

I am happy to contribute to this worthwhile insert entitled “Silver Linings”; for me, life truly seems to have had one. I have crossed paths with many of the attendees today since 1991. In case you thought I was on a great vacation for three years during that time, this is what really happened. My name is Michelle and I would like to share the very private side of me that you do not know.

Due to lack of education, as a high-risk skin type, I burned as a young child. When I got older, I used tanning beds. None of this seemed eventful until the day I was patiently sitting in the Doctor’s office for an hour waiting to hear some news; it didn’t even occur to me that a ”skin cancer” that was discovered could be fatal. I went from “patient”ly to “patient”!

I thought a melanoma was another just “cut it out” skin cancer. For the next three years I had Chemo five days a week (for one year), gave myself shots for eleven months, had seven different surgeries, and was in a wheel chair and walker”; I still had stage four melanoma!

I am a miracle. Clinical trials that originally made me sicker, finally made me well. During my treatments at the Moffit Center, I stayed focused on a quote in the radiology department that was painted on the wall. It was from Christopher Robbins, from Winnie The Pooh.

“You’re braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think”.

Make sure when you go outside; you remember everything this Foundation teaches you about sun safety protocol. Come see me at The Chesterfield hotel and let’s toast to good health!

Michelle Gagnon