



Andrea Guarino is a 52-year-old breast and liver cancer survivor who lives in Port Chester, New York. She teaches pre-school and directs the Pre-Kindergarten Academy in Port Chester. Andrea and her husband, Sandy, have a daughter, Juliette, son, Gregory, and son-in-law, Will.

What a Difference a Year Makes

By Andrea Guarino

as to what might be causing the high count and were unable to refer me to someone more knowledgeable in the area of liver function.

Two weeks after receiving an endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatogram at Beth Israel Hospital, I was diagnosed with a carcinogenic tumor supposedly blocking my bile duct. I asked my breast surgeon, who had performed a lumpectomy in 2003 for DCIS, for guidance in selecting a physician. After eight years of having regular checkups with this excellent surgeon and compassionate gentleman, I felt secure in trusting his referral. Eventually, I ended up at Memorial Sloan-Kettering with Dr. K as my surgeon.

When I first met Dr. K in March 2011, I had good vibes. Dr. K seemed pretty cool. I learned that he had spent some of his earlier years growing up in the same area I did. I felt comfortable because he seemed very “down to earth.” Besides being quite knowledgeable in his field, he seemed to be a caring individual, and he explained clearly, openly, and honestly what my situation involved. Since my tumor was slow growing and I really wanted to finish school in my position as a preschool director and teacher, he arranged for me to have my surgery over the summer as long as my

every-six-weeks blood test results did not get worse.

My surgery was on July 6, 2011, at Memorial Hospital. During the long, complex surgery, the medical team found that I had two neuroendocrine tumors attached to my bile duct. It was an extremely rare situation.

I found it difficult to have a bile bag attached to me for close to 11 weeks during my recovery phase. One of Dr. K’s main assistants demonstrated patience and kindness toward me during those weeks that I was getting frustrated with the bag. She would check in often and try to alleviate my worries and help me get through my ordeal.

One year later, I have two graduations to attend. My daughter received her Master of Science in Education from Hunter College, and my son an undergraduate degree from Stony Brook University. My preschool is relocating. I have my daughter’s shower and wedding very soon. Most importantly, I am here. My doctor saved my life, and I will show my gratitude as long as I am on this earth.

So, folks, it is a no-brainer. Memorial Sloan-Kettering saved me — plain and simple. I think I will try to drop off some cookies to them, too!

As I pull my chocolate kiss cookies from the oven for my daughter’s wedding shower, I do not take such a simple task for granted. In June 2011, I had serious doubts that I would be around for her July 2012 wedding. A simple blood test from an overdue physical initiated the whole saga. At that time, my liver enzymes were abnormally high. I had tests taken at a local hospital followed by visits with doctors who were clueless

Survivor Health Tip: Keep a Daily Food and Activity Diary

According to the National, Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, keeping a record of your daily food intake and activity levels will give you and your healthcare provider a quick way to check your progress toward maintaining a healthy weight.