

Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



About Me:

CITY: Victorville

JOB TITLE: Disabled

FAMILY: Husband of two years

Gary Johnson, 55; Kimberly Kleinberg, 38, daughter; Aaron and Kyle Pope, 35, twin sons

HOBBIES: I make blankets for cancer patients – for Relay they are auctioned off; some are for kids at Loma Linda. I kind of pay it forward.

PHILOSOPHY: Never stop walking; if you sit too long, you get stiff. Even if you have to use a walker. Don't rely on pain pills.

“Take a deep breath, get good people around you and fight it”



The American Cancer Society provides a 24 hour service to answer questions about diagnosis, insurance, local support and resources

If you or someone you know would like to be featured in this series, please contact Liz McGiffin at liz.mcgiffin@cancer.org.

www.cancer.org or call 800-227-2345

Linda Johnson, 62 Type of Cancer: Uterine and ovarian

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Linda Johnson says she has a “strong history” of cancer in her family.

“My mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer at 26,” she said, “then breast cancer and a radical mastectomy, then thyroid.

“She ended up passing away from pancreatic cancer when she was 67.

“She went through hell and back, then something else would show up and she fought that.

In 1993, Johnson moved to Visalia with her second husband, Jimmy. That night, upon arriving in her new home, she learned in a phone call that her father had died suddenly.

Later that year, tragedy struck again when Jimmy was killed in a car accident.

Then, in 1994, Johnson began experiencing symptoms that were the beginning of her battle with cancer.

“I started getting sick and having stomach problems and bad cramps,” she said. “After that, it was more and more, little by little.

“It was probably in the middle of 1994 when they started watching it.

“It got to the point I was bleeding so much it wouldn't stop; it was all of the tumors.”

It wasn't until 1996 that Johnson's chronic problems prompted surgery.

“I was up in the rafters working, and the guys said, ‘Hey Linda, get down here, you are bleeding.’

“I went to the doctor the next day. They said I had tumors on top of tumors in the walls of my uterus and ovaries.

Johnson had a hysterectomy in July 1996.

“My doctor was amazed. Everything just came out; it was a blessing for me. I never had chemo or radiation, just pills.

I was single with my three kids.

My kids kept me going every day. Kimberly was a freshman or sophomore in high school, and the boys were sixth-graders.

Johnson's daughter is 38 now, and her sons are 35.

Seven years ago, Johnson was injured at work, and cancer entered her life for a second time.

“When I got hurt, my neck was not healing. They opened up my neck in the front to go through and fuse three disks.

“After the surgery, I couldn't swallow and it wouldn't heal.

“So, they did an ultrasound on my neck and found three nodules.

“They did biopsies, found cancer cells, and decided to take the right side of my thyroid.

“While I was under, they tested the left side and weren't sure – it was 50/50. The doctor left it and is watching it.

“I belong to the Victorville Harley Owners Group. I had a new Harley, and two hours

into my first ride, an 18-year-old on her phone rear-ended me.

“They are going to go in with a scope to clean up my knee that was damaged.

“In 2015, I met my future husband, Gary, at a bike night in Lucerne. His cousin Jackie introduced us.

“Cindy O'Donnell, who is Jackie's sister, had colon cancer.

“She was told she would only live five to six months, but she has made it 15 years.

“Cindy is an example to a lot of people; she fights the fight every day.”

O'Donnell's Relay for Life team, Sweet Cheeks, has raised more than \$75,000 for the American Cancer Society since 2006 and puts on the Hope Ride among other events.

“I make all kinds of blankets for kids. Chemo is so hard on them. We auction the blankets. We do a lot of fundraisers.”

Johnson has this advice for anyone diagnosed with cancer:

“Take a deep breath, get good people around you and fight it.

“You can't have enough funny people. Laughter is the best medicine.

“There are so many different ways to fight it now and a lot of people don't even know they exist.

“There are so many good cancer centers to contact. Never give up.

Off to the races

Relays for Life are fundraising events for the American Cancer Society. ACS provides brochures, event forms, insurance, advice and information to participants.

“Anyone can form a Relay for Life team,” said Marlene Fuller, who volunteers as the Relay for Life High Desert event lead.

For information, visit the Relay for Life website at relayforlife.org.

There, anyone can create a personal account, find relays to attend, and create and name a team or join a team.

“We encourage everybody to raise money for the American Cancer Society,” Fuller said.

For more information about High Desert Relay for Life, contact Fuller at 760-514-2721.

Contact Sarah Olson-Andrews, newly appointed Barstow event lead, at 602-622-4123.

Contact Liz McGiffin, ACS High Desert community development manager, at 760-887-3427.

On Facebook, visit <https://www.facebook.com/relayforlifeofthehighdesert> (High Desert) or <https://www.facebook.com/relayforlifebarstow> (Barstow).

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