



## From upside down to the top of the mountain

By Vicky Trenkle

2007 stem cell transplant survivor

I was living in an upside-down world. At least, that's how it seemed when I was diagnosed with cancer. Everything was different. I was learning new medical lingo and did not know the significance of what stage IV meant. My husband was in the same boat, but we quickly adjusted to our new world.

I started treatment close to home. After six months of chemo treatments, my doctor said I needed to have a stem cell transplant and City of Hope was a good place to do that. I had received a second opinion at City of Hope when I first learned about the cancer. Dr. (Ryotaro) Nakamura, my physician at City of Hope, was wonderful with keeping in touch with my original oncologist. City of Hope and Dr. Nakamura became my first choice for the transplant. Everyone I met at City of Hope seemed very kind and caring.

I had the transplant with my sister donating her stem cells. My other sister helped me by coordinating blood and platelet donations. After the transplant, we stayed at Hope Village and loved it. The ambience was wonderful and it felt like the next best thing to home. The family support was a tremendous

help. I have two sons. One was often by my bedside and helped my husband, but our other son left for Afghanistan the week before I was diagnosed. However, I have a huge family and everyone was there for me through telephone calls, visits and cards. They were quite busy because my brother had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at the same time.

For my journey, I also had a very active support group of friends. I had a group of friends from our gym who were instrumental in giving me daily hugs and strength. Because of them I actually looked forward to working out. They also sent many cards to keep my spirits up. I had visitors while in the hospital and it made the time go quickly. I also had a friend that took up donations at the gym to buy a full-page ad in the Relay for Life magazine in my honor, complete with three dozen luminaries! Most importantly, my husband was wonderful enough to help see me through the maze of appointments, medicine and trauma of the cancer experience.

After being in remission for a year, I had a "thank you" party for all who supported me in my time of need. I gave everyone a piece of a puzzle (made from the greeting cards that were sent to me

and said that it represented a piece of the healing for me. Everyone had contributed in some way.

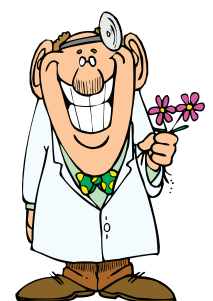
Since being diagnosed, I started a business making stepping stones with recycled material. Tiles, glass, jewelry and most anything that is colorful are purchased at thrift stores for the stepping stones. I sell them at local nurseries, a museum and art shows. I also donate stepping stones to charities and individuals that have cancer. My friends and family have received them as gifts of gratitude.

I have been cancer free for three years and am loving it. We have been able to resume our activities. One of my favorite hobbies is traveling.

When we decided to travel to Japan, our son and I decided to climb Mt. Fuji. He was mentally and physically prepared for it. I was not. At best, I could be

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**"This newsletter is free - and worth it!"**



# Upside down to the top of the mountain

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described as a “casual hiker.” The mountain is over 12,000 feet high. However, I had an idea that sharing my climb just might give others ideas on what they could achieve after cancer.

Our goal was to reach the summit at sunrise. We started our climb at 1 p.m. with short rests along the way. The weather was quite warm starting out, but we needed to carry water and cold weather gear (about 30 pounds). We knew it could be raining or freezing as we neared the top. We quit for the night at 10:30 p.m. and slept in a building that looked like a dormitory without walls, along with 50 other people. I was exhausted, but found I could not sleep wondering if I could make it all the way. About 2:30 a.m. we started the second part of our journey.

The trail was crowded now but looked beautiful as we saw the trail of lights headed up the hill. I was secretly happy it was crowded because I was able to go slowly. We did make it to the top before sunrise. We were on top of the mountain at 4:30 a.m.! Many take the journey and are not fortunate enough to see the sunrise because the mountain top is often hidden with fog, rain or snow. We were quite lucky because

we actually did see the sun, a most glorious sunrise!

All the way up, I thought about all the people I had told I was going to do the hike. I thought about my dad and brother who had recently lost their lives to cancer and all the other people that I have known with the same situation. Even though I had all these thoughts, I know I would have stopped hiking and given up had my son not been there to encourage me. I kept telling him I was finished and refused to go further, but he would not take no for an answer.

Before embarking on the climb, I happened to meet a couple in Japan who were worried about a friend currently undergoing a transplant at City of Hope. She said she was glad to meet me because their friend was depressed since they thought their traveling days were over. She e-mailed them to tell them about me. After I came off the mountain, she was very excited for me and said she would be telling them about my climb to the top.

A friend told me reaching the summit would be “like touching the face of God.” That is truly the feeling that ran through my mind and body and I feel indeed I have come from upside down to the top of the mountain.

## Day by Day

*By Christina St. Peter  
gynecological cancer patient*

I found something inside today  
I thought that I had thrown away  
Those feelings I'd locked deep inside  
Feelings I was taught to hide  
Came boiling up into my thought  
I felt as on a sinking boat  
All that crap locked in my heart  
Today I've found a fresh new start  
These feelings now I must let go  
If no one else myself to show  
That deep inside I AM OKAY  
I'm learning that DAY BY DAY

## Where in the world are you?

Send us your adventures during or after treatment.



*"Top of the Mountain" — Sunrise view from Mt. Fuji*



*Vicky Trenkle and her son Sam Ceballos at the Top of Mt. Fuji*

*The man who smiles when things go wrong has thought of someone else he can blame it on. — Robert Bloch*

# Thank you to Child Life Services!

By Elsie Kisbi and family

2010 stem cell transplant survivor

As my upcoming one year post stem cell transplant approaches, I am constantly reminded how fortunate my family is for small miracles. One of which was the opportunity that our 8-year old daughter Kylie had in meeting with Jo Ann Namm, Child Life manager at City of Hope.

Experiencing the diagnosis, treatment and out/inpatient stays at the hospital for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma was challenging for my husband and me, but for our daughter, it was daunting. She is a brave, smart and compassionate second grader, but nonetheless she is a little girl. Her father and I tried as best as we could to prepare her, however, as a patient and a caregiver, we were not prepared or trained to anticipate all her needs.

It was a blessing, when one of our nurses at City of Hope encouraged me to reach out to Jo Ann during my inpatient stay. Our meeting and the subsequent meeting and "play-date" she had with Kylie made a world of difference. Jo Ann's ability to relate to her, sharing information about

my disease, asking and clarifying questions she had, and allaying her fears (e.g., that cancer was not contagious), truly helped her process the anxiety she was experiencing. Most importantly, as small as it may seem, she will never forget the time she spent with Jo Ann in developing her "Communication Box." The box allowed Kylie and me to share information "just between us" during my isolation. I believe it also gave her a sense of control. Despite our opportunity to speak on the phone nightly and to "Skype" with one another, the "gift exchange" of notes, artwork, etc., passed along through the box provided her with an outlet to privately share her thoughts with me.

Kylie was so moved by her experience, that on her own, she decided to ask in lieu of gifts for herself (we were celebrating her First Communion) that gift cards to Michael's Craft store be given for other children like her, future Child Life program participants.

Many thanks for the resource you provided to our family, Jo Ann. We hope that many other families are touched by your knowledge and kindness as we were.

## New program offered to children who have parents with cancer

New to City of Hope patients is the "CLIMB" (Children's Lives Include Moments of Bravery) program.

This free program will include education and support for children who have parents with cancer. Using group discussion, activities and arts and crafts children will learn:

- How to identify and express their feelings (e.g., anger, anxiety, fear)
- Coping strategies
- About cancer, treatment options and side effects
- They are not alone
- That cancer is not their fault

Parents will learn healthy ways to help their children cope with a cancer diagnosis in their family.

For more information, contact Jo Ann Namm, Child Life manager at 626-256-4673, ext. 64513.



**"You have many weight-loss options: gastric bypass, donut shop bypass, pizza parlor bypass, buffet bypass..."**

*I've always thought that a big laugh is a really loud noise from the soul saying, "Ain't that the truth." — Quincy Jones*

# Our Journey

*By Nicole Parhizgari  
12 year old daughter of Javad Parhizgari  
2010 gastric cancer survivor*

First came the signs,  
Then came the news,  
Then came the shock,  
And then suddenly ... time to choose.

To choose to keep fighting,  
To choose life over death,  
Or to simply give up,  
To take your final last breath.

But surely you knew,  
That the only option was to fight,  
For your family and your friends,  
So you could hug your children tight.

I knew you were worried,  
and I knew you were scared,  
For no one could accept cancer  
with a smile,  
But you marched bravely into  
City of Hope,  
Even if you knew you were going to  
be there a while.

The first few months were  
almost like a blur,  
Just hoping everything would  
fall into place,

Will all the stress, anxiety  
and outcomes,  
God truly blessed us with his grace.

He took his healing hand,  
And he placed it upon you,  
For he gave you a second chance,  
Because he knew  
you had dreams to pursue.

Your dreams of our future,  
Of our years ahead,  
Of us not being rotten,  
But wonderful people instead.

And dad, there's no worry,  
Because of you our hearts are pure,  
Because of this experience,  
We'll grow up right for sure.

I know it takes a long time,  
For this healing process to end,  
But because of the Lord our God,  
We'll get the result we intend.

The result of no more cancer,  
No more sickness or pain,  
And after this, we'll realize,  
All the good things we've gained.

And no matter what happens,  
We know you'll be all right,

Because you have support all around,  
And your future is bright.

So let us thank the Lord,  
For this wonderful gift  
of a second chance,  
And we know you are already healed,  
For the Lord promised us in advance.

Never let anything hold you back,  
For life is too short  
to worry about tomorrow,  
Enjoy life as it is,  
And never be filled with sorrow.

You are blessed,  
With people  
who love and care about you,  
Never regret a thing in your life,  
For thanking is all you can do.

I know that  
you are sick on the outside,  
But inside you're healthy and strong,  
Promise me that you'll never  
stop fighting,  
Whenever things start to go wrong.

As a new year begins,  
Think of only good things,  
For this year will be filled,  
With good results that God brings.

## Do you have a story to share?

Every patient's cancer experience is different, each is unique. While some experiences are long, others are short. We all have something to share.

We are looking for patients who would like to share their experience in future newsletter publications. We want to hear from you!

You don't need to be a writer to share your cancer experience — we could interview you!

If you would like to contribute by sharing your story, poem or artwork contact **Becky Andrews**, patient resource coordinator, at **626-301-8221** or by email at [patientnewsletter@coh.org](mailto:patientnewsletter@coh.org).

## Pandora's Box of Cancer

*By Don Winslow  
2003 prostate cancer survivor*

With cancer comes your own personal Pandora's Box,  
Full of pain, full of grief, and designed by Zeus just for you.

Radiation, Chemo, Anxiety and Depression fly out of that box,  
Trying to conquer you, trying to overwhelm you.

But keep in mind, just read the whole fable again,  
Zeus was not totally heartless, he gives you a fighting chance.

Look deep down, way at the bottom of the box.  
You'll find something there that can, and will, help you heal.  
It's invisible, it's intangible — and it's called HOPE!

# LIFE LESSONS LEARNED

By Bill Matteson

2003 bone marrow transplant patient

During the last seven years since my bone marrow transplant, I've learned a lot about health and life, and, in the interest of possibly giving others a "head start," I'm going to list what I consider to be the "Top Ten" Life Lessons here:

## 1. Take life seriously

Life is a one-time trip. Take a minute to consider what you're doing right and what you're doing wrong. Whatever you're doing wrong – change it! If you're not eating healthy – change your diet. If you're not living where you want to live – move! If you can't stand going to work – find a job you like!

## 2. Don't take life too seriously — it'll make you sick

Worry and anxiety, or "all work and no play" not only make Jack a dull boy, but more than likely, it'll make Jack (or you) sick in the process. I wear a Mickey Mouse watch (and I'm old) to remind me not to take life too seriously.

## 3. Keep priorities straight

Health and family (not necessarily in that order) come first, then everything else. We're not going to lie on our deathbed saying, "I wish I would have worked more." I believe Eleanor Roosevelt said that.

## 4. Let life rule your work, don't let work rule your life

Live where and how you want to live, and work around it, versus taking a job for the most money, and living where and how you must. Many of us simply take advantage of opportunities that are presented to us, versus having a plan and accepting only those opportunities that fit the plan. When we take less than perfect jobs because they pay more, we're greedy and sacrifice a certain amount of happiness for status.

More than likely, if you have your priorities straight and have really thought it out (this might take some creativity), you can do both – live where you want to live and have a great job. The key is to really document your financial status — most of us don't do this; we just assume we can't change (or we aren't willing to adjust). In my case, I moved to Sedona, Ariz., and started a consulting company.

## 5. You find out who your real friends are when you get sick

When you can't provide anything for certain for your business colleagues, many of whom you thought were true friends disappear. Even more interesting, many whom you thought were strictly business, care about you. They show their personal side and come through for you.

## 6. Use what you've learned to help others

When you successfully overcome (or while overcoming) your disease, you've learned a lot about treatment, medication and side effects as well as developed certain "tricks and shortcuts." When you share this knowledge, it helps others and makes you feel good. In fact, it actually helps both of you.

## 7. As your loved ones take care of you, take care of them

When family and/or other caregivers take care of you, their stress over you can eventually make them sick. It's a heavy load to which they may not be accustomed. When possible, you have to consider their needs and make them take care of themselves. Make them realize that if they get sick, it hurts both of you.

## 8. Physician, heal thyself

While your doctors review your records and take care of you to the best of their ability, they only see you sporadically, especially when you're in long-term outpatient recovery. Only you are aware of yourself 24/7 – as you realize changes that occur, get information to your doctor right away. Early detection is the best cure.

## 9. Permit yourself dreams and goals, but don't ignore what you already have

It's good to have a "bucket list," a list of things you still desire to have and do (Own a boat? Write a novel? Travel to Europe? Go to your college homecoming game, etc.). Goals keep you thinking about the future and drive you on. However, you already have things that are important to you, and all too often we ignore them because they've become part of our routine (family that you love, a garden you have, the weekly card game with friends, etc.). Take a minute to "smell these roses" and appreciate what you already have in a new light.

## 10. Life is a game — play it

As we get older, the time we have for experimentation decreases. Extend yourself and enjoy new experiences along with the old. Be creative and find new endeavors so each day provides new challenges and enjoyments. Waking up each day then becomes an even more meaningful occasion.

I think I'll end by saying that I figured out something that would have made my life a whole lot easier. If they could have microwaved my bone marrow transplant, instead of healing for two years, I could have done it in a fraction of the time. Eventually, they'll come up with something like this – I'm sure they're working on it...

Straight ahead ...

Bill Matteson's valiant battle against cancer came to an end on November 9, 2010. Bill's perpetual humor, relentless optimism and appreciation for every moment of life made him an extraordinary friend and human being. He was a dedicated, charter member of the Patient and Family Advisory Council. Bill's insights and writings as a contributing editor of *High Hopes* will be greatly missed.

# What's New

## in the Sheri & Les Biller Patient and Family Resource Center

### Join the Hope Network Peer Support Program

Hope Network is now recruiting breast cancer patients and caregivers who can provide support, hope and understanding based on their experiences.

For information, please call the Biller Patient and Family Resource Center, 626-256-4673, ext. 32273 (3CARE) or e-mail [hopenetwork@coh.org](mailto:hopenetwork@coh.org).

### Art Therapy for Patients and Caregivers - Six-week Series

Discover your inner artist and express yourself through the creative process of art. Explore drawing, collage, crafts and more. No previous art experience necessary.

- Offered Tuesdays, 1:30 to 3 p.m.

Preregistration is required as space is limited.

For more information or to register, call 626-256-HOPE (4673), ext. 3CARE (32273).

### Hands-on-Harps Upcoming Performances

Patients, caregivers and staff are welcome to join this unique fee music series where outstanding professional musicians perform Celtic, folk and world music on harps and acoustic instruments.

- Tuesdays, February 1 and March 1, 6:30 to 8 p.m. — Dr. Alfredo Rolando Ortiz

Performances are held in the main lobby of City of Hope Helford Clinical Research Hospital.

For more information, call 626-256-HOPE (4673), ext. 3CARE (32273).

### Music Therapy for Patients and Caregivers

Nourish your mind, body and soul with the healing power of music. Patients and caregivers can explore instruments, create music or just come and listen!

Offered twice per month Thursdays, 2:30 to 4 p.m.

Preregistration is required as space is limited.

For more information or to register, call 626-256-HOPE (4673), ext. 3CARE (32273).

### Children's Lives Include Moments of Bravery "CLIMB"

Education and support for children who have parents with cancer. Using group discussion, activities, arts and crafts children learn how to identify and express feelings and learn coping strategies. Parents will learn healthy ways to help their children cope with a cancer diagnosis in their family.

Preregistration is required. For more information or to register, call 626-256-HOPE (4673), ext. 64513



**"If hopping burns more calories than walking, and it helps you eat more salad, then OK, I approve of the Bunny Suit Diet."**

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