



ThyCa Journeys

A free publication of ThyCa: Thyroid Cancer Survivors' Association, Inc. <www.thyca.org>
Support, education, and communication for thyroid cancer survivors and families.

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My Story (an excerpt)

by Tina Anders, Facilitator, ThyCa Northern Colorado Support Group

(Editor's Note: Tina, along with her children Gareth and April, was diagnosed with medullary thyroid cancer in 1999. Medullary thyroid cancer sometimes runs in families. Tina believes that being a part of ThyCa has helped her cope with her disease.)

"I feel less alone in this disease. I got so much support from others in 2001 and 2002 to help me survive the worst time in my life; now that I am helping others it feels great. Running a support group in Colorado has brought new friends into my life that I never would have met before"

I picked a doctor for me to see for the fun yearly physical. While there, we discussed some symptoms that I had been having.... At every step along the way, I told all the doctors about my eyes and my "spells," as I called them. My "spells" always came when I was lying down - I would get short of breath, shaky, sweaty, headaches, and it would only last a few minutes. If I changed positions, or got up, they would go away. These were the symptoms of the pheochromocytoma I had.

The last doctor became my hero because he put all the pieces together and determined that my children and I had Multiple Endocrine Neoplasia Type 2b. We knew the kids had it because over the summer we had their eyes examined....So they tested the kids' blood, and got the results right before Christmas. Merry Christmas, you have cancer, and if your kids don't have it now, they will eventually. So right before Christmas, I had another MRI of the abdomen, and thyroid ultrasound, and a chest x-ray. This confirmed medullary thyroid cancer (MTC), but no metastases showed up on these scans.

So, on January 3rd, they removed my right adrenal gland in laparoscopic surgery. During that surgery, the doctors looked at my liver and took out a little to do pathology tests on. Sure enough, I had liver metastases. At that point, we decided to go ahead with my total thyroidectomy and neck dissection because I/we just wanted as much of the cancer out of me as possible....My life was altered after the MTC operation.... My post-op CT only showed metastases to the liver, which we already knew about, because of my previous surgery.

.....my regular doctor has since become my newest hero, and an all-great doctor to me. I used to see him every week to get my calcium drawn, and he's monitoring the kids now, too. My doctor really is my life-line, and I feel so comfortable with him. He hugs my kids, he hugs me, and he really treats us like PEOPLE, not numbers. Although I'm not very religious I believe he was a gift from God to me in all this.

The calcitonin (measured as part of testing in people with medullary thyroid cancer) is also a problem. Prior to surgery it was 62,000. Then it was 41,000. Now it's at 26,000....My voice is also quieter since one of my vocal cords was paralyzed during surgery....

My daughter's surgery cured her of the cancer!!!! Unfortunately Gareth isn't so lucky. It's still in him somewhere. He had a CT scan in Denver, another one in Boulder, and a neck ultrasound. He had a second surgery in April 2001, involving a neck dissection. It was a tough recovery. For some reason his scar doesn't heal like mine does. His post-op calcitonin is still elevated so he still has some cancer in him somewhere....

Getting a doctor and surgeon with experience with medullary thyroid cancer is VERY important so that the patient gets the best care possible. Many doctors who might be great in some areas do not know enough about medullary thyroid cancer because it is rare. Medullary patients really need to be their own advocates and get the best care possible.

Thyroid cancer has had a HUGE IMPACT on my life!! It has changed how I take on every day. I learned not to sweat the small stuff. Enjoy the day....

ThyCa's Thyroid Cancer Survivors' Conference is an amazing thing to be a part of. Having thyroid cancer wreaks havoc on one's emotions. Going to the conference and hearing all these people saying they are going through so much of the same things really helps one's mental state.

Also, seeing all the doctors, and hearing from them, and realizing that there REALLY are great doctors out there who care about us, and want to help ALL thyroid cancer patients...that gives me strength and reassures me that the world has good people in it. I am proud to be part of ThyCa!

Rally for Research

- **Our goal:** A future free of thyroid cancer.
- **ThyCa's Research Grants** are open to all institutions and all scientists. Grants are awarded on the basis of scientific merit, regardless of hospital or institutional affiliation.
- **Grant recipients** are selected through expert peer review by an independent panel of the American Thyroid Association, the professional association of thyroid clinicians and researchers.
- **Our research fundraising campaign** unites survivors, family, friends, neighbors, and loved ones in an international effort to raise funds to combat thyroid cancer. Donations throughout the year, plus special fundraising events—walks, marathon runs, golf tournaments, bake sales, silent auctions, card and board games, and other special events—all contribute to our research funds.
- **It's never too late to make a difference!** Choose any day and make it special by declaring it a Thyroid Cancer "Rally for Research" day. ThyCa will provide you with flyers, letters, and donation envelopes. Or you may ask people to donate online through our web site. Let ThyCa know about your program so we can announce it on our web site and invite all our site's visitors to sponsor you! For more information, contact us at thyca@thyca.org, toll-free 1-877-588-7904, or fax to 1-630-604-6078.