This month, we've got Ann Halff, a new member of our committee and recent participant in "Knowing the Group!" taking some time to fill out this month's opener.

For those of you unfamiliar with The Breasties, there is a slogan they've coined "Worst Club, Best Members." If there is one thing this cancer journey has taught me, it's that even through some of the absolute worst parts of life, you really do connect with some amazing people!

Recently, I had the pleasure of attending the inaugural retreat hosted by the Dallas YACS Group where I was reminded of just how incredible this community truly is and how grateful I am to be a part of it—the getting to know each of you part; not the having cancer part! Since I've concluded my treatment, I've been burning the candle at both ends as they say. I felt I had something to prove coming back into society, only two years from treatment myself. During treatment, I spent most of my time sleeping or barely moving because of the bone pain and/or exhaustion that would consume me! Now I've been living life at full throttle, determined to make up for the lost time. But even with all the activity, I sometimes find myself feeling disconnected from the world around me.

This retreat was a much-needed respite with people who understand all the phases of cancer life. Our first morning there, in the midst of a field of beautiful wildflowers, we had quiet time with yoga and light stretching. It was beautiful to take a minute to appreciate where you are right there in the moment. To literally stop and smell the flowers. After lunch, many of us conquered (as we cancer-community peeps do!) fears while swinging from great heights, zip-lining through canopies of trees, and scaling walls. We also teamed up to capture the flag with bazooka balls, while some simply laughed at the chaos in front of them.
One of the most memorable experiences of the retreat was the music therapy session by the campfire. As we beat our own drums and occasionally went off rhythm, we were able to express ourselves freely while still feeling a consistent sense of community. In those moments, I felt seen in both the suffering of going off beat in life and the joy of coming back together with a group of people who love you no matter where you are or what cadence of life you're in. And let's not forget the s'mores—a delicious reminder that even in the darkest and stickiest of times, there are moments of sweetness to be savored.

Through it all, I am constantly struck by the resilience and strength of each and every one of us in attendance and this community. Together, we got to celebrate the challenges we have overcome and the growth we have experienced, while also acknowledging the hurdles we faced and some still face currently. But in this community, we know that we are never alone.

We really are the WORST club with the BEST members!

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Pictures from the Retreat!
Call For More Newsletter Committee Members

We need one to two more members to help put this growing and changing publication together. The committee is still in its infancy and finding its feet. We're looking for members that can stick around long-term. Quite simply, the more people we have, the simpler it becomes to put the newsletter together. Ideally, you'd have one section a month and/or come up with some new ideas.

If interested, email us [here](mailto:).
Saturday, June 3rd, 6-9pm — Survivor’s Day Full Moon Paddle at Lake Lewisville

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We Want to Support Your Partner, Too

We encourage your spouses and partners to get connected with us by submitting their contact information on our YACS Spouses and Partners Contact Form.

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Knowing the Group! Featuring Sam Snow

I was able to make it more than two years without filling this out myself but my time finally came.
In the summer of 2014, at the age of 20, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor that was too cool to be labeled. That is to say, the couple of times it was tested as part of a biopsy, it came back with different results: an ependymoma and a glioma. Regardless, it was the size of a plump lemon and it completely upended my life.

There were various treatments over the next few years, including surgeries, clinical trials, chemo, and radiation therapy, and in 2018, everything looked good. The tumor had ceased to grow and was very small. I graduated from UNT that year and then came the search for a job, which was also hard since I had to change majors due to the tumor.

Eventually, I got a job with an airline (having nothing to do with my degree) and life moved on. Then the pandemic hit and I lived with my dad for a while. Last year, I was finally able to live by myself and had saved enough for financial independence. Two weeks after I'd moved into my apartment, I had some regularly scheduled MRIs. Turns out the tumor had started growing. The doctors were able to identify it this time: a glioblastoma.

Obviously, I'm still alive, but by no means is my treatment over. The treatment has been effective, but no one really knows if it'll keep up. Everything is up in the air. There's no ending in sight, be it one where I live or one where I'll be six feet under when the third anniversary of this newsletter is published.

However, throughout this second bout dealing with cancer, Dallas YACS has been a godsend. They've been able to assist at every level of this process. You name it, they've helped me with it.

As many of you know, there's so much paperwork involved in medicine; so much that it can feel like the oxygen is escaping the room. Among the biopsy, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, radiation therapy, medical bills, dozens upon dozens of blood draws, massive numbers of MRIs, and hours of time in waiting rooms, Dallas YACS and Alex have been there making my life easier.

In the midst of a typhoon, they've been a shelter and an anchor. Whatever the future holds, I will always be thankful for this support group.
Also, as the person who started this newsletter, please take a few seconds to answer two questions in this survey below. It truly does help this group when the recipients of this newsletter can see who is in it.

We need more submissions!

We're switching it up a bit! Instead of having you fill out the form now, we're just asking you to take this survey and then we'll get back to you whenever it's your turn.

Taylor's Witty Turf

What do you call Dwayne Johnson’s origami tools?

Find out at the end of the newsletter...

Alex's Meditation Moment

One of the most approachable definitions of mindfulness is to pay attention to what we are doing while we are doing it—to attend to what’s happening in the present moment with purpose. The word attend comes from the Latin atendere, which means “to stretch toward.” I think it’s a beautiful idea that we might stretch toward one another and ourselves as a regular practice, just like a plant stretches toward the sun to grow. When we begin to attend to our body, our mind, and our emotions better, we can start being there for ourselves more often. As we learn what we need, we find caring and loving ways to meet our own needs before we get too distressed by them. I think this is an anecdote to
isolation and empowers us to overcome obstacles.

Mindful stretching is an embodied practice in which you can focus your energy on where the tension is in your body and bring gentle movement and flow to that area to relieve that tension. You have likely sensed that your muscles are tighter when you are more stressed. Maybe you feel this in your shoulders or your jaw. Your body is always an available indicator of how you’re feeling—you just have to attend to it! Stretching combines progressive muscle relaxation and breathing, and just like any mindful practice, even a little time every day yields big benefits.

Begin in a position with your feet flat on the ground, standing or sitting with your feet hip-width apart. Notice how it feels to arrive here, the sensations of the ground beneath your feet, and the sensations in your body right now. Allow your shoulders to relax as best you can, and be present in your body. Start to bring your awareness to your breath and your stomach, being here, standing here, and breathing. If you can, slowly begin to move your arms out to the side of your body. Gently allow your arms to move upward, bringing awareness to the environment around your arms, noticing whatever sensations are here as your arms rise. And gently bring the arms upward, slowly and mindfully until they’re right up over your head, reaching for the sky.

Now, very gently, begin to move your arms over to the right so your body is slightly bending over. You might notice your hips moving slightly out to the left. Just notice whatever sensations you experience during this stretch. And, when you feel ready, move your arms back to center. Next, allow your arms to move over to the left side. Your hips may move over to the right and your body very gently bends to the left. Just notice the sensations of the stretch. Then, very slowly, mindfully come back up to the center, and gently lower your arms to your sides. Notice whatever sensations that are here; notice any tendency for the arms to rush back to the side of your body. When your arms reach your sides, just notice how your body is feeling right now. Notice any sensations of having done this stretch and being present, with your feet on the ground, breathing and being aware of your breath.

Now, allow your hands to rest on your hips so your elbows are out to the sides.
Settle into this posture, and, with your hips and feet still facing forward, very
gently turn your upper body to the right. Keep your feet and hips facing forward,
your upper body and shoulders moving to the right, just as far as they’ll go. Not
pushing anything, just gently twisting your body as far as it wants to be twisted
right now. Then, gently, mindfully, come back to the center. And now, gently twist
your body to the left. Your feet steady on the ground, your hips facing forward,
your shoulders and your upper body gently turned to the left as far as they will
go. Then, gently coming back to the center, noticing the sensations of the
stretch. Now, allow your arms to fall to the sides of your body.

Slowly move your head toward your right shoulder, gently stretching your neck
just as far as it wants to go, noticing the sensation. Now, slowly come back to the
center. Then, gently move your head to your left shoulder, mindfully stretching.
Just noticing how your body feels right now. Then, bring your head back to the
center and settle into this posture. Come back to a position standing or seated
with your feet flat on the floor, your arms resting by your side, your shoulders
back, your head straight, just resting here in this pose.

Bring your awareness to your stomach and the rise and fall as you breathe in,
and as you breathe out, noticing how your body feels having done these
stretches. And, as this period of practice comes to an end, just rest here, and
when you move away from this posture, see if you can bring mindfulness to your
body as you move on into the day.

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**Prompt of the Month**

You have the option to sacrifice one of your senses in order to immunize yourself
from cancer. Do you take this opportunity? Why or why not?

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In response to last month's prompt, "You have two minutes to go back to your
initial diagnosis day and give yourself some advice. Do you take the
opportunity? If so, what do you say?" we were lucky to receive a response from
AJ Aguirre. Here it is:
"What a great question. Wow. Going back to that day. Well, I was at Clements in the ER admitted due to severe abdominal pain. I'd already read a radiologist's report at that time, indicating a mass with high likelihood of lymphoma, so I kind of saw it coming. At that moment, I was on pain medication and was feeling very relaxed! I'm not sure it ever hit me--the weight of that diagnosis.

But if I could give myself advice, the first thing I'd say is trite: "It's going to be okay. You're going to be okay." I'd share a bit more... "Some of this is really going to suck. You're going to feel really sick. You're going to have to be places a lot of the time that you don't want to be. You're going to feel cranky and hungry and famished and stuffed, all at the same time. But, you're going to sleep well. You're going to grow an unbreakable bond with Marianne. She's going to be there for you in ways you couldn't have even imagined. You're going to get to watch lots of movies. You're going to spend lots of time with Finn. Your brothers will get the chance to be there for you too. You're going to get a new lens, showing how life is, in fact, finite. You're going to appreciate life more—specifically, your time. So, rest assured that you'll get through this, and your life will be better on the other side."

If you'd like your response featured in next month's newsletter, simply include it in an email to the group at dallasyacsalot@gmail.com.

The Rock's Paper Scissors
Feedback?

If you have anything you'd like us to know that isn't covered in the newsletter, tell us here.

That's it! You've reached the end of our newsletter. Until next time...

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