

Barbara's story: The healing power of giving back

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BARBARA D.

LIVING WITH CANCER SINCE 2003

Barbara knows about cancer. Over the past 14 years, she's been diagnosed with ovarian, lymphoma, breast and skin cancer. She knows about the fear and uncertainty of being diagnosed, and about the toll cancer can take on your work and your relationships.

But she also knows that cancer can be a catalyst for positive change in your life. And how it's possible to find new ways to take care of yourself, while also helping other people along the way. She knows this because that's exactly what she's done in the years since her first diagnosis.

Cancer helps put your life in perspective. It helps you see what's working and what isn't.

Barbara was diagnosed with ovarian cancer 14 years ago during a routine exam. "I didn't have any symptoms. It came out of the blue." She says that cancer helped her to identify the people in her life who were truly there for her. "There were a lot of people who lifted me over the mountain."

After finishing treatment for ovarian cancer and beating a lymphoma diagnosis in 2007, Barbara embarked on numerous adventures, volunteering in orphanages, schools and for programs for women with HIV in far-off places like Botswana, Tanzania, Myanmar and South Africa.

Article slides



Barbara feeds the sheep at a farm in New Zealand.



Barbara and her partner, Karen, at a family wedding in Ontario, Canada.



Barbara rides a camel in India.



Barbara kayaks on Glenmere Lake in New York.



Barbara and Karen with one of their "adopted nieces," Ella.

For me, helping others is the best antidote to grief.

Helping other people has always been an essential part of Barbara's life. For many years, she worked in social services, directing programs that served thousands of people every day. She refused to let cancer take that spirit away from her.

Barbara remembers volunteering at a daycare center in Botswana, where she helped children get their first pair of shoes and taste their first ice cream cone. "It's an experience I call up whenever I need inspiration—especially when fear or helplessness takes hold before my scans."

Today, Barbara's life is filled with the people who have stood by her: her close friends and her partner, Karen. It's also filled with new people in her life, including the children she and Karen have adopted as "chosen nieces." She stays physically active and has developed a passion for walking, hiking and kayaking. Constant motion and activity in Barbara's life have been an essential part of her healing.

Walking teaches me: you can put one foot in front of the other. You have been slowed down but not stopped.