

# Courage & Cancer

An Evening of Stories

*“Celebration”*

May 6, 2026  
5:30 PM - 8:00 PM

Hilton Garden Inn • Troy, NY



»—————«  
*Honoring*

Kelly Carron and Dakotah Jones  
of Emma Jayne's Restaurant

»—————«  
*To benefit the NYOH Community Cancer Foundation*

NYOH Community  
Cancer Foundation

## *Event Program*

<b>Doors Open</b>	Hors d'oeuvres, cash bar, & raffle prizes
<b>Welcome</b>	Molly Renaud
<b>Stories of Celebration</b>	Lutricia Graves, Chuck Aiken, & Michelle McCoy
<b>Recognition of Honorees</b>	Kelly Carron & Dakotah Jones
<b>More Stories of Celebration</b>	Latha Kaliath & Dr. Courtney Bellomo
<b>Closing Remarks</b>	Molly Renaud

## *Event Details*

Try your luck winning a fun raffle prize! \$20 donation for ten tickets. Winners must be present to win, take your raffle prize home tonight. We will draw winning tickets during the program and post names at the end of the night.

Food, cash bar, and raffle prizes will close when the event program begins.

ASL interpretation provided by Living Resources

Audio Visual by Live Sound

Photography by Jay Zhang Photography

Video recording by Agora Media

## **Thank You to Our Event Committee & Volunteers**

Christa Carson	Emily Rubin
Linda Kindlon Cary	Elliot Sobel
Frances Ford	Dawn Vyvial
Diane Granger	Casey Mulligan Walsh
Johanne Morne	Lexi Watkins
Molly Renaud	Takara Wiles



## Meet Our Honorees

### Kelly Carron and Dakotah Jones

Kelly Carron and  
Dakotah Jones both  
work as managers



for Emma Jayne's Restaurant in Clifton  
Park. They met over 15 years ago while

working together at Rumours by Tuscan Sun, then Joe's Tavern in Cohoes, and quickly became dear friends. When Kelly was diagnosed with breast cancer 2017, Dakotah was one of Kelly's biggest supporters, often visiting to keep her company while in treatment – sharing a few laughs and friendship.

To both honor Kelly and give back to the local community, Emma Jayne's Restaurant, thanks to Kelly and Dakotah's creativity and enthusiasm – has hosted multiple fundraisers for the NYOH Foundation, sponsored holiday drives for NYOH patients and their families, and become energetic cheerleaders for the NYOH Foundation. You might have enjoyed their tasty, featured pink cocktail served in October for Breast Cancer Awareness Month, dropped off a toy during the holidays for the family of an NYOH patient, or recently attended their Blue Night Out in March for Colorectal Cancer Awareness.

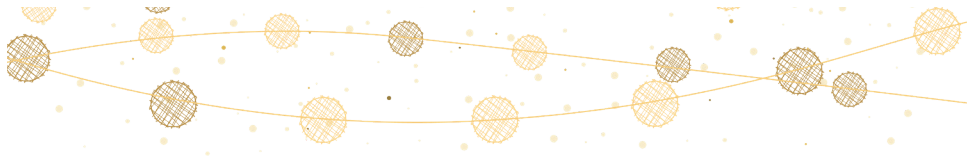
Both Kelly and Dakotah look forward to coming to work each day, seeing each other and fellow co-workers who feel like family. Kelly lives with her husband and daughter in Rexford. They have a dog, Jameson. Dakotah lives in Schenectady with her boyfriend and their dog, Bob.

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## NYOH Community Cancer Foundation Board of Directors

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### Narrator

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*in honor of my mother*  
Repeat Business Systems  
Terry & Douglas Wingate

### Additional Thanks

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Accent Commercial Furniture, Clare Dollard Photography, Fenimore Asset Management, Fort Orange Press, Donna Healy, Katie Mangan, Tree House Brewery, and Old Wisdom Wellness



## *Meet Our Storytellers*

### **Chuck Aiken**

Chuck was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia in November 2019. Since then, he has turned his experience into purpose as a cancer advocate and speaker. Chuck is the Director of Membership and Onboarding with Man Up To Cancer, where he helps strengthen community and support for those impacted by cancer. Known for his candid, hopeful voice and resilience, he inspires others to stay informed, stay connected, and keep moving forward—one step at a time.



### **Dr. Courtney Bellomo**

Dr. Bellomo is a hematologist-oncologist and stem cell transplant director at New York Oncology Hematology. She specializes in blood cancers and advanced therapies, including CAR T-cell treatment, and has been recognized as a “Next Gen Innovator” for her contributions to oncology research and patient care. She also has been active in creating quality guidelines for community practices through FACT and NYOH’s Clinical Quality Committee and currently serves as a National Donor Marrow Program national ambassador. Dr. Bellomo also leads the Albany Med Health System Cancer Committee. She is also active in community engagement through various organizations such as the American Cancer Society, the Warren & Denyse Mackey Foundation, and Blood Cancer United. She enjoys spending time with her family, cooking, traveling, and photography.



### **Lutricia Graves**

Trish is a divorced mother of a 32-year-old daughter. Employed with the NYS Assembly for over 30 years, she currently holds the position as a Telecommunications Analyst. Trish is also the founder of Tangerine Dreams, an event planning business, and she is a travel agent and advisor with Fora Travel Agency. She also works part-time in the community she grew up in, working with inner-city children at the West End Community Center in Albany. Trish is a two-time colon cancer survivor in remission for 16 years. She enjoys sharing her cancer experience with people, in hopes that it will offer encouragement and give hope to those experiencing this terrible fight.





## Latha Kaliath

Latha is 78 years old and has been fighting stage 3 ovarian cancer for the past 10 years. She taught English for 56 years across 3 continents. She has always been, and continues to be, an avid sportswoman, training for years in Indian classical music and dancing, but she loves all kinds of music and dancing. Latha and Hari, her husband have travelled to more than 40 countries. They met on the Himalayas at an altitude of 17,000 ft. 48 years ago. She wants people to know that neither age nor sickness should deter us from doing what we love to do, as much and as well as we can.



## Michelle McCoy

Michelle moved to the Capital Region as a graduate student and has since built a rewarding 20+ year career as a speech-language pathologist, supporting adults with diverse communication needs. She is also a five-year Stage 3 breast cancer survivor who, with the support of her loving husband and care team, chose aesthetic flat closure over reconstruction so she could return to an active, healthy life as quickly as possible.



## Molly Renaud, Mistress of Ceremonies

Molly is the Director of Community Engagement at the Times Union, a breast cancer survivor, and a proud Niskayuna resident with her husband, Dan, and their 10-year-old daughter, Lucy. This is her third-year volunteering with Cancer & Courage—and her first as emcee. A lifelong storyteller since her third-grade stage debut, Molly also co-chairs the Albany Institute Museum Gala and serves on the board of Albany Pro Musica.



## Emily Rubin, Storytelling Coach

Emily is an author and writing instructor. Her debut novel, *Stalina*, was a selection in the Amazon Debut Novel Award Contest. Her stories and essays have been published widely. Her personal essay on being diagnosed a second time with breast cancer was the cover story for the September issue of *Cancer Health Magazine*. Rubin runs the Write Treatment Workshops for NYOH and Mount Sinai Cancer Centers. The Write Treatment Anthologies, Vols. I and II include writings from her workshop participants. She has lectured at Bard College and taught fiction for Columbia University's Narrative Medicine Program. Rubin lives and writes in Columbia County, NY. More about Emily's writing and workshops at [emilyrubin.net](http://emilyrubin.net)





### **Additional Stories of Celebration**

The following heartwarming stories were selected for our print program. With each author's permission, stories have been edited for length.



## *Jennifer's Story* By Jennifer Dushane

*Editor's Note: Jennifer was diagnosed with Castleman's Disease, which is not cancer, but rather an immune disorder. The disease was discovered in a tumor in her neck, which, because of its location, was too risky to remove, so she was sent to NYOH for infusions, which put her in the world of cancer treatment. She is part of our NYOH community, and we felt her story, although cancer adjacent, was compelling, and her journey to health and stability is one that we hope will be ongoing with our continued support.*

Nine years ago, my life changed for the better.

Some people's lives aren't easy, and financially, mine was a struggle. Instead of getting a second job or a better job, I decided to get involved with drugs. I was a transporter to people I thought I could trust. I'd get the package of drugs mailed to one of my family members' houses, and I'd pick it up. Then someone would pick it up from me, and I'd get paid \$300. I was promised that if we ever got caught, they'd get me a lawyer and take care of me.

On May 18, 2017, I went to jail for the first and last time. I was scared at first, but it's something I had to face. I didn't point fingers and didn't blame anyone but myself. I didn't get a lawyer—I only had a public defender. None of their promises were kept.

Sitting in jail, I asked myself, "Why are you crying? Crying's not going to get you out of jail, so suck it up and get it together."

I tried to make something positive out of what had happened. I signed up for my G.E.D. and went to class every day. I had one visit a week, from my aunt and my dad. Before I went to jail, I didn't have a relationship with my dad because of my



own mistakes and the lifestyle I was living. He only found out I was in jail from his coworker, who had read it in the paper.

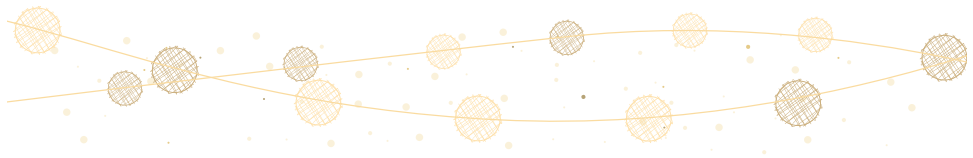
Sitting in a place that's very depressing, stuck in your head, you think about what's next. Not knowing what's next is terrifying.

When I met with my public defender, I was offered 8 months with no probation or 6 months with 5 years probation. As silly as it sounds and as much everyone questioned me, I chose 6 months and 5 years probation. I needed to stay on the right path. I realized I'm not the person I'd been trying to be—I'm better than that. I'd put my family and my own life at risk.

I was released from jail, continued working toward my G.E.D, and graduated. I moved in with my dad, continued to rebuild our relationship, and was released from probation 2 1/2 years early. I had my beautiful daughter in 2020.

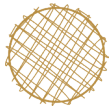
Even though being in jail was hard, I'm glad I went. I took accountability, moved on, and didn't let jail define me.

The moral of this story is this: Don't let anything define you as a person. Don't let the feeling of defeat actually defeat you. I may have Castleman's Disease—a rare disease—but every day, I'm just Jennifer, a woman who's fought battles my whole life and never let them beat me.



**"Stories make us more  
alive, more human, more  
courageous, more loving."**

**MADELEINE L'ENGLE, AUTHOR OF *A WRINKLE IN TIME***



## *Looking for Gifts Along the Way*

By Molly Renaud

I was in my happy place—twelve miles out to sea, wrapping up a week-long vacation on an island off the coast of Maine—when I heard the words, “You have cancer.”

It had been a beautiful week in a place I’ve visited my entire life. The island’s hiking trails are like old friends; its vistas, warm neighbors, salt air, and sea have always been a kind of yearly salvation. My husband and I were celebrating the anniversary of our engagement—he proposed to me on the island nine years earlier. And my daughter, at age seven, hiked the “permitter” (as she called it) with us. Her little legs made it around the island in just under five hours. Not once did she complain. She made up songs and stories just to keep moving along the cliff trails.

The news came to me like waves on the beach: it landed, and then it receded. I would say it out loud—I have cancer—but it wouldn’t sink in. It kept washing away. It didn’t truly “land” until I returned to the mainland.

Once I was home, I wanted answers. The only person I knew in my immediate circle who’d had breast cancer was a second cousin. I called her and asked the questions you ask when your life suddenly has a before and after: How did you get through treatment? What do I need to do to survive this?

She told me she’d faced a rare and aggressive breast cancer in her forties. She beat it and was living cancer-free ten years later. Then she said something that, at the time, sounded almost offensive:

“Look for gifts along the way—and celebrate them.”

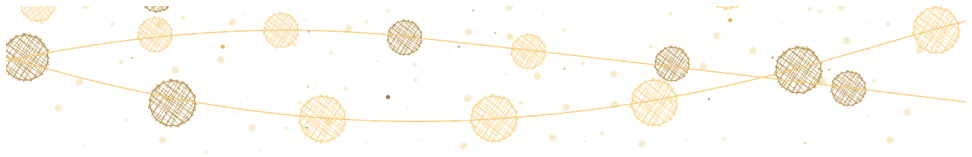
Gifts? I thought, I’ve been handed a death sentence, and you’re telling me to celebrate? But the phrase stuck. And, as it turns out, Cousin Patti was right.

Don’t get me wrong: I did my fair share of awfulizing. But whenever I felt myself spiraling into fear or anger, I tried to return to that idea: find the gifts. Celebrate them.

Here’s what I found.

### **The gift of receiving help**

I was six months into my role as Director of Grateful Patient and Family Giving when I received my diagnosis. I worked alongside clinicians and helped raise funds for the medical center, so I could talk openly about cancer with colleagues whose empathy



and compassion were unlike anything I'd experienced before. That support was a gift—it helped me move through treatment without always feeling like “a patient.”

But I remember the moment I finally accepted that I was one.

The morning of my lumpectomy, I had a wire placement—a marker to guide my surgeon to the tumor. I'm afraid of needles and I faint at the sight of blood, so my strategy is simple: close my eyes, look away, pretend I'm somewhere else.

This time, after the wire was placed, I opened my eyes and saw the doctor, nurses, and a medical student huddled in the corner, studying the images together.

And I started to cry.

They were there to help me. They had learned how to do this, and they were teaching someone else, and it was all for the same purpose: to help my surgeon get this tumor out of my body. I didn't have to earn it or even ask for it. It was simply offered—exactly what I needed.

The doctor noticed my tears, came to my side, and said, “You know you're going to be okay. You're going to be okay.”

And for the first time, I believed it. Those tears weren't fear. They were gratitude—and the relief of being able to receive this help.

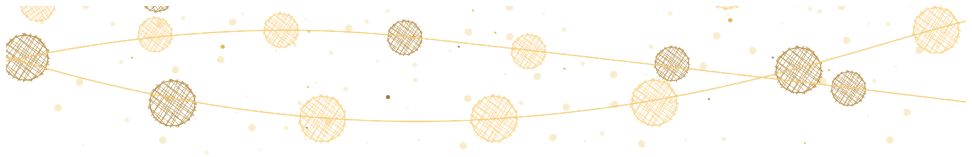
### **The gift of deeper relationships**

When we got home from Maine, I'll never forget the way my husband held me as the diagnosis finally sank in. He didn't try to fix it or rush me past the fear. He just held me, cried with me and let me fall apart in his arms. In that moment, I knew I wasn't alone—and that he would help me build myself back up.

He became my steady constant: getting our daughter to school and games, packing lunches, cooking, cleaning, going to work—keeping our life moving. And he did it not only through my treatment, but through a fully ruptured Achilles tendon that followed on the heels (pun intended) of my radiation, when I needed to stay in bed for weeks.

When I was diagnosed, my daughter was seven. We decided early on that we would talk about it—ask questions, name our feelings, and make room for all of it: worry, tears, even laughter.

I explained what a lumpectomy was, and soon I caught her playing “breast surgeon” with her doctor kit—her way of making sense of something scary. When I started



radiation, I told her it would be like a bad sunburn, but one that helps keep the bad cells from coming back. I missed a few softball games, and I didn't feel up to our annual pre-Christmas trip to the Red Lion Inn, but we talked through the disappointments together.

And we celebrated the wins, too—she helped me ring the bell at the end of treatment, two days before Christmas.

Unbeknownst to me, she even worked with her third-grade teacher to share my story with her class: cancer is scary, but you can talk about your feelings—and screening and early detection can save your life. My seven-year-old had found her voice as an advocate and ally.

I will never stop celebrating my family.

### **The gift of community**

Every day in December, I took a short walk from my foundation office to the hospital for radiation. I entered through a back door and passed through the receiving area in the basement—where linens are handled and mailroom clerks sort packages. I could tell myself I was just taking a coffee break at the same time every day—except instead of coffee, I was going to get “zapped.”

I could walk there and walk back to work. I wasn't facing the barriers to treatment that so many people do. And as I walked those halls, I saw what it takes to run a hospital.

Yes, it's the nurses, doctors, and receptionists. But it's also the people behind the scenes—clerks, technicians, environmental services and more—who make excellent care possible. What a gift to be surrounded by a village dedicated to saving lives.

### **The gift of gratitude—and the muck of life**

The year before my diagnosis, we had an epic rainstorm on the island. The next day was dry, so we hiked anyway. The trails had turned into rivers in places—puddles in others—and mud everywhere. My daughter and I had decent boots. My husband, with less-than-ideal shoes, kept finding his own route. Step by step, we did what you do when the path isn't what you expected: we adjusted, we helped each other, we laughed, we found new footing.

That's what this cancer journey has been like.

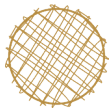
Sometimes the news comes in like a wave—crashing, then receding—until one day it



finally lands. Sometimes the trail is wide and the views are effortless. Sometimes it's muddy and feels impassable. Sometimes you want to turn back. And sometimes you just get covered in mud.

But I've learned this: mud isn't a deterrent. You can move through it. And if you keep going—if you let people walk beside you—you start to notice the gifts along the way: a steady hand, a kind word, a strong pair of boots, a glimpse of the horizon when you didn't think you'd see one.

I make it back to “the Rock” every year. I still love watching the tide come in and go out. And now, more than ever, I celebrate the simple fact that I'm here to take the next step—whatever the trail looks like—because the muck of life is worth it.



## *Fist Bump for a Baldy* By Emily Rubin

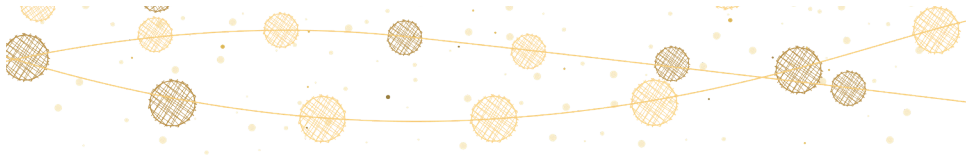
One, two—the scans of my breasts were done. As I lay on the ultrasound table waiting for the needle biopsy, my forehead lined like a venetian blind, and the screws at the back of my head turned righty tightey, not lefty loosey. I tried to keep calm, saying to myself, it's better to know...it's probably nothing, like all the other times the last fifteen years. But as the instrument tray rattled into position and the doctor assured me it would be a quick procedure, my eyes burned, as fragmented sense memories of the nausea, brain fog, and looking like an alien, developed like Polaroids right before my eyes. Holding my breath did not block the flow of tears.

The technician took my hand and said, “You're doing great.”

Everything was done with the utmost care, but I was shaken by the invasiveness of it all. The staff sent me on my way with their blessings. Still shuddering, I slipped into the lavatory to take a moment and stared into the mirror with closed eyes, breathing a halting sigh of relief for getting it over with. In two days, the phone call came.

“Really? Damn!” I said to the surgeon.

“I'm so sorry,” she added, “very glad we caught it.”



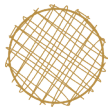
The new tumor was diagnosed as triple-negative breast cancer. You'd think negative would be a good thing, but no, it was the same breast as before, but this was a new tumor and not related to the previous malignancy.

"You felt something, and you did something. You took control," the surgeon said.

I felt more like a careening rollercoaster, looping around scary turns of disappointment, fear, and frustration at the prospect of going through cancer again. Surrendering time to cancer is nothing anyone plans for, and I tried to mitigate my angst by reminding myself, 'you have been through this before, you got this.'

Still, the memories of surgery, chemo, and radiation lingered. Fifteen years later, I hoped all those clinical trials I signed up for would pay off. I found comfort remembering an incident on a subway platform when I was going through cancer the first time:

It was the middle of a blistering heat wave in August 2009. I had already been through surgery and was exhausted and nauseous from chemotherapy. I felt dejected and unnerved in the dankness and claustrophobia of the crowded subway platform, lamenting the fact that my last round of chemo was a couple of months out. I was bald, sweaty, and feeling sorry for myself, waiting for the F train at 53rd and Fifth. A brief distraction into an exhibition of surrealist erotica and the air conditioning across the street at MOMA had only thrown me deeper into the peculiarities of my body's illness dysphoria. As I looked down the tunnel, hoping for an incoming train, I spied a young man with a shiny, shaved head (maybe it doesn't matter, but he was very fit and quite attractive—probably early 30s—I was 53 at the time), his eyes fixated as he slalomed through the crowd. He came up to me with a big smile and raised his fist for a bump, the whole time acknowledging my bald head. With a highly energized leap, our fists connected in bald solidarity, and then he disappeared down the platform into the crowd. The playfulness made me feel present and seen, strong and part of humanity, something bigger than my internal and external sorry self. I recovered my enthusiasm for the pulse of this audacious, resilient city, even in the oily humidity of the underground. I stood taller, my eyes cleared with a joyful release of tears as the train rattled into the station. The doors opened and passengers emerged. The blast of air conditioning anointed my tears and froze that mischievous fist bump in time.



## *27 Years and Still Smiling*

By Michael Smith

I have been a patient at NYOH since 1999, and over the years, I've had four incredible oncologists who have taken very good care of me. I have always been appreciative of the nurses in the treatment room, also. They keep my spirits up. Their job is very difficult, but they do it with a smile. I must thank Dr. Charlene Ives and Erin Lasher, RN, MSN, ANP-BC, for their patience, care, and concern. As far as I'm concerned, they are the best in the business.

My journey with cancer began in 1999 in Rexford, NY, with Dr. Stewart Silvers, who treated me for chronic lymphocytic leukemia (known as CLL), which is a slow-growing cancer.

In December of 2005, I was diagnosed with colon cancer after my first colonoscopy at age 50. I saw Dr. Silvers, who said that I was the "poster child" for colonoscopies, because a cancerous polyp had been discovered. I had surgery, and the tumor was removed with a resection procedure. After the surgery, I was grateful to hear that all of the cancer was removed, and I didn't need chemotherapy or radiation.

In 2021, I was diagnosed with lung cancer and was operated on at St. Peter's Hospital by Dr. Marshall, another wonderful doctor. She removed the middle lobe of my right lung to remove the tumor. Again, I was blessed to hear that I didn't need follow-up chemotherapy or radiation.

I experienced a recurrence of the CLL in 2024 and, in November, began a chemotherapy protocol that lasted for a year, which was very challenging for my wife and me, due to debilitating fatigue. In 2025, my pulmonologist discovered another tumor, this time in the left lung. I was referred to an NYOH radiation oncologist, who said that this is common with lung cancer. This time, I was treated with four radiation treatments, and they worked!

My cancer journey has been an intense one, of 27 years duration. The journey continues.

I look at it this way: I'm still standing, still smiling. There have been countless medical innovations which I have benefited from on this long journey, but I thank God and my support team at NYOH for their know-how, medication, and treatment plan to solve the problem.



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 Congratulations to all of this evening's storytellers!



At Monticello, our mission goes beyond real estate sales. Over the years, we've invested over a hundred thousand dollars in our community, supporting initiatives that champion the economic vibrancy of the 518. Monticello's commitment to giving back and community investment have been a driving force since our inception. Our mission is to Love, Serve, and Innovate. We are dedicated to supporting our clients and communities with compassion and humility. Here are some of the dozens of local organizations we have supported through the years.



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WE ARE PROUD TO HONOR

# CHUCK AIKEN



*Man Up to Cancer Pack Member. Storyteller. Warrior. Brother.*

*"It costs nothing to be kind." - Chuck Aiken*

Chuck embodies everything Man Up to Cancer stands for: showing up, speaking out, and refusing to face cancer alone. His voice is proof that no man should walk this road in silence.

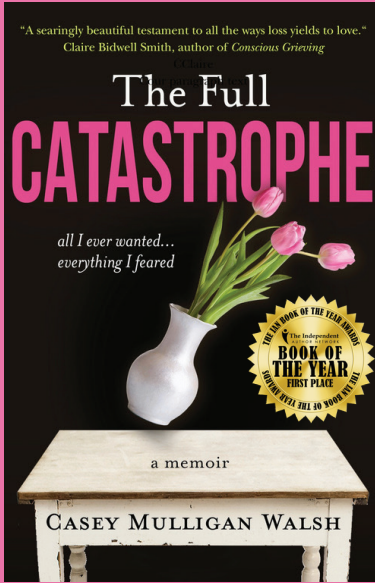
Thank you, Chuck – the MUTC organization would not be what it is without you.

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# *Every Story Deserves a Stronger Tomorrow.*

At New York Oncology Hematology, we know cancer is only one chapter, not the whole story. That's why we're committed to caring for the whole person with compassion, expertise, and support through every moment that matters.

As we look ahead to our new **Regional Cancer Center opening in 2027**, we stand alongside the NYOH Community Cancer Foundation and others in our community to help shape the future of cancer care, advancing innovation, compassion, and a more connected patient experience.

Because every story deserves not just to continue, *but to thrive.*

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**Care that listens. Treatment that leads.**



NYOH New York  
Oncology  
Hematology

[newyorkoncology.com](http://newyorkoncology.com)



## About the NYOH Community Cancer Foundation

### Our Mission

The mission of the NYOH Community Cancer Foundation is to alleviate financial hardship for community members diagnosed and living with cancer, allowing them to focus on treatment and improve their quality of life.

### The Work of the Foundation

The NYOH Community Cancer Foundation provides financial assistance, patient education, and other resources to individuals diagnosed with cancer by:



**Paying** for rent and household bills or providing gift cards to purchase gas and groceries, we help cancer patients focus on their treatment instead of worrying about daily household stressors.



**Providing** free patient education and support programs to enrich the cancer journey for patients and caregivers. Our Foundation sponsors workshops, both virtual and in-person, covering topics like breast cancer, cancer and wellness, and therapeutic writing.



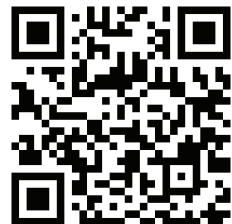
**Distributing** items such as blankets, port pillows, books for children about cancer, and patient care bags (with items such as socks, lotion, journals, etc.) for local cancer patients.

### Who We Serve

Financial assistance and benefits are offered to all cancer patients receiving treatment or who have received treatment within 6 months and reside in the Capital District, as defined by Albany, Columbia, Fulton, Greene, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Warren, and Washington counties.

### Our Impact

Scan the QR code to visit our website.





is proud to support the NYOH  
Community Cancer Foundation and  
their Evening of Stories.

Inspired by this evening? Consider a donation to  
the NYOH Community Cancer Foundation.

The NYOH Community Cancer Foundation is a registered 501c3 and provides financial assistance, patient education, and other resources to individuals diagnosed with cancer. By paying for rent and household bills or providing gift cards to purchase gas and groceries, we help people living with cancer focus on their treatment, instead of worrying about daily household stressors.



Share your story

Nobody tells the story of our  
community better than the



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# NYOH Community Cancer Foundation

Check out our NYOH Foundation Events in 2026



## MONTH OF MARCH COLORECTAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

### *Courage & Cancer*

An Evening of Stories

Wednesday,  
May 6

Hilton Garden Inn, Troy

### NYOH Cancer Survivors Day

Sunday,  
June 7

Albany Capital Center,  
Albany

### *Taking Charge of Our Tomorrows:*

A BREAST CANCER SURVIVORSHIP PROGRAM

Saturday, August 1 • Hudson Hall, Hudson

### *Rock Your Style*

Saturday,  
September 26

Empire Live, Albany