This month, we've got Michael Acosta, a member of our new committee, stepping up to the plate to open up our newsletter.

It's crazy to believe that April is already here. It feels like yesterday, we were ringing in 2023. I have mixed emotions about the month of April (I'll get into that shortly.) Alas, here we are: entering the fourth month of 2023.

For whatever reason, April hasn’t been kind to me. Maybe it's the April showers that people talk about, or maybe it's just what the universe intended. April 2010 (I was 17 at the time) kicked off my fight against testicular cancer. Fast forward 10 years to 2020, and I joined the millions of others across the nation who lost their job as COVID reared its ugly head—this was right after I got into a rental house and bought a new car. A few weeks later, my girlfriend at the time broke up with me. I'm sure there were other things, but those three really stick out to me. That two weeks right there, I truly felt that I had hit rock bottom.

When faced with adversity, we really only have two options: fight or flight. I'm glad that I've always been a fighter my entire life, because like they say, "When one door closes, another one opens." The job was a huge loss, but it wasn’t a good fit for me for a variety of reasons; ultimately, it was that job that got me back to Texas closer to friends and family, and while it took me a while to find it: my job now is the perfect fit.

With the cancer diagnosis, there was no other option but to fight. I was in high school, and while there were a handful of times that I truly felt like giving up, I'm glad I didn't.
For as much as I blame cancer for so many things, it helped me grow as a person—allowed me to define that I can truly conquer anything because I overcame something so young. Being cancer survivors, we have that chance to give back and be the support for others going through it. We also have opportunities to be advocates for our type of cancer. Being an advocate fits my outgoing personality, and anyone that knows me, knows I'm not a quiet person.

For me, I think the PTSD that followed my cancer has, at times, been worse than the treatment, but it's all part of my story. I will always be forever grateful for all of my doctors, nurses, and every healthcare worker that helped along the way, even if I didn't show enough appreciation at the time.

April is Testicular Cancer Awareness Month. I've been hard at work trying to set up meetings with our elected officials to bring more awareness to this dreaded disease. I'm trying to raise money for testicular cancer and trying to plan some events for next year—I'm excited about the possibilities! Testicular cancer is curable in over 95 percent of cases caught early, but our work is never done.

Looking forward to what's to come! I plan on having a great month of April, putting all of those negatives in the rearview mirror!

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**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:).
Dallas YACS Calendar

Sunday, April 23rd, 3:30pm — Couples Outing at Upstairs Circus

Tuesday, April 25th, 7pm — Support Group In-Person*

Wednesday, April 26th, 7pm — Support Group on Zoom*

Saturday, May 13th — Trail Ride at Equest. That’s right?! We will be doing a trail ride with our friends at Equest on this day.

*This is not an error; we're trying something new in April. In order to accommodate the number of people in attendance, we're offering an in-person and a virtual option on separate days. This both allows more people to attend and gives you all two options for what day to attend. Or you could attend both—it's up to you. The point is to provide you all with more options.

WE WANT TO SUPPORT YOUR PARTNER

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

Introducing Caregiver Support!

This segment comes from Melissa Irek as she explains the reasoning for the most recent and exciting expansion of our group.

My story began in March 2022 when my husband Daniel was diagnosed with stage 2A testicular cancer. Like many of you, our world turned upside
down within a moment’s notice. While we had the unwavering love and support from our family and friends during Daniel’s treatment, I personally struggled, not only to be a caregiver, but in connecting with others who were able to relate to my circumstance. I’m preaching to the choir—one that believes no one expects to get cancer in their 20s, and one that doesn’t expect to be thrown into a cancer caregiver role in their 20s either.

To gain perspective, I sought out online resources for avenues to cope with this newfound responsibility as both partner and caretaker. Unfortunately, a lot of these resources were either lacking, out of date, or not specific to my situation as an AYA caregiver. Further, once Daniel entered remission, a lot of the prior support I had slowly drifted away. I had no concept how stuck I would feel in comparison to my peers in his survivorship.

Recently, I’ve felt like it’s been hard to move forward in our new post-cancer normal, trying to navigate when we can reach certain milestones—having children, advancing in our careers, pursuing further education—without the looming threat of another cancer diagnosis during the next five critical years of surveillance. Thus, I reached out to our fabulous YACS leader, Alex, who expressed that other partners in the group echoed the same sentiments as I did. Therefore, I am pleased to announce the expansion of partner-specific support as part of Dallas YACS.

Our goal is to make the co-captains of our ships, our lead co-stars, and the most important people in our court, feel heard and supported. We will introduce some new opportunities for the partners of the group to connect this year and beyond, with the hope of finding comfort in one another in this isolating, challenging time of life. If you would encourage your spouses/plus ones/life partners to fill out this contact information survey, we would be so grateful so that programming can be tailored to the needs of the group.

I am so excited to be working with all of you and connecting with one another. I look forward to meeting all of you very soon!
Melissa and her husband Daniel

Knowing the Group! Featuring Ann Halff
As a new member of our newsletter committee, it seems appropriate to feature Ann Halff this month, so here she is!

Ann Halff here! I'm a warrior wife to a culinary genius, a mother to a fierce 2.5-year-old daughter, a devoted dog mom to two fur babies, a passionate non-profit enthusiast, and a restaurateur!

Despite being diagnosed with Stage 2B breast cancer while 34 weeks pregnant in August 2020, I refused to let it defeat me. Cancer has always been an isolating experience for me with no family history or genetic mutation to explain it. But in the midst of a pandemic shutdown, the loneliness and isolation were amplified. While others complained of being alone, I had to stay away for the sake of my own health and my newborn daughter's. However, thanks to a wonderful friend, Molly Dunn, I was
connected to Dallas YACS—a group that finally made me feel seen. With them, I found a community that truly understands the struggles of cancer treatment and sometimes even missed motherhood.

Finding Dallas YACS has helped me process the pains of diagnosis and treatment, and even enjoy conversations about it! I'm honored to be a part of this group and finally feel like I belong somewhere.

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**We need more submissions!**

If you'd like to be featured in a future newsletter—and let's face the facts, if you're reading this, we want to feature you—then send us an email through [THIS LINK](#), bolded so you won't miss it.

As we receive your responses, they're added to our supply and we pull one per month for the newsletter.

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**Behind the Scenes: 9474 Foundation**

In order for a support group to run, funding is needed. For the Dallas YACS group, one of the ways we're able to provide all that we do is through the 9474 Foundation. We asked them to lift the veil and explain their part in our group and why they do what they do. Here is what they had to say...

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Life is hard! It can be like the ultimate roller coaster ride with all of its ups and downs, aggressive sideways turns, and sometimes even flipping you upside down. Add to that the challenges of numerous medical appointments, physical and mental fatigue, financial responsibilities, and the seemingly infinite list of other challenges accompanying a person's fight against cancer, and life can quickly seem insurmountable.
That’s where the 9474 Foundation comes in, and our mission is to provide “Joy in the midst of trials.”

The 9474 Foundation was founded in January 2019, about the same time UT Southwestern started to conceptualize the Dallas YACS group, leading to the formation of a natural partnership.

Why 9474? Our foundation was created to honor the life of Phil Taylor, who battled colorectal cancer until his passing in 2018. Born in St. Louis, Phil spent most of his childhood in Orange County, CA, and then attended TCU, where he played football (Go Frogs) and worked in sports broadcasting in the DFW area until his passing. Phil lived a total of 9474 days and during that time touched the lives of many people with his positive attitude and strong work ethic, especially during his time as a UTSW cancer patient. Though the 9474 Foundation’s mission centers around young adults with colorectal cancer, we are honored to team with Dallas YACS and support young adults who are fighting all types of cancer.

During our partnership with Dallas YACS, the 9474 Foundation has humbly provided for YACS members in many ways. From gift cards such as Uber, Amazon, Kroger, and other vendors to help patients fill a need, to sponsoring many YACS activities such as cooking classes, Taco Tuesday, bowling, and “Random YACS of Kindness.” Most recently we provided Amazon cards for new UTSW patients, to remind them as they begin their journey that they are not alone, and they can find support through others fighting the same battle as well as many who want to help them through it. Finally, we are excited to be one of the sponsors for your upcoming retreat, and we can’t wait to hear all about it. We pray that all those attending have an unbelievable time and benefit from the support and experiences it is sure to provide.

If you have questions or comments, please feel free to reach out to us at any time at 9474@9474Foundation.com. May God bless and keep you as you walk this journey.
Sam's Jocose Section

What do cancer patients and cheetahs have in common?

Find out at the end of the newsletter...

Alex's Meditation Moment

This month’s newsletter highlights a new branch of support on our program’s growing tree, and that’s for your spouses and partners. As we’ve come to meet your super cool significant others, we have heard how cancer has uniquely impacted their lives and their desire to relate to you and to others experiencing something similar.

There is a distance that has to exist between someone living with cancer and their spouse or partner. Even the closest intimate relationships will have this because each person is changed by the situation in different ways. A beautiful practice can emerge with distance, and that’s the practice of compassion.

Compassion is a feeling we have toward someone in distress combined with the wish to alleviate their suffering. To be compassionate in our relationship means that we are able to recognize when our partner or spouse is suffering in some way (empathy) and to be loving and kind to them as they move through their process. This kind of support can be provided in a number of ways.

After our basic needs of safety, food, and shelter have been met, each of us has very important relational needs—attention, affection, appreciation, and acceptance. We all need to be felt, seen, and recognized, and one way we can extend that to our partner is to listen with intention. This requires being present in our interactions and listening from the heart. From a smile to a hug to a kiss, affection is an essential part of being human. We can express affection with fondness and admiration in our speech to one another. Appreciation underscores the friendship within an
intimate relationship.

We innately need to feel valued and recognized by our loved ones, and a simple act of telling our partners puts a significant deposit in our love piggy banks. When we accept our partners without judgment, we create a safe space for them to be themselves and for love to grow. When we focus on these key needs, together we can navigate any challenge. So let’s embrace the practice of compassion in our meditation.

You can do this meditation with your partner, communicating silently or out loud, or you can simply visualize your partner being with you. If you are not partnered then extend this loving-kindness meditation to yourself. You are deserving of your attention, appreciation, affection, and acceptance as they are also the key components of our relationship with ourselves.

When you are ready you can begin by adopting a comfortable position with both of you either sitting or lying down next to your partner. You can be holding hands if you wish or can make contact by sitting back-to-back. You can also visualize your partner being with you while placing your hand on your heart.

Let your eyes close. Becoming present and aware, take a long exhale to soften and to slow your breathing. As you exhale, releasing, letting go, feeling calmer. For a moment, letting go of the past, letting go of the future, having a sense of arriving in the present moment. Engaging with some relaxing, slow belly breathing for three breaths or so. Then breathing normally and easily.

Being aware of your whole body… softening the face, smiling within with a sense of ease, softening the belly, the jaws, the chest, the shoulders… relaxing the whole body, if only a little more, with each breath out.

Following the breath, as it enters at the nostrils, down the throat, chest or belly rising and contracting as you are breathing in and out. Choosing a point of focus to bring your attention to, again and again. Simply observing your breath in your own way.

If the mind wanders, that’s okay, totally normal. Notice the thought and
then simply come back to the awareness of the next breath. Then resting for a moment in the awareness of being aware. Seeing both of you from above, having a sense of yourself expanding.

Now turn your attention to your partner, being filled with the intention of loving-kindness for your partner. Enjoying their good company. Reminding yourself of their goodness, and being grateful for having them in your life. Reminding yourself of your intention to connect with your partner. Just like you, your partner wants to be loved and appreciated, valued and cared for. Just like you, your partner wants to be happy, peaceful, strong, and wise.

Being aware of your love and care for your partner. Letting the good energy flow out and radiate to your partner. If unhelpful judgments arise, come back to the awareness of your breath and reaffirm your intention to love your partner.

Now becoming aware of the stress and struggles that your partner has been going through in the past or recently. Resting in your intention to love and support your partner. Offering your partner two or three loving-kindness phrases of your choice. Maybe phrases like,

"I care about your suffering, I care enough to be close."

"May love and wisdom guide and protect you."

"May you be peaceful and skillful during challenging times."

"May you be free from suffering and the root causes of suffering."

You can gently repeat the phrases out loud, in turn, or taking the time to say them silently to each other if you prefer,—whatever feels right for both of you. Being aware of your good intentions of wishing well to your partner, of supporting them in good times and difficult times. Focusing on sending good wishes, but also taking a moment to savor receiving the good wishes. Remember that you are not trying to feel anything different, but you are simply trying to connect with compassion, to open your heart to give and receive, resting in a gentle kind awareness.

Then you can turn your attention on yourself, offering the same loving-
kindness phrases you offered your partner by repeating out loud, in turn, or silently.

"I care about my suffering, I care enough to be close to myself."

"May love and wisdom guide and protect me."

"May I be peaceful and skillful during challenging times."

"May I be free from suffering and the root causes of suffering."

Then, when you are ready, you can begin to offer the same phrases to yourself and to your partner out loud in turn or silently for a few minutes. Offering each other what you each wish for yourself. Using phrases like

"We care about our suffering; we care enough to be close to one another."

"May love and wisdom guide and protect us."

"May we be peaceful and skillful during challenging times."

"May we be free from suffering and the root causes of suffering."

Then letting go of the phrases, resting in the silence, being aware of your breath and your partner's presence, notice what is arising in your mind, letting it be as it is. Remembering that there is no right or wrong way of doing it. It is what it is. Letting yourself be as you are. After a few minutes, you can open your eyes. You can end by thanking your partner and sharing your experience.

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**Prompt of the Month**

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

Both cancer patients and cheetahs benefit from an emotional support dog.

Photo credit: Columbus Zoo

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...