



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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Q & A with Gary Bloom, National Board Chair

Gary Bloom, ThyCa Co-Founder and Board Chair, has been involved with ThyCa since its inception. A Maryland resident, Gary is a survivor of papillary thyroid carcinoma with tall cells. Gary's cancer was misdiagnosed for years, and he was incorrectly treated for sleep apnea. Since discovery of his cancer, Gary has had three thyroid-related surgeries, including a total thyroidectomy and two surgeries to eliminate metastatic tumor. Gary has also had five radioactive iodine treatments since being diagnosed. Currently a patient at the National Institutes of Health, Gary is part of a clinical study that may someday lead to more effective treatment of thyroid cancer patients.

Journeys Editor: *What has the impact of thyroid cancer been on your life?*

GB: During the time in my life when I was going through hypothyroid testing and treatment every 6 months, thyroid cancer physically was my life. No sooner would I feel 100% then I would begin the slide back into hypothyroidism. The last couple of years have been easier on me physically, especially now that I'm followed using Thyrogen instead of going through withdrawal. I still get to go through the low-iodine diet, the MRI, and the whole body scans, but the process is not as hard on my family and me. Beyond that, I stopped being a workaholic for my day job and spend more time with my family ... a reward in itself. Guess I learned life is short, and enjoy. I also went back to my growing-up phase of helping others by becoming active with ThyCa.

Journeys Editor: *How did you find out about ThyCa: Thyroid Cancer Survivors' Association?*

GB: I met up with the other founders of ThyCa before the organization began. I met them through the original Internet e-mail support group. Most of the other 16 folks instrumental in founding the organization got together in September of 1998 at the 1st annual survivors' conference. I wasn't able to go due to a serious illness in my wife's family. When those folks returned home from the conference they immediately drafted me to be part of the developing organization...I became ThyCa's first board chair, a position I'm proud to say I've held since.

Journeys Editor: *What do you feel you get from being part of ThyCa and its support group?*

GB: I get the feeling of belonging to a group, obviously. A group that deals with our special, significant health issue together. Like so many when I began down this path, I was alone. I made mistakes because I didn't know enough. I didn't have all the answers (still don't, of course), but now, I can reach out to others and compare notes. Beyond that, I really enjoy offering a shoulder to the next person ... it has been most satisfying to work with other folks to try and ease the shock of dealing with thyroid cancer. Working with others is made more difficult because we are sometimes told we have 'good cancer.' I've learned that many folks don't take this disease seriously enough because their physicians have gone to great lengths to comfort the patient/survivor with this label.

Journeys Editor: *What do you think makes ThyCa different from other support groups?*

GB: Our people! We accomplish so much without paid employees. Everything we accomplish happens because of volunteer enthusiasm! ThyCa is proof that there is good on the Internet.

Journeys Editor: *What changes, if any, has ThyCa undergone in the last year?*

GB: ThyCa is always changing. Last year we decided to move our annual survivors' conference We knew we had to bring the conference to a new group of attendees. The conference is too good an experience to not share with everyone.... the conference is a great way to learn and share regarding our thyroid cancer journey. Our visibility in the medical community continues to grow. Physicians are telling their patients about ThyCa. This is our hope. We know that everyone won't be interested in our services, but we hope everyone has the opportunity to decide this individually.

Another change for ThyCa involves fundraising. ThyCa has always been about providing services first. We don't overwhelm people with solicitations for money. Last year we announced our intentions to raise money to fund Thyroid Cancer Research. Our dream is to establish a perpetuating Thyroid Cancer Research Fund. We must help ourselves!

Journeys Editor: *What would be your long-term wish for ThyCa?*

GB: My wish for ThyCa is that volunteers will always come forward to help each other. Beyond that, I hope we'll fund the research that eliminates this terrible disease.

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.