

HopeLine

connecting you to a network of support

Mission Statement

Hope for Two...
The Pregnancy with
Cancer Network is
an organization
dedicated to providing
women diagnosed with
cancer while pregnant
with information,
support and hope.

Guiding Values

We serve women of
all socioeconomic,
ethnic and religious
backgrounds world-
wide. Volunteers with a
history of cancer while
pregnant are the
mainstays of our
support network. We
strive to remove
barriers to women
obtaining complete and
accurate information
about their options for
dealing with cancer
while pregnant.
We respect and support
every woman's
personal decisions
without judgement.



Message from the Chairwoman

Patty Murray... Peace

When I was a child, I would ask my Dad what he wanted for his birthday or Father's Day. Without fail, he would always retort, "All I want is a little peace and quiet!" As the second oldest of 5 children, with waves of friends floating in and out of our home, I was baffled as to how I was ever going to fulfill my Dad's wishes for a "little peace and quiet." It was equally incredulous to me as to why he ever wished for this, since I always thought it was fun when people were around. Yet now, I truly understand the "peace and quiet" he wished for, a different kind of peace.

It is the peace that is so elusive; the peace and quiet of mind and spirit that only you can give to yourself. You have to go within, find it, and never let it go. In the process, you have to silence the negative thoughts of worry, fear, and doubt. If you allow them the chance to take hold, these malignant thoughts will become unbearable noise in your mind. Once forced out, you must replace them with benevolent thoughts of wholeness, love, and faith. This is the peace that my Dad was referencing all those years ago. Nevertheless, when life gives us curveballs, it is very difficult to maintain our serenity; therefore, it takes practice and hard work for peace of mind to emerge as a healthy lifelong habit.

Even though I never was a baseball player, I have always felt a kinship with all Major League Baseball players who have practiced and developed this habit. Each time they are up to bat, they have the courage to step up to the plate to take a swing, hoping for a base hit or even a home run. Each player brazenly stares down the pitcher, not knowing what type of pitch is being thrown at him – a 90 MPH (or more) fastball, a curve ball, or worse yet, a career-ending wild pitch. Despite this uncertainty, he stands there, has faith in himself, and quiets his fears and anxieties in order to find the peace to forge ahead and stay in the game. Their faces appear calm, showing that they are in control and able to let go of the rest.

This tranquility and constant perseverance reminds me of the Serenity Prayer that I was introduced to 50 years ago:

God Grant me the Serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

Until next time, may each of us create strategies for cultivating our own peace of mind.

testimonial

Thanks to *Hope for Two* I made it through my darkest days of cancer treatment with reassurance and comfort.

- COLLEEN G.



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my story by Laila Johnson

real stories of women diagnosed with cancer during pregnancy

In the fall of 2014, I was directed to see a fertility specialist after having an ectopic pregnancy. Even though I was heartbroken to lose the pregnancy, I was thrilled to know that I did, at least, get pregnant. After two and a half years of chemo in my early thirties and being 39 at the time, I was concerned that I would not be able to conceive at all.

I met with the specialist, who I really liked a lot, and he ran several tests. We eventually found out I had a polyp that needed to be removed due to its placement in my uterus. Once removed, we had a meeting with the doctor on Dec. 31, 2014. I will never forget it. He said that, according to my blood work results, the likelihood of conceiving again was close to zero. If I did conceive, it would probably end in a miscarriage. He recommended using a donor egg as my only option. He said IVF wasn't even an option for me.

I left feeling pretty upset, but not defeated. There was a little voice in the back of my head telling me not to give up. Three weeks later, I took a pregnancy test that came back positive! I had conceived naturally, against all odds.

We were cautiously optimistic. But I couldn't help feeling that a miracle had happened.

Eventually, I went for my bloodwork and met with my OB/GYN. My exam went well, but then she returned to say that all my bloodwork was great except that my lymphocytes were very low. She asked me to reach out to my oncologist about it. I initially kinda blew it off because I figured it was because of the fierce cold I just had. But once it sunk in, I kind of lost it a bit. I remember crying and saying, "I can't go through this again." She sat down with me and assured me that, even if it was something, that the baby would be ok and we would get through it.

I left there feeling better and like it wasn't anything to worry about. I had been cured! It had been nine cancer free years, there was no way it was back! Even my oncologist agreed that it was probably because I had just been sick. So, I dragged my feet to go for more bloodwork.

Finally, I got my blood work done and on the following Monday, Dr. Shani (my oncologist) called. She told me to drop everything and come to her office right away. Erik, my husband, happened to be home at that moment and I couldn't even digest what she just said and could only utter, "why, did something come up?" Duh? Of course something did! Why else would she tell me to drop everything and head to the city? She wanted to run the test in her lab.

After giving my blood at her lab, we waited at the office. When Dr. Shani came out and called us into her office, I could see by the look on her face that I was in trouble. I just felt like running. There sitting in her office, she told us that there were 18 blasts found in my blood. I felt defeated. Still so drained from just losing my mother, I just felt defeated and ready to give up. I remember crying my eyes out and feeling my sister hug me and I couldn't even hug back. I felt despondent. I felt like, "what a cruel joke!" We all had been through so much for about eight years, that to have to go through it again seemed impossible. I felt like "I am done!"

Then, I started to focus on my pregnancy. I began to not care about anything else but my baby! I have to have this baby! That means I can't just give up, I have to fight. And so, the fight began again that day. Dr. Shani immediately started making calls for an oncologist who would take my case since she felt it was too big of a fish for her to fry. "Who wants a pregnant lady with relapsed Leukemia?!" Uh not many!

My team eventually came together in April 2015. They were amazing and ready to do whatever it took to save both me and my baby. They informed me that treatments and tests for ALL had changed a lot since my first go around 2006. To be honest, I felt like the treatment cycles were so much longer and intense, but I had to do whatever it took. They were careful to leave some drugs out because I was pregnant.

"I WAS IN TREATMENT FOR APPROXIMATELY SIX MONTHS OF MY PREGNANCY. THEN, LUKE HARDY JOHNSON WAS BORN ON SEPTEMBER 13, 2015, WEIGHING 7 LBS 1.9 OZ."



Hope for Two member Laila Johnson with husband, Erik, and son, Luke.

It was incredibly daunting and scary. I felt like I was in the craziest situation and was looking anywhere for some hope. I scoured the internet for similar stories and came up with basically nothing. Then, I found *Hope for Two*! I could not believe that there was a whole organization dedicated to women fighting cancer during pregnancy! I was thrilled to be able to read success stories about both mother and child. It gave me such a life line. Eventually, I reached out to *Hope for Two* and they set me up with a mother who also had had Leukemia during her pregnancy. It was just what I needed. The mother was healthy again and her daughter was about 13 years old already and perfectly healthy. She even went on to have triplets after her treatment was finished. I was amazed and so hopeful after that. I really can't say that I would have had such a positive outlook if I didn't find *Hope for Two*. I felt so alone, but *Hope for Two* made me feel like I wasn't and that there really was something to be hopeful for. I am forever grateful to the organization and to the women I have communicated with—very kind and understanding individuals who really cared.

I was in treatment for approximately six months of my pregnancy. Then, Luke Hardy Johnson was born on September 13, 2015, weighing 7 lbs 1.9 oz. I was induced at 37.5 weeks. After being in labor for an entire day and two hours of pushing, Luke was born via C-section. I will never forget seeing the doctor examine him and turn to me with two thumbs up and saying, "he's perfect!" and the doctor was right. He was and still is perfect. He is almost three years old now and brings us so much joy and laughter every single day. Of course he tests us whenever he can, he is three! We feel very lucky to be his parents and that he is so healthy and strong. I believe that his strength is what got him here and even helped me, his momma. I used to say "the force is strong with this one" every time someone asked how the baby was doing. Hence why we named him Luke! We love him more than words can ever describe.

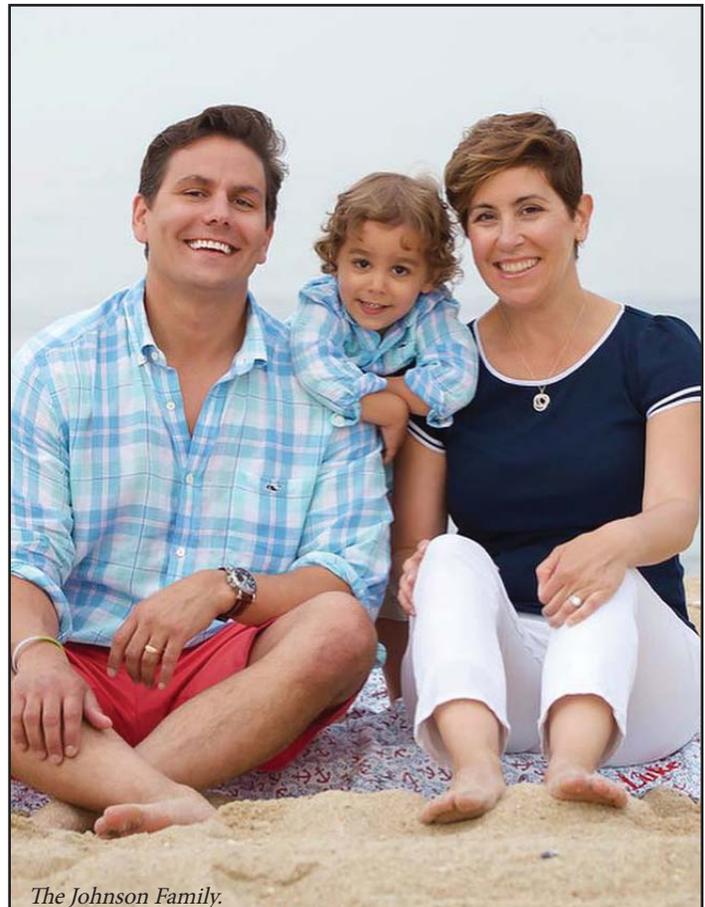
As terrifying as the whole experience was, Luke gave me so much strength and joy during such a scary time. I felt his kicks for the first time while in the hospital. I was overjoyed in a place that I really didn't want to be, but he was always with me, reminding of the miracle he was and that he was ok.

Two weeks after his birth, I had to go in the hospital for over a month to receive a double cord transplant. It was the hardest thing I ever had to do. I had to leave my newborn and endure a very difficult time both physically and mentally. I remember telling myself, "just get it over with" to every treatment and moment.

Finally I returned home after a month or so and the recovery began. Again, the hardest thing I have ever experienced. I couldn't be the mom I wanted to be and I used whatever energy I had to be with Luke. After a long while, the pieces came together and I am happy to report we are all healthy and happy. It's been about three years and I still think about it every day, but mostly how lucky we are.



Hope for Two member Laila Johnson with son, Luke.

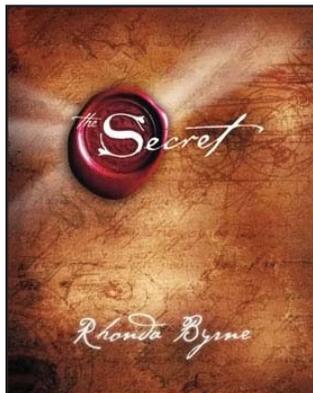


The Johnson Family.

book review

The Secret

BY RHONDA BYRNE



The Secret is about the Law of Attraction, which is the belief that by focusing on positive or negative thoughts people are then able to bring positive or negative experiences into their life. The book, which rose to the top of many bestseller lists, encourages readers to clearly visualize their goals in order to attract what they really want in life. It offers a variety of proven methods in order

to help each person, whether it be earn more money, improve their personal relationships, or return to full health. Unsurprisingly, the lessons found within *The Secret* are almost identical to those espoused by our organization—hope, support, and most importantly, love. Whether or not you've read *The Secret*, you all understand its core message. As cancer survivors and cancer supporters, we can't always detect when things will turn around, but perseverance and a belief in oneself is key.

To view other books reviewed by Hope for Two, visit our website: <http://www.hopefortwo.org/category/book-corner/>



Hope for Two member Meghan Ward's daughter, Sloane.

Special Deliveries

b a b i e s b o r n t o m o t h e r s
w h o w e r e p r e g n a n t w i t h c a n c e r

- ☞ Meghan Ward gave birth to SLOANE MARIE in July 2017 (5 lbs. 10 oz.)
- ☞ Gina Quatum gave birth to MAXIMUS JONATHAN in April 2017 (4 lbs. 14 oz.)
- ☞ Allie Moreno gave birth to JOEL LUCAS in March 2018 (6 lbs. 8 oz.)
- ☞ Merideth Sorensen gave birth to HOPE ELAINE in July 2018 (4 lbs. 8 oz.)

tell us about your
little miracle
info@hopefortwo.org



birth story

Allie Moreno

Allie Moreno was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma at 22 weeks pregnant. After four rounds of chemo, Joel Lucas Moreno came into the world on March 6, 2018 at 8:04 a.m. He weighed 6 lbs. 13 oz. and was 19” long. Most importantly, he’s healthy! The week after delivery, Allie had her first PET scan and it showed negative for cancer cells! Allie has since finished her remaining two chemo treatments and has 17 rounds of radiation ahead to finish her cancer treatment.



Hope for Two member Allie Moreno with son, Joel.



Joel Lucas Moreno.

ask the therapist

BY CHRISTINE BYLEWSKI, LCSW-R, BCD

Chris is a licensed clinical social worker, Vice-Chairwoman of Hope for Two... The Pregnant with Cancer Network Board of Directors and a co-author of the Hope for Two Volunteer Support Woman Training DVD.

Q:

I feel so anxious most of the time, especially first thing in the morning and then, at the end of the day. I don't know how to deal with my fearful thoughts.

A:

Being diagnosed with cancer at a time when life should be filled with excitement is not something you ever expected. Fear can be such an insidious emotion and that is what anxiety is: fear of the unknown. Asking yourself “why did this happen to me, will I be healthy again, what does the future hold” are thoughts which fuel anxiety and fear. Rather, focus on what is real in this moment: i.e., “I have the support of my family, I am ok right now, I have a medical team I trust “. Replace scary thoughts with calming, reassuring ones. Remember to breathe! Put your hands on your belly and slowly breathe in and out. Say to yourself, “Cool air in, warm air out”. Repeat and repeat. As your breath becomes deeper, your body will release the tension anxiety creates.

testimonial

“Thanks, *Hope for Two*, for giving me and my family hope during such a scary time.”

- KRISTI L.

If you live in the Western New York area and would like to serve on the Hope for Two Board of Directors, please contact Patty Murray at info@hopefortwo.org.

A special thank you

Susan Musialowski and

Christine Bylewski

Susan was our part-time patient coordinator for eight years. She assisted with a multitude of tasks, including putting together the newsletter information, training our Volunteer Support Women, matching patients with trained volunteer support women, and maintaining, as well as updating our organization's database. She has also assisted the Chairwoman with each of the fundraisers that have taken place since she has joined the organization. Susan found *Hope For Two* 19 years ago when she was diagnosed with thyroid cancer while pregnant. After completing her treatment, Susan was extremely eager to become one of our Volunteer Support Women and soon became a valued member of our Board of Directors. Upon moving to North Carolina several years ago, Susan had decided to leave the board. However, she took on the new role as the Patient Coordinator for *Hope For Two* shortly thereafter. After 8 valued years with *Hope For Two*, Susan has recently decided to step down from her position after deciding to take on a full-time job.



Hope for Two member Merideth Sorensen, with daughter, Hope.

Chris, who was our Vice-Chairwoman of the board for many years, recently stepped down when her term was up and upon her retirement. Chris has been an invaluable part of *Hope For Two* since its inception, from being our consultant in our early days to helping develop our Volunteer Support Women training program alongside Susan Musialowski and Patty Murray. Chris is also the author of the "Ask The Therapist" column for our newsletter. She spearheaded our tote program, and currently volunteers many hours each month towards this project.

To both of these ladies, we owe a debt of gratitude. However, this is not a farewell. Rather, it is a thank you, thank you, and thank you again for all they have done for *Hope For Two*.

Welcome to our new part-time employees: Juli Morlock and Nicole Silpe

Nicole is our new network assistant and helps with secretarial duties, which include sending out letters, updating the news section on our website, as well as maintaining our *Hope For Two* Facebook page. She also assists with compiling a great deal of content for our newsletter.

Juli is our new Patient Coordinator whose role consists of matching newly diagnosed women with one of our Volunteer Support Women, monitoring all of our emails, and training our new Volunteer Support Women.

Both of these women are highly competent and passionate about our mission. We at *Hope For Two* are so happy to have these two wonderful ladies on of our team.



Hope for Two member Kerri Mercer Brooks with daughter, Maddie.



Hope for Two member Gina Quatum's son, Maximus.

testimonial

“I am so thankful for *Hope for Two*. You gave me peace of mind during a very difficult time.”

- SHAYLA W.

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Got News?

www.hopelfortwo.org

Hopeline is printed to share ideas and stories among members. If you'd like to share your story, birth announcement or information for publication, please contact us!

INFO@HOPEFORTWO.ORG

1.800.743.4471

Hope for Two...The Pregnant
With Cancer Network
PO Box 253
Amherst, NY 14226

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Materials published in Hopeline are not intended to provide medical advice, which should be obtained from a qualified physician. Information and ideas included do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of all members.

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