

# How One Prostate Cancer Patient is *Finding Hope!*

In 2016, Rockey Weddel was enjoying a countryside lifestyle in East Texas. His job as a cross-country truck driver kept him busy when he was away from the cows, horses, chickens, and his beloved wife of 43 years, Maurya.

After a routine checkup, he got a call that would change everything. "I went in for a regular doctor's visit, went back to work, and they called me one day and told me to get to the emergency room," he recalls. When the doctor called later that night to ask if he had been to the emergency room, he said, "Nope, gotta talk to the wife." His wife gave him two choices: Either she would take him, or she would be calling an ambulance. Rockey felt fine but agreed to go, and within 10 minutes, they were sending him for treatment in Tyler as his kidneys had shut-down and he didn't know it. He was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Rockey was admitted and spent 20 days in the hospital, after which he began chemotherapy. At one point during his second round of chemo, they couldn't find a pulse, and his blood pressure dropped dangerously low. "I was feeling

fine and fixin' to go back to work," he remembers, but they immediately sent him back to the hospital for another 20-day stay.

After he was released and completed another round of chemo, life began to return to normal. However, two years later, the cancer recurred. Due to his original reaction to it, the doctors did not want to pursue the same regimen as before, "the chemo was just hard on me." His doctors had a new plan, a referral to Mary Crowley Cancer Research to begin a clinical trial.

Rockey started trial #19-26, a phase 1b combination trial. While he had initial success, the team at Mary Crowley is continually identifying trials that may work for patients if their results begin to change which is exactly what Rockey experienced. He is now on trial #19-32, a targeted therapy for patients with advanced prostate cancer. He is doing very well and appreciating the reduced side effects of the treatment, saying, "this is a whole lot better than chemo ever thought about being."

Rockey has been grateful for his experience at Mary Crowley and has built a close bond with the staff. "The nurses and everyone here are awesome. They take good care of me." Although he is no longer able to continue working as a truck driver, as he needs to stay home for treatment, Rockey is especially thankful that the team at Mary Crowley helped him navigate his disability and social security benefits, bringing peace of mind to an often complicated process.

Rockey is now able to get back to his favorite things like spending time with his wife and two daughters, and fishing with his grandson. He's also very involved with his cowboy church, where he often participates in community outreach. Part of his ministry includes bringing his horse-drawn chuck wagon to various locations and cooking in his dutch oven.

Rockey is filled with hope for the future proclaiming, "God is working through me to help people, and working through y'all!"

## Our Vision for 2021

As 2020 is now in our rearview mirror, we at Mary Crowley Cancer Research look forward to a new and hopefully less stressful year. This past year has shown us that we all must adapt to our circumstances in order to survive and succeed. Here are some of the things that we envision for 2021:

- **Secure more clinical trials to provide for our cancer patients.**  
Although we have a great deal of pharmaceutical companies that approach us for our Phase I trials, we can never have enough. Mary Crowley has been active in the FDA approval of 17 cancer drugs.
- **Ramp up our outreach to oncologists, as well as to the community.**  
Mary Crowley has a good working relationship with area oncologists, and have been able to “partner” with other cancer-related nonprofits this past year.
- **Expand and enhance our fundraising efforts.**  
With our expanded number of board members, we look forward to new avenues of fundraising.
- **Explore the idea of satellite clinics.**  
This is a vision that takes careful planning and even more careful execution. Our efforts in this area are underway for this coming year.

Mary Crowley Cancer Research has been in existence for 27 years and we must no longer be “the best-kept secret in town.” Our board is helping us to get the word out about Mary Crowley, as well as our staff. In 2021, we will continue to serve our precious cancer patients in the best and most efficient manner.

Onward and upward!

## Finding Your Happy Place

by Jackeline Castillo, LCSW

Happy is not a word that anyone would typically associate when dealing with cancer or the epic year of 2020. Finding happiness amidst chaos can be a challenge but not impossible. Searching for happiness doesn't mean that you are not allowed to have bad days when you are struggling, it just means you know where to look when you are ready to receive a positive change.

With the arrival of the new year, I wanted to take a moment to remind everyone of things that you can do to help find your happy place.

### Disconnecting

- Disconnecting from social media/technology can be scary, but it can also be freeing.
- Identify some short times that you are able to disconnect to find time for yourself.
- Have a plan in place, i.e., reading a book, taking a walk, reconnecting with a friend, practice some mindfulness.

### Setting Goals

- When you are not feeling well, this may seem like an overwhelming task, but it doesn't have to be.
- Break down the goals into smaller goals.
- Goals can change depending on your physical abilities.
- Remind yourself if you aren't able to accomplish the goal, it's not a failure, you just try again another day, i.e., if working on regaining strength, what small exercise can you do to get started?

### Gratitude

- When you have a great day or amazing news, document it so you can remember that it's not always negative.
- Keep a journal to draw, write, or doodle to show how you are feeling, i.e., today I am thankful to wake up with no pain.

### Friends/Family

- We may not be able to see all our loved ones in person, but it doesn't mean you can't connect with them.
- Set up zoom dates/game/cooking nights.
- Try something new with your loved ones, you never know what you might learn about them.





## Your Impact

As we look back on 2020, a year unlike any other, I feel more grateful than ever for all the people who help make Mary Crowley Cancer Research such an important part of the cancer community in North Texas. Though we faced unprecedented difficulties in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, our clinic team and administrative staff came together to ensure the health and safety of our patients so that Mary Crowley could stay open and continue offering clinical trials to those who needed us the most. Our physicians, nurses, and staff all rallied, working overtime behind the scenes to develop and implement new safety guidelines and procedures, as well as more stringent cleanliness standards. As a result, we were able to keep our clinic doors open, despite the uncertainties everyone encountered at the start of the pandemic.

We would not be able to continue our important work, however, without the invaluable support of our donors. In a year when our usual events were either canceled or virtually held, we depended more than ever on the generosity of our individual donors. And because Mary Crowley is a small, independent nonprofit, our supporters have a direct and immediate impact on our patients' lives. While we all hope that life starts going back to normal in 2021, we also hope that we can continue this treasured and vital relationship with our donors. Looking forward in 2021, we will bring you more news about the exciting work that Mary Crowley does and the positive ways your support impacts our clinic and our patients. We are all more appreciative than ever of our relationships after such a difficult year, and we thank you for your support of Mary Crowley Cancer Research. Every donation, no matter how big or small, brings hope to cancer patients that they may fight to see another day.

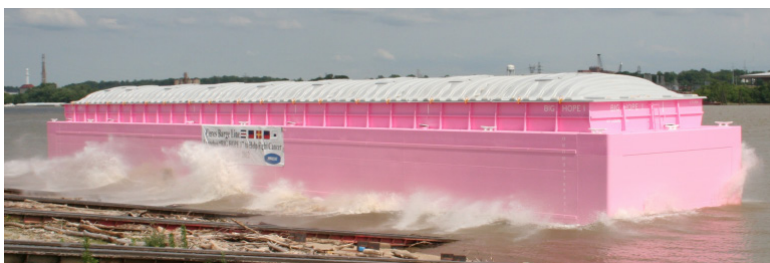


Deborah Montonen, CFRE  
VP and Chief Development Officer



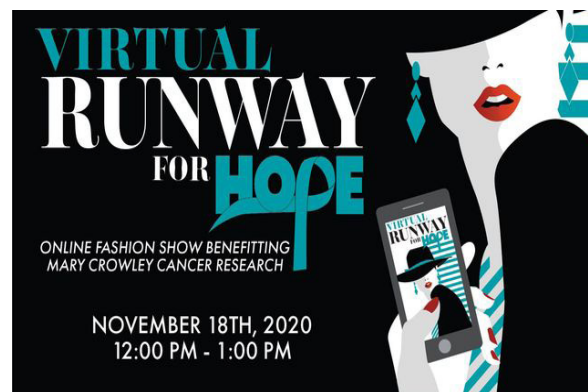
## *Big Hope 1*

Every year, we look forward to the Pushing Hope Annual Marine Industry Charity Tournament in the St. Louis area benefiting Mary Crowley Cancer Research. Unfortunately, the weekend of golf, softball, and kickball had to be canceled this year because of COVID-19. We are so grateful to the barge industry, however, for still coming together to help raise money for the cancer patients at Mary Crowley. So far, they have donated over \$75,000! Although we are sad to miss seeing friends and familiar faces this year, Mary Crowley is thankful to our amazing supporters in the barge industry. Their generous donations allow us to continue to open and enroll cancer patients onto clinical trials.



## *Runway for Hope*

Be the Difference Foundation held its second annual Runway for Hope Fashion Show supporting Mary Crowley Cancer Research on November 18. Although the event was held virtually this year, Be the Difference Foundation creatively found ways to feature four ovarian cancer survivors as models and pair them with fashion influencers, who helped to style them in multiple outfits from Nordstrom, Style Your Senses, and Karina Grimaldi. Hosted by emcee Scott Murray live in studio, attendees heard inspiring stories from our ovarian cancer survivors and learned fashion tips and tricks from our fashion influencers all from the comfort of their own homes. Thank you to Be the Difference Foundation for hosting such a fun event while keeping everyone involved safe and healthy!



## Wilson Foundation Grant

Mary Crowley Cancer Research is honored and elated to receive a generous grant from the Jasper L. and Jack Denton Wilson Foundation. The Wilson Foundation awarded \$400,000 to help Mary Crowley open more combination therapy clinical trials for patients. Mary Crowley has increasingly focused on opening personalized combination trials at our clinic in recent years, as combination therapies target multiple pathways, minimizing drug resistance because cancer cells are frequently incapable of adapting to the simultaneous toxic effects of two therapeutic agents at once. The Wilson Foundation has been a longtime supporter of Mary Crowley for almost 15 years, helping to fund various aspects of our clinical trial program over the years, from vaccines to physician outreach to our molecular database. We are grateful for their support, as the Wilson Foundation has been a vital part of the existence and continued success of Mary Crowley Cancer Research.

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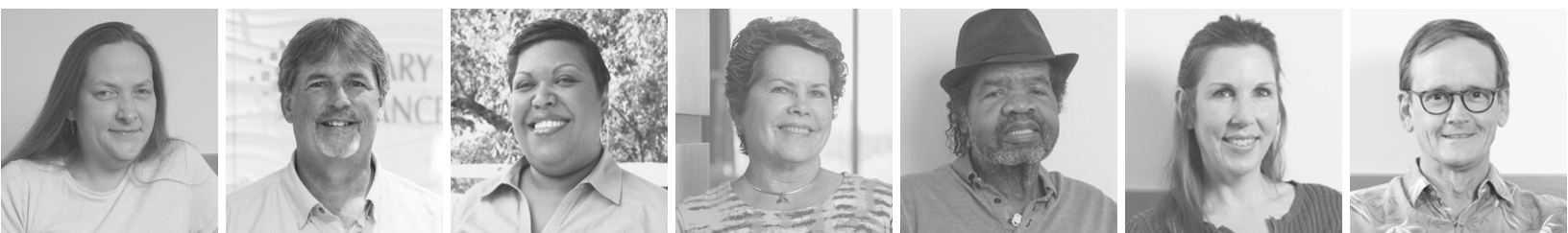
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## 6 Questions with *Jennifer Ashun*

MSN, RN, FNP-C  
Nurse Practitioner

### 1. Where did you grow up?

I was born and grew up in Accra, Ghana, in West Africa. It is a coastal city and the capital of one of the fastest developing and most stable countries in Africa. Dallas has been my home since 1993. Beyond giving back to my DFW community, I work with organizations to meet desperate health needs in a few impoverished areas in Ghana.

### 2. How did you first hear about Mary Crowley, and what made you interested in working here?

Working at Medical City Dallas hospital, I had heard of Mary Crowley, and I took care of their patients several times as a BMT nurse. Some of my coworkers at the time started working at Mary Crowley, and I heard great things from them about the organization. The work environment was of especially great importance to me, and everything I heard was positive. Though I have worked with cancer patients for the past nine years, clinical trial and research is new to me but had always been my career aspiration.

### 3. What is your favorite part of your job?

There are a lot of things I like about the job, but I have to say that getting to know the patients and learning about their journey means a lot, and it is of great value to me.

### 4. What inspired you to choose oncology research?

I want to be part of an organization that brings about change and advancement. Mary Crowley is at the forefront of world cancer research right here in Dallas, giving hope to families that are at their wit's end and are looking for any chance to live.

### 5. What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

I enjoy reading novels, however, for the past few years, due to schooling, my spare time has been devoted to learning and reading study material. I love traveling to see new places, and South America is next on my bucket list.

### 6. What has been your proudest moment professionally up to this point?

Probably when I graduated as a Nurse Practitioner, I wanted to inspire my children to pursue advanced education. I could not believe I made it through with family and work life.

