And Then There Were Three...

Anna Stoessinger, who had her stomach and part of her esophagus removed to treat gastric cancer, has beaten the odds in more ways than one.

June 17, 2019 By Anna Stoessinger

For Dr. A., without whom I would not have made it

The title of this section of the magazine makes it sound like cancer might be a harmless sidekick, a casual shrug of the shoulder. “Well, that’s just life with cancer,” I imagine someone saying after meeting your cancer at a cocktail party. But once you have it, cancer stays with you—and the people you love—forever.

In 2011, at age 36, I was diagnosed with gastric cancer. Suddenly, nothing mattered but my health—and being with the people I loved. My husband and I set about the difficult work of making sure I lived. I underwent a total gastrectomy (complete stomach removal) and partial removal of my esophagus and finished six cycles of chemotherapy. I lost most of my body weight and relearned how to eat. Even though I am “cured,” I still experience chronic nausea and (often daily) vomiting, pain, anemia and malnutrition.

Despite this, I still love to eat. And I will still travel irrationally far distances to procure, for example, the perfect linzer cookie or Garrotxa, the sublime Catalan goat’s milk cheese.

When I was newly diagnosed, my fear was omnipotent; it controlled everything. It nearly stopped my heart to learn I might only live another three years; it nearly killed me waiting for test results to find out whether I’d live or die.

But these days, cancer takes on different forms—gratitude, fatigue, disbelief, perspective—and this is why: In 2016, the same year I was declared “cured,” I gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

My doctors had told me that my treatment would make having a child impossible.

But we found a fertility doctor who guided us, and I spent months getting blood drawn two to three times a week. Twice, I gave myself injections to trigger ovulation. The second one worked. I got pregnant, and eight months later, Henry was born.

So these days, when I think of “life with cancer,” I think about what would have happened if I hadn’t met this disease, the one I punched square in the face, the one that took me to my knees,

the one that still plagues me with (often intense) discomfort. I think of it when my almost 3-year-old burrows his head under my arm and I feel his little body breathing in sync with mine, or hear his uncontrollable laughter when my husband holds him upside down, or give myself completely to the folds of my husband's arms as he holds Henry and me and kisses us both, over and over and over. I think of my disease every single time Henry asks the toddler's defining question: "Why?" And that is because I've been given the gift of being here to respond to him, even when I don't know the answer.

To read about new developments in gastric cancer treatments, click here; to read about steps you can take to preserve your fertility if you have been diagnosed with cancer, click here.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/three-anna-stoessinger