



PROJECT KILIMANJARO: THE CLIMBERS

Becky Pope, United States Probation Officer

Becky is 54 and grew up in Houston, and Tulsa, Oklahoma. She is a graduate of Baylor University with a degree in social work and completed her MSW at the University of Houston. She and her long-time partner Pam Hilmes have always enjoyed spending free time in the outdoors, hiking, biking, and playing with their dogs. They are avid movie-goers and value time with friends and family. Becky is also involved with her church and its various community outreach projects.

For the past 30 years, Becky has worked in the criminal justice system. She believes that her mother was a big influence on her career choice; she gave of her time to help others. When Becky took her first college class in social work, she felt like she was “home.” Helping people be empowered seemed to be a worthwhile goal in life—believing in a person’s ability to change if given the right tools made perfect sense.

In 2008, Becky developed minor incontinence (what menopausal woman hasn’t?) and visited a urologist for a check-up. Tests were ordered; at the follow-up visit, the urologist matter-of-factly blurted out, “You have a tumor and I suspect it is ovarian cancer.” Stunned, Becky immediately began seeing specialists and was scheduled for a hysterectomy. When she awoke from the surgery, she learned from Pam that she had Stage 3 ovarian cancer, a large, aggressive tumor. She believes that her fitness level allowed her to recover more quickly from surgery than a less active woman. And her oncologist, Dr. Terry Pustilnik, agreed. She underwent chemo, continued to exercise throughout treatment and had very few side effects.

Becky’s and Pam’s lifestyles changed more when Pam was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. Two illnesses were difficult, but they continued to do as much as they could to stay healthy. In September 2010, Becky’s cancer returned and she underwent additional chemo. She finished chemo in January 2011 and is in remission.

Although she has faced much adversity, including the unexpected death of her mother in March of this year, Becky does not focus on what she doesn’t have, but on the blessings she does have. Attitude is critical and one of her favorite quotes is, “It’s not waiting for the storms of life to pass, but rather learning to dance in the rain!”

Becky’s spirits remain high and her faith unshaken. She says, “Even with stage 3 ovarian cancer, I have joy in my life, and I’m laughing and dancing in the rain!”

