

Cancer came into my life in March 2022 at age 34. I immediately made plans to work as much as I could to maintain my health insurance, student loans and mortgage. For every oncology appointment, I traveled 200 miles. In the 23 days between diagnosis, an egg retrieval procedure to protect my ability to have children after treatment, and my first chemotherapy infusion, I spent my nights trying not to imagine cancer cells spreading.

After a few chemo infusions, I understood that my identity as a strong woman who enjoyed stillness and who could move my body and go to the mountains whenever and however I wanted, would not be who I would be able to keep being. Could I make sense of the suffering, sadness, and grief that came from knowing my body was once dying—and that I didn't realize it until a biopsy? And that survival required destruction, loss, and transformation?

Community was my bridge between isolating defeat and the strength that rises from the truth that everything is always temporary and transforming. Community grounded me that despite the chaos and unknown, every day, if I chose, I could love and receive love. Amid the surreal schedules of travel, bloodwork, chemo, surgeries, radiation, and whack-a-mole side effects, tender moments, rest, nourishment, and healing somehow, were possible.

I first came to Cancer Support Community because I thought I should prepare and test out wigs. I brought my sister and that memory with her of playing around with different wigs is one that will always be full of light. During treatment, I joined a virtual book club and writer's group through Cancer Support Community. CSC helped me meet my peers. I felt so connected and understood the first time I met another young woman who went through fertility preservation before chemo. And during the 2023 legislative session, CSC, a host of cancer survivors, providers, and advocates, powerfully came together to pass a law so young cancer patients will now always have access to the care they need (Check out SB 516!).

Cancer is a humbling, mighty teacher. I now know we are not meant to struggle in isolation. When everything feels out of control and when the only known is the unknown, community heals. **Community strengthens and it soothes.** Community reminds us who we are when we fear we may forget.

Thank you for your support of the Cancer Support Community. I am honored to be in community alongside you in this wild, beautiful life!

Katie Beall
Cancer Survivor & CSCMT Participant