

PARADE

Presents

Inspiration

SEPTEMBER 14, 2008



I'm Just
Getting
STARTED!

Living Your Life
With Cancer



Don't Be Scared
Of Chemo:
7 Ways To Cope

Newest Breakthroughs
In Breast Cancer



Living Your
Life with
Cancer:

'There's No Time To Be Sick!'

By Sally Abrahms

Thanks to earlier detection, more targeted treatments, and less-toxic chemotherapy, many cancer patients are able to stay healthy and active for years. "People can and do live prosperous and fruitful lives with cancer," says Dr. Ann Partridge, an oncologist at Boston's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. That's critical, when you realize that more than 10.8 million Americans have cancer and that about 1.4 million more are expected to be diagnosed this year. Meet three people who are moving forward with their lives in ways that can inspire us all.

Christina Gianoplus, 38 WILMINGTON, N.C.

This past New Year's Eve, Christina Gianoplus went to the emergency room with what she thought was a severe bladder infection. It turned out that the 38-year-old Wilmington, N.C., mother of four (ages 13, 10, 5, and 2) had Stage IV colorectal cancer that had spread to her liver.

"I was completely shocked," says Gianoplus. Only 10 percent of colorectal patients are under age 50, and she had no risk factors. "But I had a choice: to view my cancer as a death sentence or to face adversity head on," she says. After surgery that included a temporary colostomy, Gianoplus has needed chemotherapy along with a drug that cuts

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off the blood supply to her cancerous tumors. Every other week, she spends three hours traveling to the UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center in Chapel Hill, which takes her away from her kids for an overnight stay. Fortunately, her doctor says the tumors are shrinking.

Gianoplus is passionate about teaching young



Christina
Gianoplus with
her daughter,
Alena

moms about the symptoms of colon cancer and showing them that getting treatment doesn't always mean one must look like a "typical" cancer patient. It's possible to have a full head of hair and look healthy despite cancer therapies.

Last June, Gianoplus organized a community fundraiser for cancer, and she talks informally to people about prevention. "I'm saving my energy to fight the disease. When—not if—my treatment is over, I'm going to raise awareness even more. I'm just getting started!"

Cynthia Salsman, 43
BOSTON, MASS.

At age 35, Cynthia Salsman had no college degree, had just finished alcohol rehab, and worked as a package handler. "I was floundering with no real goals, stuck in dead-end, menial jobs and going nowhere," she says.

Then she was diagnosed with an aggressive inflammatory breast cancer. Since October 2001, Salsman has undergone a mastectomy, a bone-marrow



Cynthia Salsman with her parents, Helen and Richard

'I don't dwell on it and let it define me. I have things to do.'

So, in 2005, she earned an associate's degree in drug and alcohol rehabilitation counseling. Today, she's a part-time counselor with a bachelor's in psychology and is enrolled in a master's program in social work.

"School has been a great motivator, because it has helped me to not focus on my cancer," she says. Not that she could forget. There are the four pills she takes every morning and the weekly intravenous treatment at Boston's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, as well as monthly checkups. Every eight weeks, when she has body scans, Salsman worries that the cancer might be worse. "But I don't dwell on it and won't let cancer define me," she says. "I have things to do. There's no time to be sick!"

Robert O'Connor, 56
CHICAGO, ILL.

Robert O'Connor has kidney cancer, which has brought on skull, rib, lung, adrenal gland, and neck tumors, but he says he has reasons to be "an eternal optimist." The senior manager for an international electronics company, O'Connor has family members to look to—and take inspi-


ration from. He believes his efforts may one day help others.

transplant, and countless rounds of chemotherapy and radiation to treat her cancer. Incredibly, Salsman, now 43, believes that "cancer has changed my life for the positive. I realized life is really short, and I better start doing something with it!"

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"I've watched my father battle and deal with esophageal and colon cancer for over 20 years, and my daughter is a six-year survivor of Hodgkin's disease," says the 56-year-old Chicagoan. "I'm confident doctors will come up with something." Diagnosed in March 2005, O'Connor is counting on breakthrough drug discoveries and has participated in four clinical trials—including one going on now—at Loyola University Medical Center and the University of Chicago Medical Center.

"I've joked to my oncologist, 'Consider me your crash-test dummy. If you've got a trial, I'm in.' It's important to participate in clinical trials, but the number of people who do is very small. If I lose my battle," says the husband and father of two, "the time and effort will help someone else down the road." 



Robert O'Connor with his wife, Nancy, and daughter, Megan