

Bridges

Connecting Cancer Survivors



The Best Gifts Are Not Under the Tree

By Stephen Reimann

The lumps of coal for our stockings came early last year – December 17 to be exact.

The lumps, multiple pulmonary nodules, were identified by a routine CT scan. A little more than a year after major surgery and 18 weeks of chemo, the cancer had returned. We were told that a year without recurring disease was pretty good, statistically speaking. But it didn't do much to make the season bright.

After a brief respite in Florida was eight more weeks of traditional chemo, during which the nodules continued to grow. Not the hoped-for results, but at least no hair loss.

That brought us to another summer filled with uncertainty. The “gold standard” chemo regimen didn't work. What next? Surgery and ablation were ruled out. This brought us to the “science” part of the MSK marketing slogan “More Science. Less Fear.” The promising clinical trial of a protein inhibitor with a strong link to endometrial cancer did not pan out because of chemistry mismatches. Two equally promising clinical trials were ruled out because of diabetes complications. Then came DNA testing, which revealed a genetic predisposition to a new type of drug recently approved for endometrial cancer. Finally, a viable chance for success.

Or was it? Perhaps it was the only remaining option after the others did not fit? It didn't matter.

■ *Continued on page 8*



Chris and Steve Reimann live in Centerport, New York. Prior to being diagnosed with stage IV endometrial cancer in the summer of 2013, Chris spent her professional career establishing national programs for vulnerable populations. This December, Chris and Steve will be spending their 50th Christmas together, with renewed appreciation for the gift of life.

In This Issue

- 2 Editorial and My Pet Therapist
- 3 Ask the Professional
- 4 Silver Linings
- 5 The Gift Of Cancer: Gaining a Family
- 6 Sweet Pepper Soup
- 7 Not If But When



Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

Interested in sharing your story?
Please visit www.mskcc.org/bridges

■ *Continued from page 1*

Eight more weeks of chemo were followed by yet another scan, and the results are now in.

No coal this year. The new treatment is working. No new disease and, more importantly, the existing nodules have shrunk. To be sure, this does not ensure an imminent cure, or even remission. But in terms of the season, it is a gift that does not come wrapped and adorned in ribbons and bows. It does, however, redefine the holiday wishes for a happy and healthy new year.

There can be no doubt that our frame of mind after last year's results can't compare to the joy we feel this year. Ironically, at no time in the past year did we feel morose or defeated. We were always hopeful and never let the setbacks derail our optimism. No small part of our overall attitude came from knowing that Chris was being treated by the very best doctors, nurses, and scientists in the world. But more than that, Chris is simply a positive force of nature. Her spirit cannot be dampened. Cancer doesn't stand a chance.

■ *Continued from page 2*

During the summer after that bout with cancer, I clearly remember sitting on the little red love seat in a small TV room of our old house and being really, really sad. My hands lay lifeless on my knees and my sniffles quickly turned into a compulsive cry of loneliness. I heard a creak around the corner of the doorway. I looked up with rolling tears, and there was Mr. Mischief. He waddled up as fast as he could, hopped in my lap, and started purring while lifting his paw to my chest.

While I'm sure Bell and Mr. Mischief didn't assess my hemoglobin levels and determine

the most effective direction in which to lob their tongues at my face, they had something that no other creature had. Those animals showed me something I needed: absolute, unconditional love and understanding. They were the ones that looked at me with the same smile and the same joy as they did before cancer.

Though both of them have long since passed, I'll never forget their impact on my journey through this crazy life. Cancer taught me to be tough, my family taught me to live, and my pets taught me how to see through veils of self-consciousness and love unconditionally.



Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

Patient Editor
Eileen F. Gould

Managing Editor
Katie Decker, MA

Advisory Committee
Shrujal Baxi, MD
Joanne Candela, ANP, MPH
Patrick Dooley
Diane Dunst
Jennifer Ford, PhD
Barbara Golby, LCSW
Ellen Greenfield
Judith Kelman
Mario Lacouture, MD
Mary McCabe, RN, MA
David G. Pfister, MD
Ann Pfister-Brown
Larissa Regala
Becky Steed, NP
Clare Thomas

Cover Bridge Photo
Duane Bailey-Castro

Produced by the
Department of Communications

Bridges is a publication of the
Cancer Survivorship Center at MSK.

Patient and Caregiver Volunteer Program

The Patient and Caregiver Volunteer Program connects current patients and caregivers to volunteers who have experienced a similar diagnosis or circumstance related to cancer. If you are a former patient or caregiver of someone who has completed treatment, please consider becoming a Patient or Caregiver Volunteer.

For more information, contact
Wendy Bonilla at 212-639-5007 or
patient2patient@mskcc.org.

If you would like an email
copy of *Bridges*, please sign
up at www.mskcc.org/bridges
to join the mailing list.