

SurvivorTimes

A NEWSLETTER FOR CANCER SURVIVORS

VOLUME 12 | ISSUE 1 | 2020

Sponsored by the Dr. Diane Barton Complementary Medicine Program

Survivor Story: Ron Grabowski

Ron Grabowski of Delran, NJ, suffered for two months with indigestion, stomach pain, heartburn, and vomiting after every meal. One morning, Ron's vomiting became so severe that he could barely stand. At the insistence of his fiancée, Faith, he went to a local hospital's emergency room for help.

Doctors there did an ultrasound and told him to follow up with a gastrointestinal specialist. An endoscopy (which uses a flexible scope with a light and camera to view and take pictures of the inside of the digestive tract, including the esophagus and stomach) revealed a cancerous mass in his stomach.

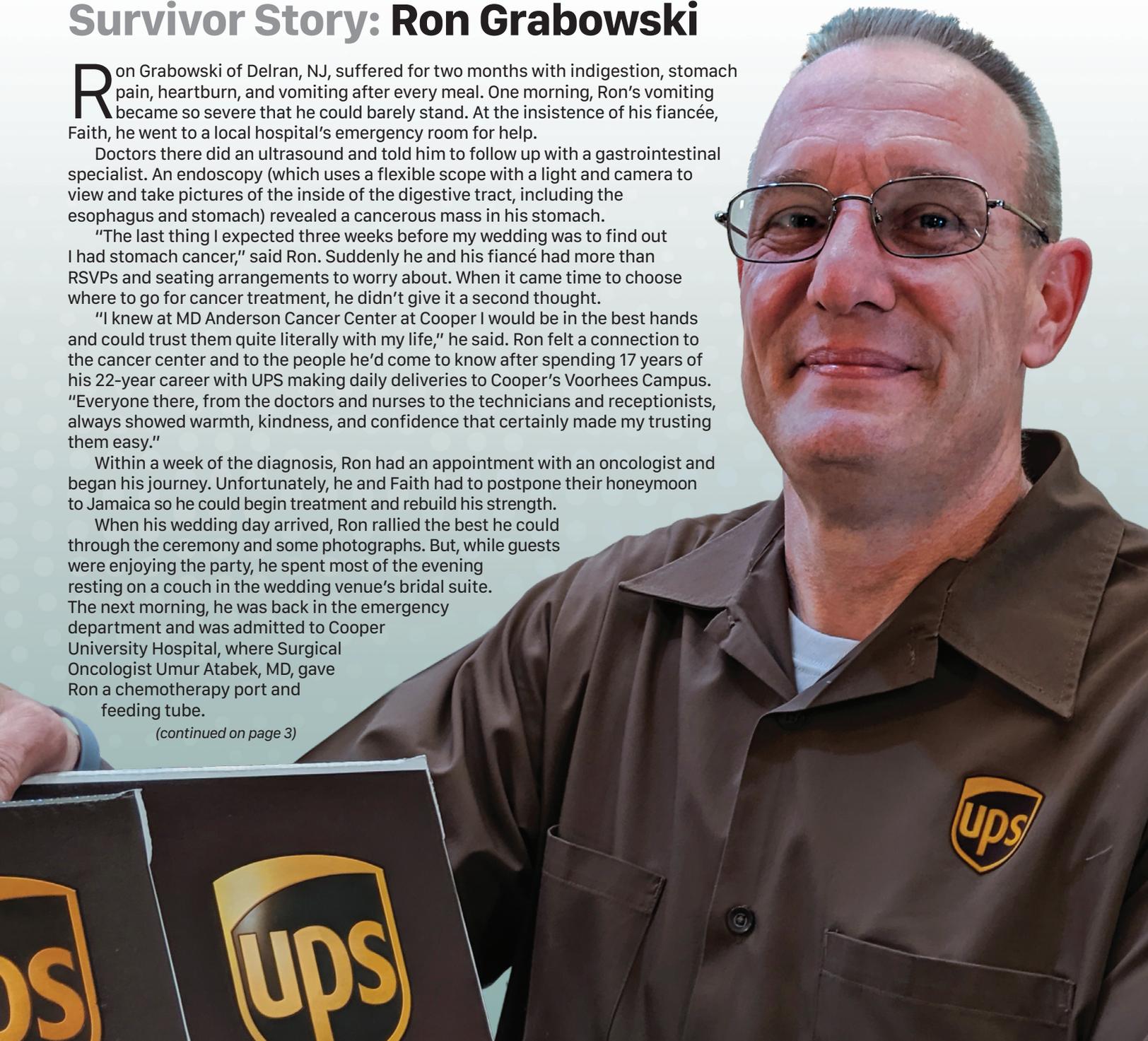
"The last thing I expected three weeks before my wedding was to find out I had stomach cancer," said Ron. Suddenly he and his fiancé had more than RSVPs and seating arrangements to worry about. When it came time to choose where to go for cancer treatment, he didn't give it a second thought.

"I knew at MD Anderson Cancer Center at Cooper I would be in the best hands and could trust them quite literally with my life," he said. Ron felt a connection to the cancer center and to the people he'd come to know after spending 17 years of his 22-year career with UPS making daily deliveries to Cooper's Voorhees Campus. "Everyone there, from the doctors and nurses to the technicians and receptionists, always showed warmth, kindness, and confidence that certainly made my trusting them easy."

Within a week of the diagnosis, Ron had an appointment with an oncologist and began his journey. Unfortunately, he and Faith had to postpone their honeymoon to Jamaica so he could begin treatment and rebuild his strength.

When his wedding day arrived, Ron rallied the best he could through the ceremony and some photographs. But, while guests were enjoying the party, he spent most of the evening resting on a couch in the wedding venue's bridal suite. The next morning, he was back in the emergency department and was admitted to Cooper University Hospital, where Surgical Oncologist Umur Atabek, MD, gave Ron a chemotherapy port and feeding tube.

(continued on page 3)





Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! This issue is dedicated to you: the Warriors, the Ninjas... those with true grit... those cancer survivors who are fighting or have fought a cancer diagnosis with breathtaking grace and dignity. Bask in your own resilience and legacy of hope.

They say people come into our lives for a reason. Some, if you're lucky, for an entire lifetime, and some like a bright burst of color and light blow through with the intensity, purpose, and determination of a shooting star. They leave deep and meaningful footprints on our hearts and to the greater good, to some piece of humanity. I encourage you as we enter a new decade in 2020 to take a minute as you read this and think of those who fit this description for you: people who we will continue to "carry with us in our hearts" for a lifetime.

One such unforgettable person was my friend and mentor; Dr. Diane Barton. It becomes clearer with each passing year that she was a true visionary. Her honorable legacy lives on each day through the vast number of cancer survivors who experience and benefit from the Dr. Diane Barton Complementary Medicine Program at MD Anderson Cancer Center at Cooper. If you are reading this newsletter or have attended even one of the unique programs offered over the past 16 years, then you have benefited from her noble gift.

The Dr. Diane Barton Complementary Medicine Program offers unique and diverse programs that are designed to help cancer survivors cope with the stress and anxiety of their diagnosis and alleviate some of the side effects of treatment. Our use of evidence-based integrative and complementary therapies supports mainstream medical care by targeting the three pillars of a healthy lifestyle — nutrition, physical activity, and emotional health — and focusing in on the mind, body, and spirit connection to overall well-being. These programs offer patients access to social, educational, and support opportunities, and they allow survivors to connect, share experiences, and draw encouragement from one another. Reaching out and interacting with your care team and other cancer survivors can help make a positive difference in your cancer journey. All programs are free for cancer survivors.

If you would like to make a donation to The Dr. Diane Barton Complementary Medicine Program or would like to suggest a topic for an upcoming issue of *Survivor Times*, please contact me at mehr-bonnie@cooperhealth.edu.

Be well,

Bonnie Mehr

Editor, *Survivor Times*
Director, Integrative Oncology Services
Director, The Dr. Diane Barton Complementary Medicine Program
MD Anderson Cancer Center at Cooper



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MD Anderson Cancer Center 
Making Cancer History®

Beyond BRCA: A Mother/Daughter Story

Being related often means sharing the same physical features as others in the family. But in the world of cancer genetics, being related can also mean sharing a gene mutation that leads to an increased risk of cancer. While genes with the highest risk are often the most well known, research is showing us that some genes have only a “moderate” risk for cancer over a lifetime. That is, many people who have the mutation will never get cancer.

The most common genes associated with breast cancer are called BRCA1 and BRCA2. However, there are several additional genes that increase the lifetime risk of breast cancer. Some of these, like BRCA1 and BRCA2, are “high-risk” genes and others are “moderate-risk” genes. One of these moderate-risk genes is called ATM. Being an ATM carrier is associated with a risk of female breast cancer that is 2 to 4 times greater than the average woman’s risk. Lifetime risk of colon cancer is also increased, though moderate as well. Lifetime risks of ovarian, stomach, prostate, and pancreatic cancers may be increased, but risk estimates are still evolving. Risk management for these cancers is individualized for each patient based on personal and family history as well as the gene mutation. For example, in the Cancer Genetics Program, ATM mutation carriers with a family history of pancreatic cancer may consider enrolling in a pancreatic cancer screening protocol.

Stefany was offered genetic testing after her diagnosis of breast cancer. Based on her results, a personalized management plan was made, and her family was also offered testing. Here is her story:

Being told I had a gene mutation was a complete shock but your team guided me through all of my questions and concerns. I am extremely grateful that genetic testing was offered before my surgery and that I decided to do it. The information I received has forced me to be a bit more aggressive in my care to



Stefany Cordrey and son.

“I am a strong advocate for genetic testing. The information it offers can be life changing.”

— STEFANY CORDREY

ensure my health, long term. For example, due to my possibly heightened risk of being diagnosed with ovarian cancer due to my ATM gene mutation, I plan to have my ovaries surgically removed later this year to decrease that risk. This will also be of benefit in the treatment of my breast cancer and will allow me to choose a different hormonal approach.

My mother also had genetic testing after I had mine completed, and we discovered that the ATM gene mutation was passed on to me from her side. With this information, she was able to have medical conversations with her sisters and nieces, and although they opted not to get genetic testing for this gene, they were much more inclined to complete their routine physician visits and diagnostic testing immediately. The option of testing can be considered in the future when and if they are ready to do so.

I am a strong advocate for genetic testing.

The information it offers can be life changing. I am fully engaged in my care and am much more vigilant with decisions regarding my body since my cancer diagnosis and genetic testing. I know that the medical field is constantly being updated with new information regarding this moderate-level gene mutation, and I will continue to meet with the Cancer Genetics Program annually to obtain any and all new information.

Thank you so much for everything your team has done for me since my breast cancer diagnosis. It has been a tough journey, but all of you have helped me navigate the waters! I do not know what I would have done without your expertise! ■

If you are interested in learning more about the William G. Rohrer Cancer Genetics Program or would like to schedule an appointment, please call 1.855.MDA.Cooper and ask to speak with the Genetics Program Administrative Coordinator. Office visits and tests ordered may be covered by health insurance on a case-by-case basis.

Survivor Story: Ron Grabowski *(continued from page 1)*

“It’s not how most couples would envision their first days of marriage,” he quipped. “We definitely knew the ‘in sickness and in health’ portion of our wedding vows very well.”

Within a week of his hospital stay, he received his first dose of a chemotherapy regimen. Eight weeks later, Dr. Atabek removed a portion of his stomach and small intestine affected by the cancer. Fortunately, the cancer had not spread beyond the immediate area.

Recovery after surgery was slow. Ron had lost more than 75 pounds and needed to regain his strength. Slowly, he began adding solid foods, learning how to adjust to his smaller stomach. After 10 months, he was strong enough to return to work and the gym, and Ron and Faith were finally able to take their long-awaited honeymoon in Jamaica.

Ron credits his remarkable recovery to a strong will, a little bit of stubbornness, a positive attitude, and an incredible support team.

“I always felt surrounded by people who really cared about me as a person, whether at home or in treatment with my second family at MD Anderson at Cooper,” he stated.

More than a year later, Ron remains cancer-free. “I can finally say I am taking control of my health and not the other way around,” he added. “I take it one day at a time, and with my wife and family by my side, I couldn’t be happier.” ■



The Dr. Diane Barton Complementary Medicine Program

March – August 2020

Creative Arts for Healing for Cancer Survivors

PRACTITIONER: Andrea Meehan

Engaging with the creative arts can be a powerful healing experience. We believe that making art frees the body's healing powers — uniting body, mind, and spirit. Join us for a variety of fun projects.

11 a.m. to Noon

**March 26 • April 9, 23 • May 7, 28
June 11, 25**

Qi Gong and Meditation for Cancer Survivors

PRACTITIONER: Corinne Corcoran, EDD, NCBTMB, ARCB

Qi Gong uses movement and breath as a way to increase, harness, and move the vital energy that is within and around us. It can increase circulation and relax you. Meditation can help nurture and support you through life's stresses and joys.

11 a.m. to Noon

**March 24 • April 21 • May 19 • June 16
July 21 • August 18**

Guided Imagery with Reflective Journaling for Cancer Survivors

PRACTITIONER: Corinne Corcoran, EDD, NCBTMB, ARCB

Participants will learn how to use guided imagery, meditation, and reflective journaling to cultivate well-being, reduce stress and anxiety, promote healing, and develop inner peace.

11 a.m. to Noon

**March 10 • April 7 • May 5 • June 2
July 7 • August 4**

Gentle Chair Yoga for Stress Reduction for Cancer Survivors

PRACTITIONER: Julie Fischer

Join us for gentle chair yoga that enriches the mind, body, and spirit. This class is open to all levels of flexibility and experience.

9:30 to 10:30 a.m.

**March 10 • April 7 • May 5 • June 2
July 7 • August 4**

Seeds of Hope Project

Join us as we plan and grow our organic vegetable garden. We will share our bounty through the Tea Cart Program with patients receiving chemotherapy. All classes are held in the Healing Garden, with the exception of the planning meeting on April 15, 2020, which will be held in the Cooper Clock Tower.

9:30 to 10:30 a.m.

**April 15, 22, 29 • May 6, 13, 20, 27
June 3, 10, 17, 24 • July 8, 15, 22, 29
August 5, 12, 19, 26**

Therapeutic Massage and Reflexology Day for Cancer Survivors

Enjoy the mind-body-spirit benefits of therapeutic chair massage and reflexology. Our sessions run from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Voorhees. Register for the session but arrive when it works best for you.

9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

May 27 • October 28 • November 18

Mindfulness for Cancer Survivors

PRACTITIONER: Corinne Corcoran, EDD, NCBTMB, ARCB

Mindfulness, or mindfulness-based stress reduction, is a discipline grounded in Eastern practices that focuses on awareness of the present moment and how to more effectively deal with experience through awareness of feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Substantial research has demonstrated how mindfulness-based practice improves mental and physical health and can help people cope with stress, anxiety, pain, and illness.

12:30 to 1:30 p.m.

**March 12, 19, 26 • April 2, 9, 16, 23, 30
May 7, 14, 21, 28 • June 4, 11, 18, 25
July 9, 16, 23, 30 • August 6, 13, 20, 27**

Building Stamina: Body Movement for Cancer Survivors

PRACTITIONER: Julie Fischer

Engage in light movement designed to build stamina, reduce stress, and promote healing.

9:30 to 10:30 a.m.

**March 24 • April 21 • May 19 • June 16
July 21 • August 18**

Laughter Workshop for Cancer Survivors

PRACTITIONER: Julie Fischer

Engage in gentle exercises of playing, clapping, breathing, stretching, and lots of laughing! Extended periods of joy and laughter have many proven health benefits, such as reduced stress and increased energy levels.

11 a.m. to Noon

May 14 • November 4

Ask the Oncology Dietitian

Engage in conversation with MD Anderson at Cooper Oncology Dietitian **Linda Goldsmith, MA, RD, CSO, TTS.**

11 a.m. to Noon

April 29 • May 20

Affirmation Jewelry Project for Cancer Survivors

Join us as we create affirmation jewelry that will be shared through the Tea Cart Program with patients receiving chemotherapy.

11 a.m. to Noon

April 15 • June 17

Registration

All programs are free and open to **CANCER SURVIVORS ONLY.**

Registration is required.

To register or for more information call Director Bonnie Mehr at **856.325.6646.**

MD Anderson  Cooper
Cancer Center

Making Cancer History®

ALL CLASSES TAKE PLACE IN THE COOPER CLOCK TOWER, 931 CENTENNIAL BOULEVARD, VOORHEES, NJ, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.