



# Mary's Story

*When Mary Hamilton was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in January of 2002, she had no way of knowing that she was at the start of an experience that would change her outlook on life forever.*

It began during a conversation with her best friend. Hamilton, hoping to brush off her growing anxiety over her irregular periods, mentioned what was happening. “When I told my best friend Carla I thought something might be up, she wouldn’t let me leave her dorm until I called my mom.” Hamilton said. “We’ve been friends since we were fifteen years old, so there was no way she was going to let me get around that.”

Carla’s suspicions turned out to be worth investigating. After seeing her primary care physician, things accelerated at a dizzying pace, leaving Hamilton unable to comprehend what happened next. “I went in and had the ultrasound fairly quickly after the appointment. I remember being in my dad’s truck, driving back to my parents’ house, when I got that phone call that the ultrasound came back abnormal,” Hamilton explained. “I couldn’t even talk to the doctor at that point because I wasn’t processing. I remember handing the phone to my mom, and having her talk to the doctor about everything, as I kind of started to lose it.”

Hamilton then underwent an emergency CAT scan, where doctors discovered an 11-centimeter mass attached to Hamilton’s left ovary. Her treatment plan quickly came together – within weeks she had surgery, and on March 4th, her nineteenth birthday, she began the first of three rounds of chemotherapy. All of this occurred while Hamilton was continuing her education and finishing up her freshman year at college.

In the years following her treatment, Hamilton found it difficult to talk about her diagnosis and journey with cancer. She endured the loss of her beloved Aunt Lizzy who had been her confidant throughout chemotherapy and treatment. But eventually, she felt it was time to connect with other survivors and share more of her story.

That moment unexpectedly presented itself at a local thrift store. “My brother used to go thrifting all the time, and he found a teal T-shirt one day that had ‘ovarian cancer’ written on it,” said Hamilton. Thanks to that teal T-shirt, Hamilton then connected with OutRun Ovarian Cancer (OROC), a grassroots nonprofit organization dedicated to fundraising for ovarian cancer research and spreading awareness about the disease.

“He gave me the OROC shirt from a past race. A little while later, I started doing research about how to get involved, and finding ways to talk about it and be surrounded with people that I can relate to,” Hamilton said.

Since she first reached out, Hamilton has been involved with OROC’s annual race for four years, taking on the responsibility of securing entertainment acts for the event. She spoke highly of the community and comradery that OROC brought into her life. “They’ve got so much positivity just radiating off of them, that it’s inspiring. It’s empowering,” said Hamilton. “Even if I don’t talk about myself very much, it’s nice to hear their stories and just take it in.”

Looking back on the period in her life when she was diagnosed, Hamilton can see how her perspective shifted forever. “When you go

## September is Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month!

### Ovarian Cancer Symptoms

Ovarian cancer usually presents with a constellation of symptoms including:

- Abdominal pressure, bloating or discomfort, feeling “full”
- Constipation, diarrhea/changes in bowel function
- Frequent urination/changes in bladder patterns
- Nausea, indigestion and/or gas
- Abnormal bleeding
- Shortness of breath
- Unusual fatigue/backaches
- Unexpected weight gain, increased abdominal circumference
- Unexpected weight loss

Symptoms may be experienced by women at some point in their lives, and usually do not indicate ovarian cancer. However, if symptoms persist for three weeks or more with no diagnosable cause, contact your doctor and ask about ovarian cancer.

[www.OROC.org](http://www.OROC.org)

through something that traumatic at such a young age, you become more mature than the people you’re around,” Hamilton said. “Your outlook on life is completely different.”

This mindset was one reason she connected so well with her husband, Dan, who spent several years serving in the US Navy. “When he and I met, we were on the same page because we had already experienced so much life until that point,” Hamilton said. “I feel like I had to go through all of those things to become who I am and solidify the type of person I want to be.”

The couple realized how much they would love to pass on those life experiences as parents. “I always thought in the back of my mind that it would be difficult for me to have children in the future,” Hamilton said. “We felt optimistic because my cancer was caught so early – it was back to back from diagnosis to surgery to treatment.”

On May 17th, Mary and Dan welcomed their son, Colson Elias, marking a new chapter they both couldn’t wait to begin. “We really just want to help him enjoy life and be adventurous,” said Hamilton. “I try to be very optimistic about everything because I’ve already beat cancer once.”

As she prepared to become a mother, Hamilton recalled the strength and support her own parents showed during the incredibly difficult moments of her ovarian cancer treatment. She looks forward to having that sort of unbreakable relationship with her son. “I want a really positive relationship with my kid. I want us to be open and honest, and I want them to be able to come to me with anything through thick and thin, because my husband Dan and I have both experienced a lot.”



OutRun Ovarian Cancer