

the life in **MYERS PARK**

October 2020

A PUBLICATION FOR AND BY THE RESIDENTS OF MYERS PARK, EASTOVER, OLD FOXCROFT & DEERING OAKS

Nancy Norelli

Breast Cancer Survivor and
Retired Judge Counts
Her Blessings!

Photo by Katie Smith Photography

Your Stories. Your Photos. Your Community.

meet your neighbor

By Myers Park Resident Nancy Norelli

27 Years and counting!

Breast Cancer Survivor Nancy Norelli

The little hand reached for mine and carefully turned it palm up. Wordlessly my youngest child placed her treasured Minnie Mouse ring in my palm and closed my fingers over it. With a smile she turned and tiptoed back upstairs and into bed. Her wordless statement – *Defy that silly rule. Wear this ring into the operating room tomorrow. So began my journey down the breast cancer highway with Minnie Mouse taped to my pinkie, a loving husband, and a host of amazing friends who took charge of the nitty gritty of my life, prayed endlessly, and cheered for my recovery.*



Photo by Katie Smith Photography

The next day a mastectomy revealed 10 lymph nodes positive for cancer. My doctors recommended the “ultimate treatment,” very high dose chemo augmented by a bone marrow transplant (BMT) at Duke Medical Center. With three young children, this strong country girl easily said, “Give me all you’ve got!” I was ready.

Ten days later, a Duke doctor explained the treatment—including that 10-15% of the women would die from the treatment itself. Duke would require me to go on a clinical trial, which would give me a 50-50 shot of getting the vaunted BMT treatment. The doctor landed another punch. My insurance company might not pay the \$250,000 cost of the BMT. I had to either present insurance certification or a *certified check for \$116,000* before Duke would randomize me for the trial. I was horrified.

Drawing on connections of friends and colleagues, I reached out across the country in search of a BMT without randomization. Each medical center directed me back to Duke’s trial. I was distraught.

At church one Sunday the clouds of despair cleared. A youth speaker described her faith that God would take care of her when she entered a dark room. I rushed to tell my husband that I had put my life in God’s hands and trusted Him to select the right arm of the study for me. My husband chuckled because he always believed that! I was at peace.

Health insurance certification was procured, and the National Institutes of Health randomized me to the non-transplant arm. At Duke

Hospital, I received high dose chemo taking my bone marrow to the limit without destroying it. I trusted God. My life was in His hands.

Recovery left me with a question, “Why, Lord, did I survive?” As my prayer list exploded with names of breast cancer patients, I knew I was called to reach out to them as they faced uncertain futures and frightening treatments. Fearing for the demise of my professional life, God directed me to lead a more meaningful life, day by day, and revealed that defying breast cancer had imbued me with courage. As fear gave way to courage, I made the gutsy decision to seek an open seat on the Mecklenburg district court. Campaigning fearlessly, I explained the importance of the courts and wordlessly demonstrated that there was a life after breast cancer. My three children gathered their friends and campaigned hard. Defeat to a talented district attorney was bearable because I had defeated cancer. Governor Hunt would later appoint me to the bench.

Today, daughter Lee is a sprightly mom, who still defies silly rules and loves beautiful jewelry. My children are empathetic, strong adults who face challenges with courage and grit. As a retired judge, I am blessed to continue my career at Miles Mediation & Arbitration. My promise to God remains firm. I shall *never ever* complain about a birthday. Joyfully, I will celebrate my 71st this month marking 27 years of survival.



Nancy's entire family in July (photo by Travis Dew Photography)



Nancy with Felipe Gonzales Edmiston, Dancing with the Stars for the Pink House 2016, where she raised \$70,000.



Nancy with her husband of 49 years, Ron Norelli (photo by Travis Dew Photography)

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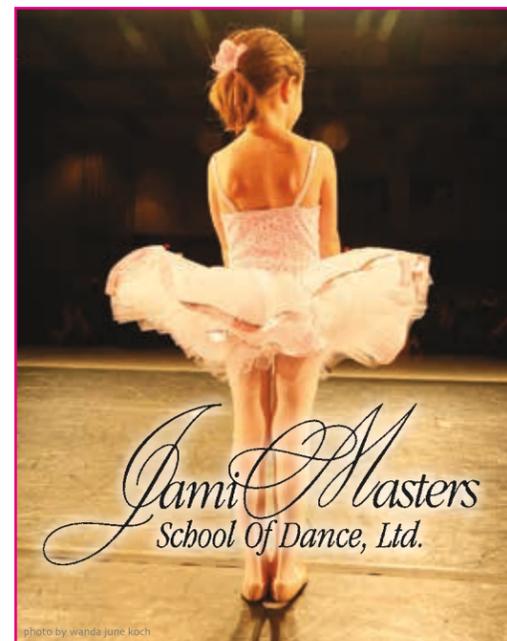


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