

## Medical Moments podcast transcript

*S2E9: SHATTERED GLASS, BROKEN BELL: How a cancer survivor finds grace by staying off the internet and keeping up with friends*

### **[00:00:03.540] - INTRO**

Welcome to Medical Moments, I'm your host, Marlon Manuel. Stories of health and wellness, and the issues that influence them, can be found in hospitals, medical practices and the community at large. Join me on this journey of medical moments.

### **[00:00:20.510] - MARLON MANUEL**

Welcome back to Medical Moments. I'm Marlon Manuel, and I'm glad you're listening. You can listen to every episode, like and subscribe to Medical Moments at [podcast.northside.com](http://podcast.northside.com) or wherever you get your podcasts. Email me your feedback at [PodcastComment@Gmail.com](mailto:PodcastComment@Gmail.com). Right now, you've joined an extended episode, the finale for season two.

### **[00:01:03.690]**

Before COVID-19, the undisputed big letter 'C' of disease was - and still is - cancer. Despite a 26 year decline in overall cancer mortality, the numbers for cancer remain staggering: nearly 5000 new cases a day in the U.S., including more than sixteen hundred deaths every day.

### **[00:01:24.480]**

One of every two males will develop cancer in their lifetime. For females, the odds are one in three.

### **[00:01:30.710]**

Betsy Gentry is one of those women who drew a short straw.

### **[00:01:34.200] - BETSY GENTRY**

The rug got pulled out from under us when when we heard the word cancer for the first time. And it was just a crazy, kind of surreal experience.

### **[00:01:44.940] - MARLON MANUEL**

Betsy is a part time real estate agent in Dunwoody, Georgia, on the north side of Atlanta. She's a wife, a mother of two grown children, a mother in law, and she says, hopeful to be a grandmother, someday.

### **[00:01:56.850]**

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Betsy will share in this episode her cancer journey, including a painful gallbladder attack, hand-holding and sailing in the British Virgin Islands. She'll also talk about how she finds hope during moments of hopelessness.

**[00:02:10.020]**

Betsy spoke with me on the phone from the screened in back porch of her two story saltbox home in Dunwoody

**[00:02:15.630]**

A ceiling fan blew a cooling breeze over Betsy. She relaxed on a curved sofa and rested her legs on a coffee table. The nearby swimming pool is relatively new. It's part of an empty-nester sanctuary Betsy and her husband created. A waterfall in the pool drowns out noisy leaf blowers and lawn mowers. Betsy says the space is a lifeline during the pandemic. Neighbors can bring food, drink, visit and social distance.

**[00:02:40.800]**

Betsy's medical journey started at Northside Hospital, well-known for maternity system that leads the U.S. in newborn deliveries, delivering more than 25000 babies each year.

**[00:02:51.810] - BETSY GENTRY**

I had my children there know very conveniently located to where I am.

**[00:02:56.790] - MARLON MANUEL**

In 1978, Northside's single community hospital first offered basic cancer treatments, radiation oncology and surgery. Today, Northside has five hospitals. Compared to its infancy, Northside has matured into a comprehensive health care system. The growth includes the Northside Hospital Cancer Institute (NHCI), a network of 50 cancer centers located across Georgia. It's the largest and most comprehensive cancer hospital network in the state. That includes the most board-certified medical oncologists in Georgia.

**[00:03:29.100]**

Patti Owen is the director of oncology for the Northside Hospital Cancer Institute. Her career started at Northside in nineteen eighty eight. She's watched Northside become a destination for cancer care.

**[00:03:40.860] - PATTI OWEN**

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People would be most surprised to understand that we are able to treat all cancer patients and that we are now one of the largest cancer programs in the country. And so we have been a well kept secret for many years. And then many people think of Northside as the place to have a baby. But we've really worked hard to keep keep people in Northside system for all of their care throughout the lifetime. And so over the years, we've grown and grown and we have become a very, very large cancer program.

### **[00:04:14.070] - PATTI OWEN**

So I think people would be surprised at the capabilities. We are a leader for cancer services. And so I do think that we have really done a lot to reach that vision. And I think there's several things. One is our volume and our size in terms of, again, being the largest one of the largest programs in the country. But we also have programs that are not normally found in a community cancer program, such as our bone marrow transplant program is one of the largest and most respected programs in the country.

### **[00:04:44.160] - PATTI OWEN**

We also have a disease side approach to many of our programs. So we have a very large breast cancer program going on, oncology program, lung, prostate, GI. Many of those are programs that are often found in community cancer programs. But we also have rare and complex programs such as leukemia, melanoma, sarcoma, liver and pancreas. So again, we have a comprehensive program which can treat every type of cancer for most of her life.

### **[00:05:14.070] - MARLON MANUEL**

Betsy Gentry gave none of that any thought. As a healthy mom, an active tennis player and a twenty eight handicap golfer, she happily raised her boy and girl, sold houses in Atlanta and rode her Peloton when she found time.

### **[00:05:28.140] - MARLON MANUEL**

But in 2015, her back had a dull ache, her stomach acute pain. Not from a golf swing, not from her tennis backstroke.

### **[00:05:36.750] - BETSY GENTRY**

My story is listen to your body because you've been in it a while and you know when something's not right and something wasn't right for a few months, but I kind of didn't pay a whole lot of attention to it. And it really wasn't worrisome because I've been very healthy my whole life. So I'm not one to run to a doctor, but I was having. Abdominal and back pain so badly that I did go see my primary care physician and she

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never considered any gynecological issues, mostly because I said I'm fine, I just had my annual visit or I was due for my annual visit the next week or something like that.

### **[00:06:23.180] - BETSY GENTRY**

So we weren't really concerned about that. And her thought was it was probably appendicitis that I was having. And this is on a Friday. And so she said, just go to the emergency room, because that way they'll get you in, they'll get you out. You'll be home on Sunday at the latest. And, you know, we'll get this all taken care of. So I went into the emergency room thinking it was going to be kind of a lousy weekend, but then I'd be fine.

### **[00:07:00.460] - BETSY GENTRY**

Betsy had a CT scan, what she didn't know while she waited for the doctor to return was that her scan showed a pair of tumors on her ovaries on an exam table in the ER of Northside Hospital, Atlanta. Betsy waited for a sequence that never happened - a doctor to tell her that her appendix needed to be taken out. Looking back, what she remembers during her visit to Northside Atlanta was a friendly face and an unexpected phone call.

### **[00:07:28.000] - BETSY GENTRY**

It turns out this is one of these little things that God orchestrated the ER nurse that day with a personal friend of ours. And it just so happened that she was there. And when one of the nurses came in and handed me the phone and it was my OBGYN on the phone telling me what they had seen on the scan. And my friend Cindy, the E.R. nurse that was there, said, whatever you do, don't Google anything. And I have listened to her advice since then because she was absolutely right.

### **[00:08:03.760] - MARLON MANUEL**

Had Betsy used a search engine, she might have read that ovarian cancer is uncommon, but still causes more deaths than any other female reproductive cancer. Ovarian cancer is hard to detect and once it reaches an advanced stage is difficult to treat. None of that would have been helpful or hopeful. A month after her E.R. visit, Betsy was scheduled for a hysterectomy and a debulking procedure: that's surgery to remove her reproductive organs and the malignant tumors. That's when the cancer surgeon made a discovery in the operating room.

### **[00:08:38.470] - BETSY GENTRY**

As he had me on the table and was doing everything, they realized that my gall bladder was just a mess, a complete mess. And they ended up having to bring in another surgeon, I guess, the general surgeon, to

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remove my gallbladder, which when they went out and told my husband, who was obviously in the waiting room, I said, well, we didn't see this coming, but we've got a gall bladder. And I believe that my horrible gall bladder is what led to my diagnosis, thank God.

**[00:09:07.600]**

Because if it hadn't, that's probably what was giving me all the pain. And all I was told was it was just a mess. I guess your gall bladder is supposed to feel like a wet balloon and mine was like a hacky sack with all kinds of gallstones and stuff.

**[00:09:23.080] - MARLON MANUEL**

And if all that wasn't hard enough, Betsy started multiple weeks of chemotherapy drugs, were injected into one of two ports she had implanted. After a follow up scan in October 2015, Betsy called her Northside oncologist.

**[00:09:43.760] - BETSY GENTRY**

Man, it was a big old, big old happy day around here when we got the results of the C.T. scan and I have to brag on my side, Doctor. He he he gave me his private cell phone. This is just so wonderful. He gave me his cell phone number and he said, call me when you're done with your CT scan. I will go in the portal. I will see what it is, and I will call you right back.

**[00:10:07.370] - BETSY GENTRY**

And it was it was not even an hour after my scan that I got the news. So it was pretty wonderful, really, really wonderful about that. I surely couldn't tell you details other than that it was clean. And that was just that was all I needed to hear. I cried. I cried. It's kind of like waiting to exhale. I mean, I knew everything seemed good. You know, they they were following my tumor markers through a blood test, through this whole thing, and that was looking good. But just to have something to say, you're clean. There's no evidence of cancer was just such a catharsis. I guess I just I didn't know that I was anxious and I guess I was, but sure was happy. I just I know I cried happy tears like I haven't ... and I remember saying this is what overflowing with joy feels like because I was just overflowing.

**[00:11:13.340] - MARLON MANUEL**

Like many cancer patients, Betsy Gentry has good days and bad days. Her very best days are the ones when she can get through and not even think about cancer once. Often that happens on the golf course.

**[00:11:26.450] - BETSY GENTRY**

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And I love when I've got some friends who are who laugh when I have like a good day on the golf course or something like that. I got beat by the cancer lady again, so I'm pretty proud of that.

### **[00:11:49.850] - MARLON MANUEL**

What gives Betsy strength for her fight is the ongoing compassion of friends and family. Some text. Some call. Some show up. Every bit keeps her hopeful.

### **[00:12:01.820] - BETSY GENTRY**

Oh, I have so many that I could mention instances. And I'm going to try to do it without crying because it's very touching to me. I would say they were people that would take me and sit with me during chemo. This is pre-COVID when you would you were still allowed to have somebody come with you. They would hold my hand while I got my port accessed. I had people who I didn't really even know all that well who would either drop off a sweet note, bring a meal totally and unrequested, unsolicited. One of the most amazing things I've seen is people who have rallied for, in my case, ovarian cancer, a fundraiser that's held annually that's called the Teal Trot.

### **[00:13:04.390] - BETSY GENTRY**

And what started out as a couple of friends doing it while I was going through treatment in my honor, which was very, very touching, is turned into this giant team of what we now call Betsy Buddies to do this race, the five K race fundraiser each year. And I am absolutely overwhelmed and humbled. And it's people from all over the place who just have rallied around, I guess me, I don't want to sound like, you know, I don't I don't know. It's just so nice seeing people doing things that have given me like we can hope it just I know there's a lot of people waiting for me and that means the world to me.

### **[00:13:55.970] - MARLON MANUEL**

Betsy rewarded herself and her family by taking a sailing vacation in the British Virgin Islands. Her Northside oncologist advised her to plan a trip for after chemotherapy, a self dangled carrot to focus her positive outlook.

### **[00:14:09.830] - BETSY GENTRY**

I am a pretty glass half full person, but when you get a cancer diagnosis, you know, that glass just pretty much shatters. So I can't tell you that I was hopeful and positive right away.

### **[00:14:27.530] - BETSY GENTRY**

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But as far as the diagnosis and the news kind of settled in, I think you go inside yourself and figure out how you're going to handle this. You know, are you going to crumple up and just deal with it or are you going to move forward in a positive way and do what you can to fight it? And like I said, live with it.

### **[00:14:53.720] - MARLON MANUEL**

Siddhartha Mukherjee, who won the Pulitzer Prize for the 2011 book, *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*, says there's no evidence that positivity physically impacts cancer. Mukherjee said he knows many positive people who inevitably die from cancer, as well as dozens who lacked positive responses but are alive today.

### **[00:15:15.110]**

But Dr. Guilherme Cantuaria sees it differently. He's the chair of the Northside Hospital Cancer Institute. He learns from patients much like Betsy Gentry.

### **[00:15:24.510] - DR. GUILHERME CANTUARIA**

What amazes me, and it's a blessing to be in this profession, and more specifically in this specific area of cancer, is to see the grace with which our patients go through this very uncomfortable and extremely stressful, deadly on occasion, disease, how they can cope with this, how they just teach us so much and being able to participate in their journey is just truly a blessing that I don't take lightly.

### **[00:16:05.140] - DR. GUILHERME CANTUARIA**

I've learned a lot from my patients, just from a quality of life. And how to live. And patient outcomes are not just the drugs. Patient outcomes is their attitude towards life and towards the disease. And you would see a dramatic difference in how patients with the same treat in the same stage of disease, same age, same other variables. Will have absolutely different outcomes just because of the control what we just discussed, which is many times forgotten, it's about attitude towards life, exercise, nutrition, interest in their care and gratefulness.

### **[00:16:43.380] - DR. GUILHERME CANTUARIA**

They're just grateful for every single day that they live.

### **[00:16:46.920] - MARLON MANUEL**

Betsy shares her experience through the Georgia Ovarian Cancer Alliance. The group provides support to women diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Betsy provides time to medical students who ask about her cancer journey so that they can be better prepared when diagnosing patients. Dr. Cantuaria said hearing

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patients stories is a valuable form of research. Another is the numerous clinical trials that the Northside Hospital Cancer Institute has access to for the benefit of patients.

### **[00:17:16.080] - DR. GUILHERME CANTUARIA**

Northside Hospital is not the typical community hospital system. What we do at Northside Hospital goes beyond what is a traditional regular community hospital. And in cities and counties throughout the country, we have one of the most robust research departments that I've ever been in. Even compared to academic centers, we are one of the main hospital systems in the country to accrue patients to on to clinical trials. We are recognized as a leader in clinical research by the NCI. We are essentially the leader of a regional consortium of hospitals in Georgia, which is called Georgia NCORP, Community Oncology Research Program, which pretty much leads and brings clinical trials to the community.

### **[00:18:11.370] - DR. GUILHERME CANTUARIA**

So not only are we heavily invested in putting patients on trials, we lead the region in bringing these trials to all these parts of the state. That's from a clinical trial standpoint and clinical research. But we go beyond that. We we have investigated, initiated the trials, which are pretty much that means the doctors within the NIH system come up with their own new innovative treatment modality and tested on patients and clinical trials. We do basic and translational research, which is essentially bench research that you would think that that just is done in academic centers.

### **[00:18:54.270] - DR. GUILHERME CANTUARIA**

We don't have the laboratories for these, but we partner with universities to get them to do these studies and participate in discoveries. We present at national meetings. We publish more than the overwhelming majority of community hospitals in this country.

### **[00:19:12.510] - DR. GUILHERME CANTUARIA**

So one has to consider Northside Hospital Cancer Institute more of a blend between the typical hospital and an academic cancer center. We take the best of both worlds and provide the latest technology and treatments to the patients. My home was sent to.

### **[00:19:58.730] - MARLON MANUEL**

I'm one of the 54 percent of Americans who say they or someone in their family has been diagnosed with cancer at some point.

### **[00:20:07.190] - MARLON MANUEL**



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My mother is a cancer survivor. Her brother, my uncle, succumbed to liver cancer just this year. Double hit lymphoma, took my mother in law in 2014.

### **[00:20:19.400] - MARLON MANUEL**

For my own father, there weren't many treatment options for him. In 2005, I went with him and my mother to view his scan with the oncologist. And even as a layperson, I was alarmed by what I saw a growth the size of a folded over dollar bill. The mass surrounded his pulmonary artery, which delivers blood from the heart to the lungs.

### **[00:20:39.290] - MARLON MANUEL**

The tumor pushed against his windpipe. He died just 42 days after doctors diagnosed him with the disease. Lung cancer is often caught late before doctors can do anything now.

### **[00:21:10.260] - MARLON MANUEL**

The Atlanta region is fortunate to have a diversity of health care systems. It's not surprising considering the population growth, especially north of Atlanta, as patients like Betsy Gentry decide where to receive cancer treatment. North Side works diligently to make its treatment experience stand apart.

### **[00:21:27.300] - MARLON MANUEL**

Matt Cox is the senior executive in charge of charting the strategic direction for the Northside Hospital Cancer Institute. I asked him how North Side is different.

### **[00:21:37.070] - MATT COX**

I would say there are probably three key things that I would highlight that really set North Side and the Cancer Institute are here in Georgia as well as nationally. And I'd say number one is our breath. The Northside Hospital Cancer Institute is now the largest comprehensive cancer program in Georgia. By many measures over the last decade, Northside has really built a cancer network that our physicians have a lot more experience caring for cancer patients. I would also say on this point of Bret, that also means that we can serve our patients more conveniently.

### **[00:22:12.240] - MATT COX**

We want cancer care to be local as much as possible. And so our aim is really to be entrenched in our patients community. We want it to be convenient for our patients to access our care and our resources. And I think that's a big reason why our slogan is built to the answer. We have built a network for patients

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to access timely care in a convenient manner, which we know is a better driver of better outcomes for our patients.

### **[00:22:40.590] - MATT COX**

And I'll highlight the fact that I've worked with many cancer providers across the country who aim to be or aim to build the biggest building or the biggest cancer center that patients often have to drive a long distance to fend off traffic and parking decks. North Side, alternatively, has taken an approach that we really want to bring cancer care to the so-called Virtual Cancer Center model, which especially for patients who may receive treatments like radiation therapy every day for five or six weeks in a row.

### **[00:23:15.300] - MATT COX**

So we believe that's a big differentiator for us. Number two is our debt and really specifically our depth of clinical expertise. Whereas many cancer programs or cancer centers are experts in treating only two or three types of cancer, nor side is really built a team of talent who are experts in treating any type of cancer. The last thing I'd hit on Maryland is just this concept of patient centeredness. So, you know, I think every cancer program across the country is going to tell you that their patient centered but very few truly walk the walk when it comes to that concept.

### **[00:23:49.710]**

And I think Northside understands better than most that cancer patients may face a very unique journey and a cancer patients need to go well beyond providing physical clinical care. And we all know a cancer diagnosis is a scary thing for most people. It's an upending thing. And many cancer patients have no idea what to do or where to turn when they receive a diagnosis of cancer. And they really turn to their physician with an extraordinary level of trust and confidence to help them through this this journey.

### **[00:24:31.860] - MARLON MANUEL**

Betsy Gentry had two years of clean checkups after she had ovarian tumors removed. That was until her CA 125 number nudged upward. The blood test for cancer antigen - that's the CA in CA 125 - is used to monitor ovarian cancer during and after treatment. A CT scan in 2018 revealed a very small tumor. Her cancer surgeon removed part of her colon. She spent a while in the hospital, then underwent more chemotherapy. And it worked. Betsy had conquered cancer again. She and her family celebrated with a raft trip in the Grand Canyon.

### **[00:25:11.590] - MARLON MANUEL**

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But her cancer journey has been as rugged as the Colorado River. Betsy's CA 125 number, ticked up again in January 2020, and she started another round of chemotherapy. She has planned another Betsy Beats Cancer trip, a return to the British Virgin Islands. She won't know anything until later in September when she expects to have a full scan that will show the status of her third bout with cancer.

### **[00:25:38.340] - MARLON MANUEL**

I visited with Betsy on the phone just days before what she hopes is her final chemotherapy treatment. Dr. Canturia is Betsy's oncologist. He's a chair of the Northside Hospital Cancer Institute, and you heard from him earlier in this episode. Dr. Cantuaria is the surgeon who removed Betsy's ovarian tumors in 2015. Dr. Cantuaria will evaluate Betsy's scan several weeks from now and let her know if she has beat cancer again.

### **[00:26:09.540] - BETSY GENTRY**

I got the all clear until the very beginning of 2020 that my number crept up again and we found out that I had three lymph nodes that had cancer in them.

### **[00:26:23.700] - BETSY GENTRY**

So I am back on on the same kind of chemo that I had the second time that I call it the kinder, gentler chemo treatments that every four weeks and it doesn't completely wipe me out for, you know, weeks at a time like the other one did. So I'm praying that I get another chance to show this cancer who's coming out on top.

### **[00:26:54.680] - EPILOGUE**

And this brief epilogue about Betsy Gentry. On the day that this episode was edited and produced, Betsy Gentry had what she hopes is her final chemotherapy treatment. Traditionally, patients ring a bell when their chemo is completed. And Betsy literally broke the bell today at Northside Hospital. This is what that momentous occasion sounded like on a cell phone video.

### **[00:27:29.670] - <CELLPHONE VIDEO>**

(Chatter)

### **[00:27:33.660] - EPILOGUE**

And after Betsy was done, she sent the following text to her friends and family. Done. I rang the bell. I broke the bell. I cried a bucket of tears. I got a sweet card from the infusion nurses. I cried another bucket

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of tears, came home to find chemo tracker at 100 percent. And I'm crying again. It's a good day. Praise God. Thank you all for taking such good care of me.

**[00:28:01.210]**

For more information about the Northside Hospital Cancer Institute, Georgia's leading provider of women's cancer care, please go to [BuilttoBeatCancer.com](http://BuilttoBeatCancer.com). Or call the Northside Hospital Cancer Institute at 404-531-4444. That's 404-531-4444.

**[00:28:27.760] - OUTRO**

Thank you for listening to Medical Moments, a publication of Northside Hospital. This is the conclusion of season two. We're going to take some time off, plan season three and be back with you this fall. Our executive producer is Lee Echols. Technical director Steven Johnson, Music by Frederic Anderson, Kevin McCleo, UnReal DM and SComber. Licensed under Creative Commons. I'm your host, Marlon Manuel. This has been a production of the Manual Narrative Group.

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