

COMING UP

'You can beat this': survivor

BY SANDRA BOLAN
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When Mary Ann Holman's 11-year-old son told her her Adam's apple was moving up and down, she thought he was mistaken. Women don't have Adam's apples. When she looked in the mirror to see what he was talking about "sure enough, there was a big lump on my throat. I went into a state of panic," she said.

Initially diagnosed as a cyst, it was still there four months later.

In January 2013, she had it biopsied.

It was medullary thyroid cancer (MTC).

Only three to four per cent of all cancer cases in Canada are diagnosed as MTC, which equates to roughly 170 people a year, according to the Thyroid Cancer Canada website.

General symptoms include thyroid and/or neck lymph nodes, hoarseness, difficulty breathing/shortness of breath, as well as a hard time swallowing, according to the Thyroid Cancer Canada website.

"I was so floored," the Grade 8 teacher at Markham's All Saints Catholic School said of the diagnosis.

She received the news alone because she was actually at the doctor for another reason.

"I looked at the doctor and said 'I don't believe you,'" she recalled.

Holman maintained that defiant attitude through two surgeries that resulted in the complete removal of her thyroid.

Even when she found out the cancer spread to her lymph nodes, Holman was adamant it was not going to take her down.

When Holman told her husband and two children, she assured them everything would be OK, even though she knew virtually nothing about MTC because it is so rare.

"Next thing you do is get on the Internet. Bad thing. Don't do that," she said with a laugh.

Through her teaching job, Holman was connected to CARE-path, a cancer assistance program with trained support staff, as well as oncology doctors and nurses.

Through them, she was set up with her own oncology nurse and support worker, who called her daily. Holman remains in regular contact with her support worker.

Following the removal of some lymph nodes, Holman was subjected to 33 radiation treatments.

She would teach in the morning, then take the GO bus to Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto, undergo radiation, then



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Mary Ann Holman will lead her Holman Hawks at Stouffville's Terry Fox Run Sept. 14 from the leisure centre.

come home by bus and do it all again the next day.

"To prove this was beatable, I was not going to be defeated by this. I had two little kids at home," she said.

Initially Holman insisted on going through the surgeries and radiation on her own.

However, while receiving radiation treatments, she realized "it was my job to let the goodness of others shine through with their help".

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Two-and-a-half years later, Holman "can't say I'm cancer free, but all my readings are in the right direction".

"I hope that one day I can say I'm cancer-free."

This year marks the third time Holman will participate in the Stouffville Terry Fox Run, which takes place Sept. 14.

However, roughly 10 years ago, she helped get her school involved in the annual event.

Holman's father was diagnosed with colon cancer about 13 years ago.

At that time, Holman underwent a colonoscopy and was told she, too, had polyps. She had them removed.

As a member of the Holman Hawks Terry Fox Run team, she proudly wears her red survivor T-shirt and has given

them to a couple of friends who have also been diagnosed with cancer, to let them know "this is something to aspire to. Just something to look forward to. You can beat this."

Roughly 60 people wore the red shirts during the 2013 Stouffville Terry Fox Run, according to Sandy Schell Kennedy, chairperson of the local event. They ranged in age from 7 to 80.

"It was beautiful," she said.

Last year's community event had about 1,300 participants and raised \$137,000 for cancer research.

This year, the goal is 1,500 people and \$150,000.

"No one is exempt from the disease of cancer," Schell Kennedy said.

Since 1982, Stouffville's Terry Fox Run has raised \$1.47 million.

There is no minimum donation required in order to participate.

Start and finish is at the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville Leisure Centre, 2 Park Dr. Registration begins at noon with the official start at 1 p.m.

The route is open until 3. Participants can complete a 2, 5, or 10k m distance by walking, running, cycling or rollerblading on a safe, well marshaled route on town streets and trails.

Consider walking or cycling to the Leisure Centre, as parking is extremely limited.

For more information, go to www.facebook.com/

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