



## STORIES OF HOPE & HEALING

### Survivor Story: Meet Jackie



#### My Diagnosis and Treatment

In 2008, I became ill with what seemed like a cold that would not go away. My illness progressed to pneumonia and flu-like symptoms. I ended up in the hospital to remove built up fluid around my heart. After the surgery,

I was in the ICU for three weeks, which is where stage IV anaplastic large cell lymphoma (ALCL) was discovered in my lungs.

I was still sedated when I first received chemotherapy and did not have the opportunity to make important choices about my treatment, fertility or anything else. My treatment included six cycles of chemotherapy over a five-month period. Right before my final treatment, my doctor cleared me for a 30th birthday celebration I had planned in Puerto Rico.

I would like to say that after my final treatment in 2008, I was embarking on a new beginning, but unfortunately, that was not the case. As too many of us know, cancer is a thief that hides and strikes when we least expect it, and my story is no different. Over the last 12 years, I fought lymphoma three more times. In total, my body has endured six cycles of aggressive chemotherapy treatment, two of which were preparative regimens for stem cell transplants. Being a two-time stem cell transplant survivor takes on a whole new meaning.

#### My Support During Treatment and Recovery

At the beginning, I was paired with Dr. Silpa Reddy, an oncologist with Atlanta Cancer Care (ACC), and I feel so lucky to be her patient! She referred me to Dr. Lawrence Morris at the Blood and Marrow Transplant Group of Georgia (BMTGA) to begin my life-saving transplant process. Both ACC and BMTGA were helpful in recommending me to other resources such as the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. My own research led me to many resources and opportunities for young adult survivors, including the Lymphoma Research Foundation, Project Koru and First Descents.

#### Support and Resources That Kept Me Going

As my energy returned and my health improved, I participated in survivor retreats such as Northside's Camp Hope. I joined Northside Hospital's Network of Hope and other support/outreach organizations like Young Women Crush Cancer.

Additionally, through Northside, I sought therapy, learned about nutrition and meditation, and began gentle yoga classes with the Cancer Support Community Atlanta. Initially, I avoided processing many things and strictly focused on my physical wellbeing, but over time I started the work of psychological and emotional healing. What was most helpful for me was my faith—belief in God—and the support of my family and friends. They were and continue to be an integral part of my treatment and recovery, especially my caregiver Mom and donor brother!

#### Fast Forward to Today

My last treatment was in December of 2014. I am blessed to feel and look as healthy as I do after what I have been through, and I am thrilled to share that I am currently doing well—with no continued medications or evidence of disease!

#### My Advice for Navigating Treatment and Journey to Recovery

- Allow others to help, but also set healthy boundaries.
- Find someone trustworthy to research, advocate and be there for you when you lack the energy, motivation or the ability to do so.
- Set achievable goals and 'plan your happy.' It is so easy to get caught in the endless web of cancer care and healing along your journey.
- Be intentional about staying connected in whatever way that makes sense for you. You do not want to look up one day and find yourself completely isolated (cancer will do this if we let it).
- Ensure that your team of physicians and specialists are a good fit for you. While it is not always possible to take the time at the beginning, try to seek a second opinion or inquire about another recommended doctor—especially if you are dissatisfied with your care.
- Exert every effort to position yourself for success or enlist someone to do it for you so that you can focus your energy on the business of healing!

#### Closing Thoughts

It is not fair that any of us must suffer through cancer diagnoses and treatments. However, I do believe that we survivors can make the journey a meaningful one by adopting a realistic and optimistic point of view, being intentional and filling our lives with pockets of joy and our favorite things. This way, no matter what the outcome, cancer cannot win. Whatever you dreamed before cancer, let it manifest despite cancer, and you will have triumphed. Battles win the war. Be well my fellow survivors. I am so glad that you are receiving topnotch care at Northside Hospital, a place I once called home.