



Get to Know Your Hero!

Hello! My name is Mary Jo Hueston, also known as Mary Jo Musselman, and I live in Toms River, NJ with my husband of a little less than 2 years, Phil, and our little dog, Attila. I also have a son, Nathan, who is 22, and a step-son, Andrew, who is 19. I am active with the Domestic Violence Response Team in multiple municipalities in Ocean County. As a volunteer, I am a second-responder of sorts for victims of domestic violence situations. I meet with victims at police stations, help calm them after an event, and discuss the options they, as victims, have available to them, even to the point of helping them develop a plan and contacting the safe house's hotline to arrange for shelter and counseling.

I am also a member of the Zonta Club of Ocean County, the local chapter of Zonta International, a service organization of primarily professional women, dedicated to improving the legal, educational, economic, political, health and professional statuses of women worldwide.

As part of my involvement with ZCOC, I am a member of the Ocean County Task Force on Elder Abuse which provides education to the Senior Citizen community in Ocean County about the many faces of elder abuse and the various agencies and organizations that are available to assist them for every type of situation. Currently, I am coordinating a seminar for February which is geared to those who have become or need to choose a primary caregiver for an elderly relative.

I am also a runner in renaissance. I used to be a casual runner - 3-5 miles every day or two - an avid exerciser; and personal trainer; however, about 8 ½ years ago, that all changed. It was at that time, at exactly 8:55 a.m., October 5, 1999, that I was told I had CHRONIC MYELOGENOUS LEUKEMIA - CML.

I was fortunate that my disease was caught "early" as a result of a routine physical. My GP was concerned that my white count was a bit high - 78,000 - so he sent me to an oncologist, whose lab revealed a white count of 83,000, and the initial diagnosis was made. Being a single mother at the time of my diagnosis, my first question was if my son could have the disease. When he told me it's not a genetically transmitted disease, my mind went into warrior mode, and I then asked if I could be cured by my 40th birthday - a mere 8 months away.

My journey for these past 8 ½ years has been interesting, to say the least. I've undergone 3 ½ years of direct chemotherapy, 2 clinical trials, a glimmer of complete remission and cessation of treatment, the devastation of recurrence, and the continuation of treatment to this day as I stridently seek that state of complete remission - and a complete end to all treatment. About mid-way through this time, my husband and I signed up for a Team In Training event - a half marathon in Walt Disney World. I began training for this race as if my life depended on it - because to me it did.

Unfortunately, I was given medical advice to refrain from training and participating in that event, which was a set back; however, I have never stopped desiring to return to running - even at my "casual" pace - nor have I given up on achieving that goal. So as you are training and raising money for your Team in Training event, keep in mind that every step you take is really two - one for you and one for me. And every dollar you raise helps with the research costs and patient assistance programs for all of us with blood cancers as we all determinedly seek that state of complete remission - and a complete end to all treatment! Thank you for your generous support!

Mary Jo Musselman, *SURVIVOR*

