from the comfort of your own home or other location that works best for you. Telemedicine can be delivered through a variety of platforms and only requires a phone or computer with a good internet or cell phone connection.

When might my provider schedule a telemedicine appointment?

Telemedicine can be beneficial when you or the provider are in different locations, or when you are unable to safely come into the office. Telemedicine appointments can be used for a variety of health-related issues including general wellness, dermatology, mental health, nutrition, and cancer follow-up care.

What can I expect from my telemedicine appointment?

Your telemedicine appointment will be similar to your in-person appointment, but without the commute. MSK only uses secure platforms to connect with your provider, and every precaution is taken to protect your privacy. You will receive the same high-quality care that you have come to expect from your providers.

How can I be prepared for my telemedicine appointment?

Telemedicine visits typically occur via MSK's secure, easy-to-use patient portal, MyMSK. Please check with your provider's office to confirm how to access your telemedicine visit. If you do not have a portal account, be sure to register in advance of the visit. It will only take a few minutes. Also take a moment to check the portal to see if there are any questionnaires to complete in advance of your visit.

Although telemedicine certainly improves the convenience of seeing your providers, you should think of it the same as an in-person appointment. It is ideal to have a quiet, private environment with a good internet connection to allow for the best video and audio quality. Minimize outside distractions and be prepared to give the provider your full attention. Bring paper and pen so that you can take notes if necessary. It's always a good idea to have a list of questions you want to ask your provider. Loved ones can also join in on the telemedicine visit just like they would at an in-person visit. If your loved one cannot be in the same space as you, it may be possible to include them through the telehealth platforms. If you would like to have someone added to a call, let your provider's office know ahead of time so that the best solution can be determined.

To log onto MyMSK, go to my.mskcc.org. Or you can go to MSK's home page, mskcc.org, and click on "MyMSK" at the top right. For help, call your doctor's office or contact the portal help desk at mymask@mskcc.org, or call (646) 227-2593.

Paying it Forward: A Survivorship Story

By Bruce Vapnitsky

Bruce is a native New Yorker currently residing in Westchester county. He enjoys nature and traveling, as well as being home with family. He loves being a grandparent. Hobbies include gardening, and as a recent retiree, finding his way!



When I first found out I had cancer, I clung onto the MSK mantra of “More science, less fear,” which helped me ride the emotional ups and downs. On this journey I truly believe I was not only in God’s hands, as we are all children of God somehow, but I made it to Dr. N’s clinic. From our first visit, my family and I trusted the medical advice and direction.

My splenic lesion started out in 2016 as an indolent condition. I sometimes felt even more frustrated not knowing what would happen, but eventually in February 2020, it mutated to active Lymphoma B cancer. This threw into motion more scans, biopsies, blood tests, and infusions than I at times could take. However, I held steadfast that my early detection, age, overall health, nutritional outlook, support from my family (specifically, my wife), and positive outlook contributed to my cancer prognosis. I am eternally and gratefully indebted that I still have my spleen when other hospitals wanted to remove it. I also urge others in today’s web information age to utilize the MSK patient portal as I did, not only to correspond with your medical team, but to research. We stayed the course, and in July 2020, when my doctor informed

me my tumor was gone, it was time for the “cautiously optimistic” victory march! We now move onto the two-year follow-up journey and, God willing, five-year cancer-free marker.

Cancer for me has been a life-changing experience, and I will never be the same.

My cancer journey instilled in me many important life experiences and lessons. Hope springs eternal, and our positive outlook is part and parcel of rebirth. I immediately divorced myself from asking “why” this happened to me, and instead decided to focus all my energies on defeating my cancer. I committed to coming out of this a better person. A few of my personal commitments were to be more resilient in bouncing back, learn to know what is important and unimportant, be kinder to myself, laugh more often, be more confident and positive in my life, be less judgmental, continue to try to help others and make this world a better place to live in, and to be mindful of my nutrition and exercise to be healthier in fighting cancer.

In my survivorship, I am more mindful and thankful in my daily prayers. When I find myself sliding back into being judgmental, I am able to catch myself sooner and correct accordingly. Although I have committed to exercise, one of the issues I am facing is my energy level. Exercise is not what it used to be, so I am taking it slower than I hoped and, with COVID-19 gym closure, have attempted to walk more. As part of the COVID-19 quarantine, I have also been challenging myself to be more mindful of my nutrition, and here again - some days are better than others. Even writing my story here has been a cathartic experience by helping me put pen to paper reliving my journey.

I feel blessed to be an MSK patient. I am eternally indebted to MSK for saving my life and maintaining a safe environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. The MSK team - from entering to leaving the building - treat you with the utmost care. No person is an island and all my caretakers (family, friends, and MSK professional staff) teamed to help me beat cancer. You cannot truly understand what this experience has been until you walk in someone else’s shoes! My family and I thank MSK for their life-saving talents.

Where Are They Now?

By Jonathan Edelstein

A senior at NYU's Stern School of Business, Jonathan is graduating (hopefully in person, not virtually) with honors in Spring 2021 with a degree in finance and data science, as well as a minor in producing from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. Outside of school, Jonathan loves to sail and is a New York Rangers fan. Jonathan's stickhandling practice up and down the halls of MSKCC kept him connected to the team he loved during treatment.



German, social isolation, and disease. Last time I wrote for *Bridges* in fifth grade, I recounted a reality defined by those three things. That is, I compared my doctors' medical terminology to German, because I couldn't understand either. I was describing my treatment, which was an academic year-long period defined by almost complete social isolation, except for special trips to school and playdates. This reality was caused by a disease, Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia, that would forever change who I was.

Fast forward eleven years from when I wrote that piece and was battling the last ripples of my illness. Today, my reality is, in many ways, very different. I am currently a senior at NYU's Stern School of Business and am excited to graduate this spring (hopefully not virtually) with honors. Next year, I will be moving to Chicago for work. Meanwhile, my treatment is little more than a speck on the rearview mirror. It may inform who I am, but it no longer defines my day-to-day, even if my hip still looks like a crushed ping pong ball.

That being said, our shared reality is unnervingly similar. Despite a decade of maturing, learning, and

living with two pediatrician parents, I often still find myself trying to desperately decode the words of doctors, epidemiologists, and public health experts as they describe how we beat a pandemic we are still very much learning how to fight. While I understand the importance of masks and social distancing, trying to understand the nuances of T-cell immunity and antibody effectiveness often leaves me guessing whether the words I am hearing are, once again, suddenly German. Social distancing is eerily reminiscent of the social isolation I experienced a decade ago, even if those past experiences provide a different approach and perspective. And, finally, this reality is driven by a disease, a virus, a pandemic, and a once-in-a-century event that leaves me asking: where are we now?

While that question is too difficult for me to answer alone, I can say where I am now. I am a thriving college senior excited to graduate and explore new beginnings. I am living in and preparing to enter a new world where even the simplest pleasure of having dinner with family is a distorted, upside-down experience.

Patient Editor

Eileen F. Gould

Managing Editor

Alexandria Woodside

Advisory Committee

Wendy Bonilla

Joanne Candela, ANP, MPH

Kristen Cognetti, NP

Stacie Corcoran, RN, MS

Zana Correa, NP

Lauren DeMarzo, MSHC

James Fetten, MD

Ellen Greenfield

Judith Kelman

Emily McCormack

Nick Medley

Nirupa Raghunathan, MD

Kristie Redfield, LCSW-R

Larissa Regala

Clare Thomas

Seeta Verron, NP

Produced by the

Department of

Marketing & Communications

Bridges is a publication of the Cancer Survivorship Program at MSK.

However, more than a decade ago, that *Stranger-Things*-esque reality was my reality as I communicated with friends virtually and embraced my steadiness throughout tectonic turbulence.

My strength serves me well today, as I, along with everyone else, long for normalcy.

So I ask you: whether you are living in a reality that is eerily similar to a nearly unimaginable past or are slowly adapting to a Zoom-filled world, how are you now?



Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center



Printed on recycled paper.

Interested in sharing
your story or receiving
an email copy?

Please visit

www.mskcc.org/bridges