

January 2023, Issue 22

Dallas YACS-A-LOT

Newsletter

This month we have another member of our newly-formed newsletter community, Candace Happ, presenting the opener. It encapsulates what the group and our newsletter are all about so well. So, without further ado...

A movie called “Everything Everywhere All at Once” came out recently and I can’t think of a better way to describe receiving a cancer diagnosis, especially at a young age. Your life is just beginning. You are figuring out who you are—dreaming of the many possibilities and pathways your life can take. And then hearing one single word completely and quite literally rocks your world.

I was diagnosed with Stage 2b small intestinal cancer at the age of 26, one year after marrying the love of my life. I was traveling for work as an IT consultant and found myself unable to sleep most nights because my stomach hurt so badly. I saw several doctors, most of them specialists, and after what seemed like hundreds of tests, the best explanation I received was that I had irritable bowel syndrome. Other doctors told me there was nothing wrong at all. I questioned myself constantly and started cutting things out of my diet because I had no idea what else to do.

I think a cancer diagnosis also warps time. During those six excruciating months, when I was trying to live a normal life while cancer grew inside my body, time seemed to sit still. Some days I was just trying to survive. When I could no longer eat or drink anything without getting violently ill, my husband took me to the ER and the medical team finally found “something.”

When the pathology came back, and that one single word came out of my surgeon's mouth, time sort of imploded, and with it, at least momentarily, so did all those 26-year-old dreams. Then time sped up by three times as I was bombarded with people's opinions, second opinions from doctors, IVF, and then ultimately, chemotherapy. I tried to navigate all this while still working, but after round five or six my body was too tired and too sick to keep it all going.

Time slowed down again as I went on FMLA and focused on rest and healing. After nine rounds, I got an infection in my lungs from the very drugs that were supposed to be helping me, which I can never really reconcile in my brain. These same drugs the nurses had to suit up to administer. The drugs that, if spilled at home, I need to clean up with gloves and a mask, and put in a hazardous waste bag. Since the infection in my lungs was bad, my oncologist determined that I could safely stop chemo (as there were no signs of disease) and gave me the green light to start my family.*

*Although, I needed to do it quickly, so they could take out all my reproductive organs since I was at a higher risk of cancer in my lady parts.

A little over a year later, I miraculously gave birth naturally to our only child, Harrison.

As a side note, the only thing that rivals pain from cancer or surgery is pushing a human being out of your body. He was and is a beautiful and healthy boy, but nine weeks postpartum, I relapsed with cancer that was found in my lungs, ovaries, liver, and abdominal wall. Time sped up again, but this time it did not slow down for over three years, and 80-something rounds of immunotherapy. Immunotherapy was drastically different from chemo and so much less toxic, but it still made me tired and, on top of also being a newborn mom, I think I was hallucinating most of the time.

\]At the beginning of this year, I heard a word that I had been waiting for six years to receive... "remission."

The mental healing became a priority for me after this, because I

could tell I had numbed myself to just about everything. I read the book “The Body Keeps the Score” by Bessel van der Kolk, M.D., and it helped tremendously as it explained what trauma does to you and your life if you don’t work through it. I have spent countless sessions with my therapist practicing EMDR and appointments with my holistic chiropractor healing from the constant shit storm that having a cancer diagnosis entails.

I still have some work to do (and I probably will for the rest of my life), but I am thankful to God to be allowed to do so. I am also so grateful for this little group that has provided so much comfort, support, and understanding.

A member of our group once shared the meaning of the Arabic word “Sabr” in a support group meeting, and I would like to leave you with that definition.

“Sabr: to remain [spiritually](#) steadfast and to keep doing good actions in the personal and collective domain, specifically when facing opposition or encountering problems, setbacks, or unexpected and unwanted results. It is patience in the face of all unexpected and unwanted outcomes.”

You got this. And when you don’t, we will be here to lift you up.

DALLAS YACS CALENDAR

Wednesday, January 18th, 8 p.m. - Trivia Night at Mucky Duck's in Addison! Come early for Happy Hour!

Tuesday, January 24th, 7 p.m. - Support Group on Zoom or In-Person

FUN NOTICE!!!

Mark March 31st - April 2nd off of your calendars, because we have a two-night retreat planned. More information to come...

WE WANT TO SUPPORT YOUR PARTNER

We want YACS to be a place of support for patients **and** their partners. We are starting a Facebook group for partners and spouses to connect with each other. We hope to grow this into future activities like meetups and support meetings. Please encourage the very significant people in your lives to join!

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/619102049902713/>

CARD COMMITTEE

Volunteer for the Card Committee! Once a month, this group will get together to write cards to young adult patients admitted to Clements hospital. This is a great way to extend our YACS community to patients during such a difficult time. [Email Alex](#) if interested.

Life on Pause Podcast

Back in October, we teamed up with PennState Health to record another episode of their podcast, Life on Pause; this episode was titled "Toxic Positivity and Grief Tourism."

This is a [link](#) to listen to the podcast. You can also find it on the [Apple](#), [Google](#), and [Spotify](#) podcast platforms.

We are here for you!

Help us recognize your milestones! Do you have an appointment, scan, or cancer-versary coming up? Let us know so we can send you

a note of support! Just follow the link below.

Share your milestone!

Knowing The Group! Featuring Lindsay Durrenberger



Meet Florida native and stage III rectal cancer patient, Lindsay Durrenberger, who now calls Dallas YACS her home. Cancer has largely impacted Lindsay's profession and aspects of her marriage. After a decade in the communication profession, she changed her career to education in order to spend more time with her husband and two children after her diagnosis. Lindsay openly shares how pelvic radiation and chemotherapy's long-term side effects have created challenges in her sex life. She and her husband continue to learn how to navigate their "new reality" after being thrown into medically induced menopause at only 36 years old. Her spirits stay positive knowing that she and her family have made many strides overall in a

positive direction since her 2019 diagnosis.

We need more submissions!

If you'd like to be featured in a future newsletter—and let's face the facts, if you're reading this, we want to feature you—then send us an email through [THIS LINK](#), bolded so you won't miss it.

As we receive your responses, they're added to our supply and we pull one per month for the newsletter.

[Feedback?](#)

If you have anything you'd like us to know that isn't covered in the survey or milestone link, tell us [here](#).

TAYLOR'S COMEDIC TURF

What did the farmer say when he saw 3 holes in his field?

Find out at the end of the newsletter...

ALEX'S MEDITATION MOMENT

Mindfulness encourages us to turn toward our feelings and sit with the uncomfortable and sometimes painful experiences, and this, of course, is an important aspect of healing. However, when our brain is

relaying to us that something is too much to handle right now or all at once, we also need tools to ground ourselves in felt safety.

The container exercise is an approachable way to visualize a holding place for distressing or disturbing experiences until, in order to address these places, we feel better able, prepared, and supported. The objective is not to disregard or ignore the important data bits our brain is trying to communicate or to view this as a way to lock feelings up in order to not feel. Rather, it is meant to allow our brain to set aside distressing information until the optimal time to address the material. This helps to prevent becoming too overwhelmed by triggering experiences, which often include intrusive thoughts, images, and memories.

To utilize this exercise, imagine a container of some type: a box, safe, vault, trunk, etc. Describe the function and purpose of the container. Whatever the container is, it should have a door or lid that you can open and close as you please. The container must be big and strong enough to hold anything causing distress. Get creative with what your container looks like: the shape, the color, ornate details, maybe there is a warning sign or time stamp on the side of it—you can make this tangible and visible by tapping into your artistic side and drawing or making a box.

When something distressing arises and the timing is *not* optimal to address that something, imagine letting the overwhelming material go into the container temporarily. The word 'letting' is of great importance here. There is a lot moving around in your head; let any thoughts, memories, images, or ideas float into your container. If it is difficult to set something aside, it might just mean it's ready to be cleared and you need support and connection to do that work.

Wait a few seconds or a minute or so and ask, "What do you notice?" or "How is it going?" or "Do I need to keep filling the container, or am I ready to close it for now?"

You know where you stored it, and you will be able to find it again when you're ready to take things out bit by bit and learn (or unlearn) from them. Over time, your container may develop or change, and as

you practice, you may realize you need something different to hold what's there.

PROMPT OF THE MONTH

With 2023 finding its footing in our world, what changes would like to see in the new year?

If you'd like your response featured in next month's newsletter, simply include it in an email to the group's email, dallasyacsalot@gmail.com.

The farmer, upon finding three holes in his land, observed, "Well. Well. Well."



That's it! You've reached the end of our newsletter. Until next time...

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