Your Voices of Hope are ready to tell their American Cancer Society Story. Submit your request to pavoh@cancer.org to coordinate a date and time.
**Description:**

**Voices of Hope: Profiles of Courage** is a division-wide survivorship initiative, involving the selection of 16 “Voices” from regions across the state of Pennsylvania. These survivors and caregivers show an outstanding commitment to the fight against cancer and represent Relay For Life and the American Cancer Society publicly for a period of one year. The survivors and caregivers are selected for their ability to inspire hope and their courage and determination to fight back against cancer. This effort has three primary goals:

- To identify cancer survivors with exemplary involvement in the Relay For Life from across the state;
- To broaden the reach, effectiveness, and outreach of Survivorship before, during and after the event; and,
- To develop a broad and diverse group of Relay survivor spokespersons.

**Coordination:**

On the division level the initiative is coordinated by a Voices of Hope Workgroup, which is made up of five volunteers from Relays across Pennsylvania and led by the Relay For Life Department and supported by representative from the Marketing and Communications Department and Cancer Control Department. Workgroup members are responsible for local coordination of speaking opportunities with a term of 1–2 years.
Anticipated activities:

Sixteen Survivors and caregivers have been identified to serve as voices for 2010-2011. Expectations differ from person to person based on their abilities and interests to speak in public and be involved beyond the local level.

A variety of activities will be planned for implementation on the regional and state levels, including:

Voices of Hope Regional/Local volunteer opportunities may include, but not limited to:

1. Publicly tell their story and how they benefited from the American Cancer Society
2. Serve as honorary chairs for their local Relay For Life
3. Speak at regional trainings, conferences, kickoffs, rallies, etc.
4. Help recruit survivors to attend local Relays
5. Be interviewed by media for print articles and/or television
6. Help to implement activities centered around the National Survivor Involvement HOPE Model

Voices of Hope Division activities include:

1. Attend Voices of Hope training at Relay Leadership Summit, October 8-9, 2010, Lancaster, to help each individual develop a concise story presentation encompassing the Society’s mission.
2. Involve all Voices in a focus group to help determine survivor involvement and recruitment strategies.
3. Exhibit of these 16 individuals’ pictures and stories for use at Relay Leadership Summit, possibly region trainings, and other locations upon request.
4. Develop media and promotional package made up of individual news release based on their story and a picture.
5. Develop a booklet that highlights all honorees.
6. Voices of Hope Workgroup to explore other possible ways of involving these individuals throughout the year and to look towards next year’s expansion of the initiative.
Need an Inspirational Speaker?
Just ask for a Voice of Hope

Your American Cancer Society Voices of Hope are a group of select Survivor and caregiver spokespersons who are ready and willing to tell their American Cancer Society story. These speakers are looking to share encouragement, create passion and generate excitement for Relay and the many volunteer opportunities available to the public. These Survivors and caregivers can be utilized in a variety of ways to encourage participation and support. Some examples include:

Invite a Voice of Hope to speak at:
- Team Captain Meetings
- Committee Meetings
- Relay Rallies
- Kick-offs
- Mini Relays
- Team Recruitment visits/presentations
- Society Council Meetings

Spread the word on Relay and involve a Voice of Hope at American Cancer Society Programs and Services such as:
- Reach to Recovery® trainings and visits
- Road to Recovery® training and tips
- I Can Cope®
- Look Good…Feel Better®
- Other support group meetings

Involve these survivors in presentations/appearances outside of the American Cancer Society and help spread the mission of our organization:
- Schools
- Civic Organizations
- Faith-based establishments
- Businesses
- Trainings

Your Voices of Hope are ready to tell their American Cancer Society Story. Submit your request to pavoh@cancer.org to coordinate a date and time.
In the spring of 1999 I started to gain a lot of weight and turned to my family doctor for answers. The answer I was given was very surprising to me; he stated that it was my medication that I was taking and that I needed to exercise and eat healthier. Several months later I returned to his office approximately 55 pounds heavier and again was turned away, even after my husband suggested a thyroid test. In October 1999, I was given news from my doctor that my husband and I would be blessed with a child. With this wonderful news my health issues were pushed to the back burner and in June 2000, I gave birth to a beautiful little girl. October of 2001, I choked on a hot dog at home and I told my husband my throat feels like someone is trying to strangle me. We went to the hospital and with months of rejections from my family doctor, to the point I was wondering if it was all in my head, I was diagnosed with 11 tumors on my thyroid and a large cyst which they drained 30 ml's of fluid. I was immediately referred to an endocrinologist who attempted to shrink the tumors with medication.

In December of 2001, the tumors were biopsied and they were determined benign. In June of 2002, the cyst began to fill back up with fluid and my husband asked the endocrinologist if surgery is an option. His response was, “you are not a candidate for surgery.” We asked for a local surgeon to get a second opinion and his response was “don’t forget they are benign they will not operate.” In August 2002, I underwent an 8 hour surgery where they did a total thyroidectomy. This was one month after my Aunt was diagnosed with cancer.

After surgery I got the call at home that I had Papillary Carcinoma. Even though the tumors were benign the thyroid itself was never tested and that is where the cancer was found. In January 2005 my tests came back abnormal and there was microscopic thyroid residual tissue left on the nerves of my vocal cords. My husband and I were told there was a 50% chance I would never talk again. The surgeons at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Hospital in New York operated for almost 10 hours to remove five pieces from the nerves to my vocal cords. With a fantastic team of surgeons, they gave me the greatest gift...life and my voice! This is an honor to be nominated for the Voices of Hope. I will have yearly trips to NYC for tests “for the rest of my life” and unfortunately was told my daughter, whom is now 10 years old has a 99% chance of getting cancer. The doctors are almost certain my thyroid issues began before or during my pregnancy; she will start to get tested when she is a freshman in high school.

I became involved with Relay For Life in 2009 as a team member and survivor. I joined the Committee in September of 2009 and enjoy educating friends, family, and the community about the American Cancer Society and what they have to offer. I speak for myself and others who celebrate a birthday everyday and for those, like my Aunt, who lost the battle in September 2009 from this deadly disease.

What impact has volunteering had on you?
I started volunteering for the American Cancer Society when I lost my Aunt to cancer. We were diagnosed one month apart in 2002 and she fought hard to beat this deadly disease and lost the battle September 2009. We were going to walk in the Memorial Sloan Kettering “GIST” Walk in October 2009, she never made it. That is when I turned to my local Relay For Life to volunteer and give back to those that have helped me during my illness. My Aunt taught me not to be silent about my illness, to educate and to keep up on new cancer research. Volunteering has been very therapeutic for me; the friends I met are truly “lifetime” friends.
Name: Sherry Sperring
Survivor or Caregiver: Survivor
Type of Cancer: Chondra Sarcoma Spinal Cancer
Year of Diagnosis: 2009
Birthday: October 23, 1955
Relay: Boyertown

Since my type of cancer is extremely rare it’s become increasingly important to me to spread the word on the benefits of American Cancer Society to cancer patients. I have had the opportunity to be the keynote speaker at a groundbreaking ceremony for a new specialized treatment center in New Jersey.

At our local Relay this summer I was captain for a first year team at our church. The whole weekend was quite an experience, I was also the survivor speaker for this event.

Part of my cancer journey was to Boston for 10 weeks where I stayed at Hope Lodge. The experience at the Lodge was life changing, this opportunity was due to funding from American Cancer Society and I am always willing to tell this story, how it has changed me and how there was always someone from American Cancer Society for counseling and support during my stay. Due to the continual research and development my cancer is currently under control; just five short years ago, this would not be the case.

We rescued a Greyhound and had her trained as a therapy dog to aid me in my recovery. She is now certified as an Animal Assisted Therapy Dog. As I become stronger we now are going out as a team and volunteering at various rehab centers, homes and hopefully cancer treatment centers.

I am no longer able to work full time BUT, I am trying to fill my life with giving back in any way that I can. Hopefully this example will exemplify to others the importance of volunteering and making a difference to another person just diagnosed.
Name: Callista Baer  
Survivor or Caregiver: Survivor  
Type of Cancer: Sarcoma  
Year of Diagnosis: 2001  
Birthday: November 6, 1942  
Relay: Southern Huntingdon

When I was told I had cancer I was very upset. In fact, my husband and I were going to Niagara Falls that day, but we decided to take our trip and deal with the cancer when we returned. When we got back we called the doctor and did more testing, to which I needed radiation. The staff and volunteers were very helpful and kind. That's when I decided I would like to volunteer. The first six months were hard and I had to make some adjustments to my life, but afterwards it got easier and I was more hopeful about life.

What impact has volunteering had on you?

I volunteer because I think it is a worthy cause and it makes me feel good to raise money for research and to help other cancer patients. My greatest accomplishment is raising money and trying to help get information to new cancer patients. There is always a need for people to encourage, support, and help with cancer patients.

Additional information you wish to provide on your cancer experience:

My son-in-law was a cancer survivor for 12 years before he lost his battle. My daughter and their three daughters are another reason I volunteer and feel the need to give back to others.
In 2004, I had just turned 30. I was married, had a four year old daughter, and had just received a big promotion at work. I thought all was going great until one weekend I started to experience severe muscular pains in my chest. Still, I was not concerned; there was a flu going around with similar symptoms. A quick trip to the ER and a CAT scan later and I was told there was a large mass behind my heart and lungs and that I needed to go to Conemaugh right away. The next day, I was diagnosed with Non Hodgkins Lymphoma. You have cancer. You want to talk about a shock my friends, that was it. Those are the words that take an ordinary person like me and instantly turn you into a “Survivor” with a story to share.

My four year old daughter, Kate, kept me grounded and laughing in only the ways a little one could. I decided to try and explain things to her on a level appropriate for her age because I wanted to do all I could to keep her from being afraid. One evening I was trying to explain to her why I had a large incision from a recent biopsy. She looked at me with all the wisdom a four year could muster and said “Mommy — I already know about that. That is where they went in and took out the vegetables.” — I must have had the most puzzled look on my face! She said — “Don’t worry Daddy told me they took out some of the bad stuff — I figured that must have meant you ate too many vegetables — I told you those things were no good for you!” How can you argue with the logic of a four year old! I was blessed to have strong faith, a fantastic oncology staff, great support, a good sense of humor to help me on this journey. Even though I had already been actively involved in Relay For Life, there was so much I did not know and so many questions.

I have always believed in the statement that “knowledge is power”. Would knowledge change the fact that I had cancer? No, but, by learning all I could I was able to look at the situation objectively, play an active role in my treatment, and reduce much of the fear that I had been feeling. That is where the American Cancer Society comes in. In addition to providing funds for groundbreaking cancer research, the American Cancer Society also provides a wealth of patient services and informational resources to help patients and their families during this challenging time.

In 2009, I was diagnosed with Hodgkins Lymphoma. Still a type of lymphoma, but quite different than what I had experienced before. Early on in my treatment, the oncologists were seriously considering a stem cell transplant. That treatment has really come a long way and is now considered to be a relatively safe and very effective. I know it is a serious procedure and was on a mission to learn everything I could. I searched high and low, surfing the internet for hours on end, and reading everything I could. As it turns out, the absolute best and most accurate information I found was made available to me through the American Cancer Society. I called them at 1.800.227.2345 and spoke to a live Cancer Information Specialist. I told them what information I had about my type of cancer and the specific treatment being discussed. A few days later I received a binder in the mail with print outs that pertained to the specific type of
cancer I was dealing with and the exact procedure they were proposing. As it turned out my doctors made a last minute decision not to do the stem cell transplant because the chemo was working so well. But I must tell you, that I had great peace of mind knowing what to expect with whichever treatment they chose.

Whether you or someone you know are trying to find information about a potential treatment, network with others who have faced a similar situation, learning how to deal some of the difficult issues of treatment such as hair loss, or nausea or any of a multitude of other needs — there is information available and people there to help 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Knowledge is power. For a cancer patient and their family — knowing where to turn for resources and support can make all the difference in the world.
Name: Kathy Coursen
Survivor or Caregiver: Survivor
Type of Cancer: Sarcoma
Year of Diagnosis: 2002
Birthday: May 5, 1975
Relay: Centre Hall
It was a few years before I became involved with the American Cancer Society. When I became involved and as I continue to be involved, I find it difficult to deal directly with cancer patients going through treatment or dealing with the emotions of the disease. And actually considered terminating my involvement with the American Cancer Society. However, I have found that my comfort level is in fundraising. Being involved in Relay For Life as a Team Chair and getting people excited about helping to rid this disease is what I am good at.

What impact has volunteering had on you?

I volunteer for the American Cancer Society because I was lucky. My greatest accomplishment is watching my Relay For Life teams and Team Captains exceed their goals. I only provide tools of excitement, imagination and determination to take just one more step.

I think that others need to be involved; however, there are people who may think that they are not able to deal directly with someone who has cancer, but are unable to see there are other ways to be involved. I think that is one of the greatest challenges that the American Cancer Society has to deal with in the road to community involvement. And, the attitude ‘It will never happen to me’.

I had just met my husband (I was 33 years old at the time). We began talking about getting married and starting a family and were both very excited. I had a some bad cramps with my menstrual cycle and decided to see my doctor. He thought a D/C would be in order and one was done. A few days later, my doctor told me that he had found cancer in my uterus and that he thought my ovaries were ‘feeding’ the cancer. I was lost for words. I thought just my luck, I finally found a great guy, we were planning on getting married and starting a family and I was going to die. What was going to happen to me now? My initial reaction was to get the cancer out of my body and I had a total abdominal hysterectomy and bilateral oophorectomy (TAH/BOS). I did not require chemotherapy or radiation therapy and my husband still asked me to marry him. Unfortunately, we do not have any children. There was a long period of time when I dreaded going to the doctor because I feared hearing those words again and I also had a fear of dying. There are times that I still have those fears but are now rare.
Name: Linda Dunkle
Survivor or Caregiver: Both
Type of Cancer: Breast cancer for me, Esophageal for my husband
Year of Diagnosis: 2009
Birthday: August 1
Relay: Clinton County

When I got the phone call that my breast biopsy showed I had cancer, my first reaction was, ‘I don’t have time for this’. Just eight weeks before that my husband Neil had major surgery for esophageal cancer. He was at home recovering and I was caring for him full time. Needless to say, cancer doesn’t care if you have time or not. Even today, I am awed by the compassion and support that I received from all those around me, especially other survivors that I encountered in my treatment process. After surgery and radiation treatments, I am cancer-free at this point. I have learned the value of just listening when someone wants to talk, the value of a hug, having someone do the laundry, pick up your prescriptions, listen on the other end of the phone while you cry your eyes out, and so many acts of kindness that help you take another step forward.

What impact has volunteering had on you?

Cancer has stolen wonderful people from my life, I need to be a volunteer to “get even”. If one dollar that I help raise saves the life of one person, we win! There were many volunteers in my cancer experience that made a difference in my life, I need to pass it on. During our most recent Relay For Life survivors’ dinner, we had the microphone open for any survivors who wanted to talk about their cancer journey. Listening to those people opened my eyes to the value of what volunteers do. We help people become survivors, and we cannot do it without each other.

Additional information you wish to provide on your cancer experience:

I find myself reaching out more and more to people in our community who are cancer victims, I find it very rewarding to be able to help in anyway that I can. It has enriched my life beyond measure.
Angie Kersetter

Name: Angie Kersetter
Survivor or Caregiver: Survivor
Type of Cancer: Breast and Thyroid
Year of Diagnosis: 2006, 2007
Birthday: December 28, 1976
Relay: Mifflin Juniata

In the summer of 2006, I felt a pea-sized lump in my right breast. I made an appointment with my family doctor and he sent me to a surgeon. A needle biopsy was done at the surgeon’s office, the results were negative but I insisted on having a mammogram since my grandmother was diagnosed with breast cancer five years prior. Since I was only 29 years old, the insurance company wasn’t going to pay but the surgeon told the insurance company it was necessary. During the mammogram is when all the calcifications showed up. The cancer was 9 cm (softball size) and soft tissue so it wasn’t very detectable by touch. My surgeon suggested a lumpectomy which is what I did. I was told my margins were clean and I should be just fine. He also said I was too young for the cancer to have spread to my lymph nodes. Immediately after the procedure I developed bleeding complications while my surgeon was away on vacation.

I was working in Harrisburg at the time (about an hour from my home in Lewistown), so my step-father set-up an appointment for me in Hershey with a specialist. She asked me to bring my records and scans with me. My mom and I went to the Hershey appointment and the specialist there told us that I had more cancer visible and she recommended a mastectomy. My original reaction was NOT to do it because I was so young and I was going through a divorce at the time. My new doctor gave me literature to read and within a week I changed my mind and decided to have a bilateral mastectomy with implants. Every health decision I made was with the support of my mom, dad and step-dad.

Meanwhile, I was sent to a genetics specialist and found that I carry the BRAC2 gene that came from my father. I found out that because of the gene, I had an 87% chance of getting cancer in my other breast and also a chance of ovarian and cervical cancer. I didn’t want to go through all this again, so I feel like I made the right decision by having both breasts removed. After surgery, my doctor in Hershey diagnosed me with DCIS and invasive stage 2 cancer which had spread to my lymphnodes. I then had a complete hysterectomy. I started getting hot flashes now, too!

I continued to have complications with each surgery because my blood would not clot, which lead to painful hematomas. After twelve months, thirteen surgeries, four months of chemotherapy (which made me very sick) and trying to raise two small children on my own, I was exhausted! Sleeping on my back for over a year wasn’t fun either. On my 30th birthday, I finished chemo!

At this time, my children were two and five years old. My youngest, Reed was still in diapers and my daughter, Randee had just started kindergarten. I took her to the bus stop every morning and then went back home to sleep until my son woke up. It was tough doing it all alone but I feel stronger because of it. Randee was in gymnastics, girl scouts and cheerleading, so her schedule kept me busy which meant I could not dwell on my illness. My kids were with me when I donated my hair to the “Locks of Love” and when my step-dad shaved my head. In some ways they had to grow up quickly, but they are good kids because of it. I couldn’t hug or pick my kids up because of all the surgeries.
In January 2007, just one month after finishing chemo, I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. It was heart-breaking to tell my mother, who was with my son in the hospital waiting room. Thyroid surgery was next, followed by radioactive iodine treatment. I could not be with my children for five days because of the treatment, which was really hard...they looked as if they changed so much in just five days.

Currently, I am taking lots of medications because I have no thyroid. I have osteoporosis because of chemo and the other surgeries. I am not able to take estrogen (my cancer was estrogen fed) and I get Zometa treatments every other month, and I have kidney stones constantly.

My children have made me stronger through this adventure. I couldn’t have finished chemo without them. You know what? I’m here and I’m happy and I enjoy everyday!

**What impact has volunteering had on you?**

Volunteering makes me feel like I’m making a difference in someone else’s life with the information I share with them.
Name: Virla Ocker
Survivor or Caregiver: Survivor
Type of Cancer: Esophagus, brain, and breast
Year of Diagnosis: 2002
Birthday: October 26, 1952
Relay: Williamsport
What impact has volunteering had on you?

Because my particular situation is rare, I am hoping I can be a voice for other women who are going through this same situation. That is my major hope. I’m sure there are other women out there going through the same thing. I think it’s important we band together.

Additional information you wish to provide on your cancer experience:

Volunteering for the American Cancer Society has impacted me in several ways. I feel I’m doing something to eventually eliminate cancer. It also allows me to reach out to other cancer survivors to let them know they are not alone and they can survive cancer. Finally, it allows me to spread the news about the great programs the American Cancer Society.

While volunteering I was asked to speak as a cancer survivor at the Relay For Life of Dillsburg. After I finished my speech I saw people crying who had been emotionally touched by what I had to say. This was one of my greatest accomplishments as a volunteer. Volunteering for the American Cancer Society is important because it’s going to take a village to defeat cancer. One person can’t do it alone.

My journey began in January 2003 when I found a lump in my breast and quickly went to the doctor’s office. When she first gave my diagnosis I was shocked, and that turned to crying. After I allowed myself one day of sadness, I decided I was going to beat this cancer and I never allowed myself to think negatively again. Through the first surgery to remove my right breast, chemotherapy, radiation, removal of my left breast and having a hysterectomy, all in three years, I kept my spirits high. I took off a year from work and with my mom and husband by my side I was able to get through it, and I’m cancer free to this day. But being cancer free didn’t mean I had forgotten what I went through. I made a promise to myself that I wasn’t going to stand by and watch other people suffer the way I did, so I decided to join the American Cancer Society as a volunteer. As both a volunteer and a cancer survivor, I realized how important life is and to not take it for granted.
Name: Jill Reed
Survivor or Caregiver: Survivor
Type of Cancer: Large cell neuroendocrine cervical cancer
Year of Diagnosis: 2009
Birthday: May 16, 1969
Relay: Western Lancaster
Name: John R. Segneri
Survivor or Caregiver: Survivor
Type of Cancer: Prostate, Skin, Thyroid and Metastatic Papillary Thyroid Cancer in Lymph Nodes
Year of Diagnosis: 1999
Birthday: December 11, 1948
Relay: Lebanon

In 1999 at a routine kidney stone exam prostate cancer was found. With a long history of family cancers, I was devastated. My only thought was get it out as soon as possible. I later had three bouts of skin cancer. Sadly during this time I lost my mother to melanoma after a 13 month battle. In 2004, it was discovered I had not only severe sleep apnea but thyroid cancer. I was told that I may have to resort to a permanent tracheotomy. I held out until January 2005 when half my thyroid was removed. The cancer spread and that March the remaining half was removed. I then went through a high dose of iodine radiation which burned my mouth and caused damage to my salivary glands, as well as, my tear ducts. I had to resort to the use of a CPAP machine for breathing.

In 2006, cancer cells were again found in the lymph nodes in my neck and upper chest. I was told that radiation was no longer an option because it just would not work. I got a second opinion at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore and in 2007, I had additional radiation and a bi-lateral neck dissection. In 2008, the cancer once again returned to my lymph nodes and a second dissection was performed. Over fifty nodes were removed resulting in permanent lymphedema in my neck and a large amount of scar tissue after four neck surgeries.

In 2009 and 2010, I underwent three surgeries to try to reconstruct my tear ducts. Then in April of 2010 scans and ultrasounds revealed more cancer cells in my lymph nodes close to my vocal cords. At this time they are still under close observation. I am scheduled to have my 12th surgery, a septoplasty, September 7th to help my breathing.

What impact has volunteering had on you?

I became involved in my family’s Relay For Life team, which started six years ago and has since raised over $135,000. It is a good feeling knowing that our hard work is helping fight the disease and making survivors live a longer and more productive life. In the early 1960’s my grandmother was diagnosed with cervical cancer and at that time cancer was a bad word with a very grim outlook. Today with Relays around the country we are making it a disease we can talk about and raise funds to continue the much needed research to find that ultimate cure.

I have three children, three grandchildren, a twin sister and her family; all have been a great inspiration to me in fighting my cancers and to live my life to the fullest. I have become more compassionate for other cancer patients and even though my story may seem a bit extreme, I realize that I am very lucky to be an eleven year survivor and living a decent quality of life.

I have a history of cancer in my family with six members losing their battles with this disease, and several more surviving. My family decided to dedicate our time to raising funds for research so our next generation will not have to live in fear of a cancer diagnosis. There is great pride to see others win their fight knowing that our hard work may have helped them live a longer and better life. Even though some people cannot join a Relay team, it is a wonderful feeling to see how many of your
friends and community members come out to support our fund raising activities.

**Additional information you wish to provide on your cancer experience:**

I first found out about cancer at a very young age with the illness of my grandmother and at that time cancer was a “dirty” word and my family did not even say it. We have come a long way. The “C” word has finally come out from behind the closet doors and we are now able to shout it from the roof tops in order to spread the awareness of prevention, the knowledge of treatments and finally the resources to find the cure.
I was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s disease for the first time in 1995. I’ll always recall the initial shock of my diagnosis, and the almost surreal sensation of an all encompassing fear and sense of panic. I thought my life was over. The physician who made the diagnosis slowly told me the good news; Hodgkin’s was highly curable, even in the later stages in which I found myself. As it turned out, my Hodgkin’s was highly resistant to the chemo and radiation regimen with which I was treated, and I came out of remission in 1996, almost exactly one year after my first diagnosis. I was very sick, although the physical toll of the disease and treatment was far less traumatic than the emotional toll. It’s odd now when I think back; everyone told me how great I was doing and they couldn’t believe how well I was dealing with my cancer? I once again went into remission after my 1996 diagnosis and was healthy until mid-1999, when I was diagnosed for the last time. I once again endured the chemo and radiation and went into remission nearly 10 years ago. So very much to say on my many emotions during these years…

My experience with cancer has been one of personal devastation and a rebirth, of sorts. My response to this disease allowed it to consume my life, both personally and professionally, and I let it “own” my life. It’s taken nearly a decade to be able to talk about my experience and regain total ownership of my life. I can’t begin to express in a few sentences the roller coaster ride of my life since my first diagnosis. For all this disease has taken from me, it has given me considerably more. The details of my experience, as is the case with each and every one of the Survivors and Caregivers with which I have spoken, are stories that should be shared and from which I think we can all learn. That’s why I want to be involved as a Voice of Hope.

Volunteering has given me a sense of mission, and a better understanding that we, each and everyone of us volunteers, make a difference. We’re empowered to not only take ownership of our own lives, but to help others do the same. Volunteering is a powerful tool in our ongoing battle against these many diseases of cancer.

What impact has volunteering had on you?

My greatest accomplishment as a volunteer has been as a counselor to newly diagnosed patients. I’m now able to empower the newly diagnosed with experiential facts, resources, direction, and honest emotions. All tenets of the approach of the American Cancer Society, that’s why I volunteer; the Society makes a difference. Honestly, I also find the American Cancer Society fundraising efforts to support our mission goals and objectives to be focused and properly directed, and, the American Cancer Society to be a wonderful steward of donated funds.
I was 36 years old when I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer. You always think that it will never happen to you. Although I had not been feeling quite myself, I didn’t think that cancer would be the outcome of many tests. With the support of family, friends, and fantastic doctors, I have done very well in the past four years. As a survivor, I decided that perhaps I had survived so that I could help others. In my profession I deal with people, so I have been able to help many with cancer and other serious health issues. I feel that volunteering and giving back to others somehow makes my cancer seem almost acceptable.

Living with cancer has made me take time to stop and realize just what is important to me. I have learned to enjoy the little things in life more, take time for myself and do more of what I enjoy most in life.

What impact has volunteering had on you?

I attended my first Relay For Life after my surgery. It really touched my heart and made me want to get involved. I volunteer for the American Cancer Society to help make the cancer journey of others a little more bearable. Cancer is something that no one should face alone. Sometimes just knowing that someone else understands what you are going through can make all the difference. I feel that my greatest accomplishment in volunteering is being on the Survivor committee at Relay. It is truly breathtaking to witness all of the purple shirts of survivors walking together to show their pride and support in one another. Hearing so many of the survivor stories, each a unique journey, is very uplifting to me. I feel that volunteering is a great way to give back some of the support that was given to me. Being a survivor, you have the opportunity to touch and inspire so many lives. Even if you are not a cancer survivor, it can still be very rewarding to become a volunteer and change lives. There are many different areas to be involved in the American Cancer Society. We are truly making a difference. People are living longer and happier lives because of the care and support they are able to receive through the work of the American Cancer Society and all of the volunteers.

Additional information you wish to provide on your cancer experience:

I am also helping to organize a cancer support group in my area hospital. We are trying hard to get the word out in the community that the local hospital has such a wonderful program. We currently have between eight and fifteen members attending each month and had several new members the past few months due to increased awareness. We often have guest speakers and physicians from the hospital and surrounding community. Our goal is to reach out to cancer patients, caregivers, families and friends. We offer support and friendship to individuals and families in our community whose lives have been touched by cancer.
Name: Taunya Bondra
Survivor or Caregiver: Survivor & Caregiver for my mom
Type of Cancer: Thyroid
Year of Diagnosis: 2010
Birthday: March 15, 1965
Relay: Indiana County

I went to the physician for an upper respiratory infection when he found a lump on my neck. He sent me for further evaluation with an endocrinologist. I had two needle biopsies done that were both questionable in nature, which was very frightening. I was then sent to a surgeon for further diagnosis, which still was unanswered. I had surgery scheduled, and now it was time to tell my family. We had been through breast cancer with my mom, and she is now fighting lymphoma. In surgery they decided to remove the entire thyroid and send for biopsy. The biopsy showed cancer, but the cancer was very small, and they had removed it before it had a chance to grow. We then opted for no further treatment. I was very thankful that my cancer was gone.
Name: Kelly Yauch
Survivor or Caregiver: Caregiver for daughter Morgan Ann
Type of Cancer: Yolk sac carcinoma
Diagnosis: 2007
Birthday: October 12, 2005
Relay: South Hills
Class of 2009-2010

Class of 2008-2009

We save lives and create more birthdays by helping you stay well, helping you get well, by finding cures, and by fighting back.