



Faces of Radon

Barbara Sorgatz, Survivor & Advocate

Barbara Sorgatz, a resident of Glen Ellyn, IL, studied Public Health in college, but knew very little about radon and its health effects until 2006. Then she was forced to become an expert. That June she went to a hospital emergency room with abdominal pain. A CAT scan not only confirmed her need for gall bladder surgery, it also showed a spot in her lung. Six months later a PET scan confirmed that Barbara had lung cancer.

"My lung cancer was diagnosed in Stage IB, and in February 2007 I had 40 percent of my left lung removed," Barbara says. "The doctors have told me how lucky I was to have had that gall bladder attack; otherwise, by the time I would have developed any symptoms, the cancer would have advanced to Stage IV and it would have been too late for treatment."

"I had never really been sick before," she adds, "but in less than a year I had gall bladder surgery, back surgery, and then lung cancer surgery."

A non-smoker who had not been exposed to a significant amount of second hand smoke, Barbara was baffled as to how she had developed lung cancer. "Upon doing some research on the internet, I discovered that radon is estimated to be the second leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S. today, and a leading cause of lung cancer in healthy people who have never smoked," she says.

"I remember asking a realtor when we were buying our house 23 years ago whether we should get a home inspection, but radon was not considered an issue. I also remember when, about 15 years ago, a neighbor was selling her house and she had to do a radon test. She kept moving the bottles so the test wouldn't come back high. No one considered radon testing anything more than an inconvenience."

Convinced by her research that radon might have caused her lung cancer, Barbara purchased a short-term radon test kit and tested her home. "The lab results revealed that the radon levels in my home were 5 times the recommended EPA levels, so I began my search for a mitigator," says Barbara.

AARST member Calvin Murphy, who has been an active proponent of radon awareness and legislation in Illinois, was the third radon mitigator to give Barbara an estimate. After hearing Barbara's story, he suggested that she visit the CanSAR website. He also installed a radon mitigation system in her home.

It wasn't long before Barbara became involved with CanSAR. Under the guidance of Gloria Linnertz, Barbara soon was writing articles, giving newspaper and television interviews and speaking at meetings to raise public awareness of radon-induced lung cancer.

Today, at age 54, Barbara says she "feels great!" She does aerobics three times a week at the hospital where she works, exercising side-by-side primarily with heart patients. "My lung function is only 20 percent down, and I've been told that part of the lung should rejuvenate. The doctors were right. I truly was lucky the day I went to the emergency room!"

Barbara realizes that "a lot more education needs to be done" regarding radon. With her energy and enthusiasm, and with CanSAR, Gloria Linnertz, Liz Hoffman, AARST members and others to work with, she is making more and more people aware of the hazards of radon every day.

AARST Members Support CanSAR Advocates' Washington Trip - Donations Needed

Gloria Linnertz and Pam Moffit, policy advocates from Cancer Survivors Against Radon (CanSAR), will be traveling to Washington, D.C. to participate in "United for Lung Health Advocacy Day" where they will be visiting with Senators and Representatives. AARST members have been providing financial support for their travels to Washington with major contributions coming from the Ohio and Midwest Chapters. AARST National is matching these contributions. Please contact the AARST Executive Director by email if you would like to donate - even a small sum helps defray costs and helps us compete with much larger vested interests. For more information, contact director@aarst.org.