Two Years Cancer-Free — Christy Jefremow's Story

The first thing the surgeon said when I came out of surgery was that "uterine cancer saved [my] life."

January 15, 2019 By Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation

Written by Christy Jefremow, cancer survivor, advocate, marathoner, wife and mom

In 2018, William Raveis Real Estate raised an incredible $552,000 for cancer research. They have been a staunch supporter of Damon Runyon, hosting several multi-state fundraising events. At the annual Raveis Ride + Walk, held September 30, 2018, at Calf Pasture Beach in Norwalk, Connecticut, Christy Jefremow bravely shared her story. Here are excerpts from her speech.

My name is Christy Jefremow. In June 2016, I was healthy, fit, and motivated as I began training for my 12th marathon. I was pretty excited to be embarking on this adventure — I was always chasing my best time and I felt like I had a lot more marathons in me! As I began my training regimen, I felt a bit more tired than usual, and thought perhaps that my iron levels were low (which I had experienced before) and is common in long distance runners. I kept my eye on the finish line, but I began to experience light and unusual spotting for two weeks after my period, and decided to make an appointment with my OB-GYN. This doctor visit became a life-changing event for me.

At age 48, I was diagnosed with not one but two cancers — Stage 1 Uterine and Stage 3 Primary Peritoneal Clear Cell Carcinoma (PPC). My OB-GYN conducted a uterine biopsy that diagnosed the uterine cancer, and a CT scan revealed that I had two additional tumors — one behind my rectum and one fused to my rectoid sigmoid junction.

I was in complete shock because I was feeling relatively healthy, so I thought they must be talking about someone else! I did not feel sick. I had been eating organic for 15 years, was an avid runner AND had just received a triple-A rating from my life insurance company. My agent told me that I was "the healthiest a person could be."

Reality set in, and more tests had to be done. Due to my diagnosis of two primary cancers, my doctors also recommended genetic testing. This testing revealed I also had Lynch Syndrome, an inherited condition of mismatched repair gene mutations that cause cells to convert faster to cancer than someone without the syndrome, which puts me at a higher risk for more cancers and recurrence of PPC.

My doctors advised me as to what my treatment options were. But, ultimately, the decision was mine to make. I immediately scheduled surgery and was treated at Smilow Cancer Hospital at Yale New Haven. I underwent a full hysterectomy including removal of uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes and omentum. My surgeons also had to remove my rectum and sever my colon at the rectoid sigmoid junction resulting in having an ostomy pouch for five months. The first thing the surgeon told my husband when I came out of surgery was that "uterine cancer saved [my] life" since PPC is so aggressive it has no symptoms, it just fills your abdomen with tumors and kills you. She further stated that I "would have been dead in two years." I began chemotherapy, after the first three of six rounds of treatment, my oncologist recommended that I see a radiologist for a consultation.

Since PPC is highly aggressive, the goal was to see if radiation would work in conjunction with my chemotherapy treatment. The radiologist recommended 25 rounds of radiation even though she could find "no shred of evidence that radiation would work" and all she could guarantee was "permanent colon damage and probably the ostomy bag for life." I was brought to tears, declined and walked out. I always felt that I needed chemo due to the nature of the type of cancer that I had. I was aware of how horrible the reaction to it would be, as I have had a few friends that have gone through it. Radiation scared me, I can't explain it, but my gut instinct was not to do it. This instinct was correct as six months later a study came out proving that radiation does not work for the primary peritoneal cancer.

I finished my remaining three rounds of chemotherapy after which I was declared cancer-free. In total, I had six rounds of chemotherapy in span of five months. On November 9, 2018, I will be two years cancer-free! My doctors tell me that if the primary peritoneal cancer does not recur before then, the chances of it coming back significantly drop.

Cutting-edge procedures and medicine, innovative scientists and compassionate caregivers were the key to my treatment.

I am indebted to Bill Raveis for facilitating my introduction to Damon Runyon Cancer Research Foundation and helping to guide me to the best treatment facilities and the best doctors for Lynch Syndrome cancers. These doctors saved my life. I was even downgraded by them from Stage 3 PPC to Stage 1!

Due to my Lynch Syndrome diagnosis, I am currently being monitored for nine other cancers including recurrence of PPC.

A close friend of mine who is a cancer survivor told me, "Cancer can be a gift." As horrible as it has been, it has been more amazing to see and hear from people I haven't heard from in years. It has strengthened the bond my husband and I share. I no longer worry about the little things in life and feel so fortunate that I have been given a second chance.

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