



# CONNECT. SERVE. HEAL.

## Transforming Lives: Five Stories of A Fresh Chapter



# Today, on behalf of everyone at A Fresh Chapter, I want to say THANK YOU!

Since 2013, we have together made it possible for more than **200 participants** to explore life beyond cancer. Not only have they pushed past their comfort zones to redefine their lives, but they have also impacted the lives of others by volunteering more than **14,550 hours** - both at home and around the world.

It feels like only yesterday when I stepped off the plane in South Africa - **feeling fragile and broken by cancer**. On that day in 2011, I did not know that my time spent volunteering with 2-3 year olds would heal me from cancer in ways that would change the course of my life. Or that the connections I made with families devastated by HIV or with women who struggled to feed and clothe their children would teach me **that struggle is universal, but so is resilience**.

Mine is just one of more than 200 stories of people reclaiming their lives through A Fresh Chapter. Today, I am honored to introduce you to **Eliel, Hannah, Heidi, Linnea, and Tanessa**. In gratitude, they wanted to share their stories with you, so you could see firsthand how you have given cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers the opportunity to heal the emotional scars of cancer and discover new purpose, connection and possibility in their lives. Thank you for transforming lives with us. We can't wait to continue this odyssey with you.



*Terri Wingham*

**TERRI WINGHAM**  
CEO & Founder  
A Fresh Chapter

## OUR IMPACT

*Together, we are*  
HEALING THE EMOTIONAL SCARS OF CANCER WHILE CREATING  
*A Ripple of Good in the World.*

<p>TRANSFORMED THE LIVES OF <b>205</b> PARTICIPANTS Through our Programs</p>	<p>VOLUNTEERED <b>14,550</b> SERVICE HOURS Around the Globe</p>	<p>COMPLETED <b>15</b> PROGRAMS In 5 Countries</p>	<p>CONNECTED WITH <b>420</b> PATIENTS IN CANCER Hospitals &amp; Homes</p>
<p>SUPPORTED <b>1,020</b> CHILDREN In Daycares &amp; Schools</p>	<p>INSPIRED <b>5,000</b> POST-PROGRAM Volunteer Hours</p>	<p>ASSISTED <b>1,065</b> Adults &amp; Children with DISABILITIES</p>	<p>SERVED MEALS TO <b>1,450</b> People in U.S. COMMUNITIES</p>



WE HAVE SERVED MORE THAN  
**33 VOLUNTEER PROJECTS**  
AROUND THE GLOBE



## Eliel Morrell

### 2016 India

Cancer had put Eliel Morell in a deep hole. In addition to treatment and surgery, he lost his job and was experiencing a bout of depression. He started to question his ability to be the man of the house and provide for his wife and three children. He learned about A Fresh Chapter while at a retreat with Athletes for Cancer, where Terri Wingham was a featured speaker. Her story of meaningful travel and healing through volunteerism piqued his curiosity.

“Just the title, A Fresh Chapter, sounded like what I needed in my life,” Eliel said. “Volunteering made total sense. I was thinking about myself and there are people way worse than I am, and if I can volunteer and get a different perspective, that might be a good way to start my process. I can’t go back to who I used to be, but there is definitely another chapter in my life now.”

As a manager of global supply chains for technology companies, Eliel had traveled extensively but never volunteered. “I needed the trip now,” Eliel said. “I’d always wanted to go to India. It’s a very spiritual country with a very rich culture. But this was just a month away. I had a conversation with Terri and she could see how serious I was, and so I launched my fundraising campaign. At that moment my healing process started.”

Eliel was not the sort of person to go around and tell people he had cancer. He was not about to ask others for help, and certainly not ask for money. “I pretty much stuck to myself with all I was going through,” he explained. “Then Terri told me that fundraising was one way to get out of my comfort zone and share my story.”

Reaching out to friends, family, and business contacts resulted in a surprising outpouring of support. “I used social media to reach people in my network. To my surprise they wanted to help, but just didn’t know how. In return, I committed to sharing my experience with them through social media and pictures. They’d see India through my eyes.”

Things fell into place. Part of Eliel’s trip was funded with a scholarship. A visa that normally takes weeks was obtained in a day. The housing location had an open space for another male roommate. On the home front, Eliel’s wife supported the effort. “I couldn’t have done this without the support of my wife. We have three little kids and she stayed home for the two weeks I was on the other side of the world.”

Soon, Eliel was in India.

“It was crazy,” he recalls. “The people. The smells. The colors. Everything was loud and chaotic.” Mornings were spent volunteering at a school in the slums of New Delhi, teaching students basic letters, words, colors, and just singing and dancing. “You’re walking through these slums and see how people live and how some kids go to school barefoot and others wear two left shoes. But they had the brightest smiles and were happy just to have a pencil. That really puts a lot into perspective.”

The remaining time was spent with other cancer patients, learning, sharing, and writing. “You have time as a group—as a tribe—sitting and talking. Some people want to share and others don’t, and there is space for everything and no pressure. One ceremony we did was to write down all the things that we wanted to leave behind in India and then burn the paper. It was an interesting exercise. There were things I didn’t want to take back home with me—a lot of negative thoughts—and I learned to leave them behind!”

Eliel returned home ready to write his new chapter at home and at work. “I had a clear head,” he explained. “The experience helped me get back on my feet and do what I love to do. I used to be the kind of manager that was focused on results,

but now I see people differently and understand that everyone is going through something. I didn’t have that in the past. India made me a much better person than I was before cancer.”

Part of Eliel’s new chapter is continued volunteering within the cancer community as an ambassador for A Fresh Chapter. He’s not only helping others who are struggling to find their new post-diagnosis life, but passing on the empowering benefits of giving back to his own kids. “It helped me be a better Dad and teach my kids not to take things for granted. By telling them about India and what those kids go through every day, it’s changed their values. Now they go through their toys and find toys they can donate to kids who need them. And not just old toys either. They donate the good ones.”





## Hannah McEdwards



2016 Peru

When Hannah McEdwards learned that A Fresh Chapter's next Odyssey journey was to Peru, the idea of climbing Machu Picchu filled her imagination. Like many, she had read about the long-abandoned citadel, high in the mountains of southern Peru, and seen photos of its stone walls rising from mist-shrouded cliffs in National Geographic.

"That has always been one of my dreams," Hannah said, who applied to the program as soon as she received the application. "That was basically it."

There is very little that is "basic" about Hannah McEdwards. In her twenties, she worked for National Geographic, traveling to many ancient sites. Early on she began photographing herself doing push-ups at each location with the idea of someday making a humorous coffee-table book about her travels. She had done push-ups at the Lost City of Petra, Babylon, and the Pyramids of Giza when marriage and children shifted her priorities.

Cancer shifted those priorities yet again. Gone was the notion of world travel and ancient ruins. "When I was diagnosed, I went through treatment. I went into advocacy work and volunteering. I went back to school. I just kept going. I focused on my three growing children and my husband. But I had never dealt with the fact that I am terminally ill. I have cancer and it has metastasized. I hadn't taken time to realize that this is my life now."

"Then I saw that picture of Machu Picchu," Hannah said. "I never thought I'd be able to do it, 'cause I'd been sick and had bills and all the stuff that I'd been dealing with. I was thinking that I'd just climb Machu Picchu, but I needed so much more than a vacation. I needed to be knocked off my pedestal and taught that you don't have to do this alone. You're not a hero. Get over yourself. It wasn't until I got to Peru that I broke down. And no one judged me or had pity for me. Everyone just understood."

Hannah's "light bulb moment" came on the first day of volunteering at the Mother Theresa Home for the Dying and Destitute.



WATCH HANNAH'S STORY ON VIMEO

Her past volunteer work with mentally challenged children was considered sufficient experience for the difficult task of caring for the physically and mentally handicapped.

"We were only volunteering for 3 hours a day, because you couldn't be there any longer than that. It was just too much. I phoned my husband in tears, wondering if I could get the next flight back home, and he talked me off the ledge. I realized that I wasn't there just to help those kids—I was there for me. That was my turning point, where I fully embraced the experience."

The following week, Hannah left behind the chaos of Lima for the jungles of the Andes. The rain and clouds parted as the group arrived at Machu Picchu. "The skies opened and revealed the most glorious vista looking over this ancient wonder," she said. "It still seems like a dream that we were able to actually do that. It's one of those moments where it is so surreal. I look at the pictures and still don't believe it. It was just me and my God—the one who gave me cancer. I forgave myself for getting sick. Besides the birth of my three kids and my wedding day, that experience was the highlight of my life...and I've been all over the world."

Thanks to great cell-phone reception, Hannah was able to call her husband from Machu Picchu and share the experience with him.

Then she did a push-up.

"My husband said I came back happy," Hannah recalls. "He hadn't seen me that happy since I was diagnosed. When I left,

I looked sick and tired and angry. When I came back I had color in my face and was smiling ear to ear. I was energized and ready to go. There are still days when the pain is too much or I wonder, 'What is the point?' But I think back to my tribe-mates who I got to experience it all with. That is what changed me. Not Machu Picchu, not the children, but the experiences with those 26 other people."

Hannah has done push-ups at many historic sites. Easter Island and the Great Wall of China are next on her list.



## Heidi Bruhn



### 2018 South Africa



Heidi Bruhn had a secret. It wasn't the promotion she had recently received at her company, or the nationwide travel the new job would require. It wasn't the presentations she was making and the deals she was closing. Her secret was that she was doing it all...with cancer.

She took the new position while still going through testing. She was on the road when she received the diagnosis. "I was in L.A. with colleagues preparing for a big presentation," she recalled. "I didn't tell them at all. I just kept working."

The doctors had found cancer in her right breast. Once back home in Chicago, more testing revealed cancer in the left breast. Heidi faced a difficult decision. "It was crazy," she recalled. "I had to decide to have a double mastectomy or not. If I just had lumpectomies, then I'd have to have 35 days of radiation. So I had the double mastectomy. It was long—11 hours. I didn't tell anyone. I just took two sick days. Light work a few days. Then back on a plane the next week for work."

Heidi had found that going through the experience alone was in some ways easier. "You don't want someone asking every five minutes, 'How you are doing?'" On the other hand, it was a very lonely time. Even something as simple as lugging around

my suitcase—which I should not have been doing so close to surgery—was difficult."

Heidi found information on the [breastcancer.org](http://breastcancer.org) website, and support at Gilda's Club, and she learned about A Fresh Chapter and the idea of emotional healing through volunteer travel. "I've always been interested in volunteer travel. Both as a way to give back, but also as a healing journey for the participant—bringing some closure to the trauma and to channel it back into our communities at home."

Speaking before her trip, Heidi admitted to being nervous about traveling to Africa and living and working with total strangers. She also hoped for a degree of closure. "I am hoping for a profound moment," she said. "A chance to let go of some things, and to be out of my comfort zone. I've always believed growth happens outside your comfort zone. And I'm hoping (the experience) will force me to slow down and live in the moment."

The trip, however, involved fundraising, and fundraising involved revealing what Heidi had so carefully kept hidden. Facing that reality revealed another secret, one that Heidi had been keeping from herself: that hiding her illness was hampering her recovery. She decided to face the unknown long before her trip began.

"I put a link to my fundraising page on my Facebook page," she explained. "And unbeknownst to me, a woman I work with took that post and sent it to a couple dozen people in the company. Within four days I had five thousand dollars. I wish I'd known

how supportive [my co-workers] would be. Not just with money, but with well wishes and offers of help. All these wonderful things happened. I wish I'd told them sooner."

Now back from her trip, Heidi reports that she experienced several profound moments including, she says, "An overall appreciation of the resilience of people—both in our group who are battling cancer, and the resilience of the local volunteers who tackle desperate circumstances every day in the impoverished communities outside of Cape Town."

Now back in Chicago, Heidi has found the degree of emotional healing she had been looking for. "I had a lot of anger or resentment at the turn that my life took," she said. "I'm the type of person who believes that things happen and you just keep going, but I hadn't taken the time to realize that I'll have to live with this the rest of my life."

"People often say that adversity is a gift," she continued. "I would never say that having cancer was a gift, but my profound moment was the realization that I wouldn't have had this experience if I hadn't had cancer. I can regret having had cancer, but still be grateful for having this experience. Terri and A Fresh Chapter taught me this invaluable lesson."

Heidi's experience has even resonated through her workplace. Where once she had kept her cancer secret, she now often serves as a resource for co-workers. And she has big plans. "I'm planning to go to Kenya," she said. "I read some books on the ramifications of colonialism before I left and it made me want to go back to Africa. Plus one of my AFC sisters lives in Kenya!"





## Linnea Olson



2017 Peru

When Linnea Olson was raising her children, she told them what many parents tell a child: when you're sad, think of a happy place. That place might be Disneyland or it might be unwrapping presents under the Christmas tree. The specifics aren't as important as the perspective. Whatever you're going through, it will pass and there will be better days.

Olson had seen plenty of trying times. As a single mother, she had been on food stamps and welfare. And then came cancer. For the last fourteen years she has lived with stage four metastatic lung cancer. Disneyland and Christmas were not quite cutting it. She needed a new happy place and found it on an Odyssey trip with A Fresh Chapter.

Terri Wingham, founder of A Fresh Chapter, thought she'd be perfect for the Peru Odyssey. As Linnea recalled, "I tend to be somewhat spontaneous so I said, 'Hell yes,' without really understanding what it was. What was astounding for me was that I'm still in treatment. To think of going to a distant country with stage four lung cancer was kind of wild. But we were volunteering and I loved that."

Olson was able to make the trip through A Fresh Chapter's Fellows Program, designed for individuals who actively work to advance

cancer research and support services. The Fellows Program enables such passionate advocates the opportunity to broaden their work and realize personal growth through an Odyssey trip. Linnea, a long-time advocate in the cancer community, found both in a hospital for underprivileged cancer patients outside Lima.

"Nothing could have prepared me for it," she said. "I've been poor in America—poor with a safety net—but nothing could prepare me for the poverty we experienced in Peru. It was shocking and blew my mind and my heart wide open in a way that was at first almost painful, but painful in a way that pushed me to grow."

With her tribe of fellow Odyssey travelers, Linnea watched poverty flow by the windows of the van that took them to the hospital each day. There they chopped, peeled, served, and scrubbed dishes to the point of exhaustion, often falling asleep during the van ride back to their rooming house.

"But even that was super-satisfying," she recalled. "Like other experiences—childbirth, for example which is moving, but also painful—that kitchen has become elemental. The feeling of immersion forced me to drop my own narrative and get out of my own head."

Linnea had found a new happy place.

"In that kitchen," she recalls, "my humanity was awakened in a different way. You start to understand a bit better what is really happening in the rest of the world. And I say 'start' because this is just the beginning. Usually with a trip, you get back and you're done, but Terri takes the concept of tribe



and relationships very seriously. Since we've gotten back she's made sure the relationships are maintained."

Linnea had long been involved in advocacy work to alleviate human suffering, but since Peru her intensity has lifted. "For my own cancer treatment, I was getting the best of care in one of the best hospitals in the world. Everything was state-of-the-art," she explained. "But these people had no soap and no toilet paper. Their food was fresh, but basic. We made soup with chicken feet in it. The people would come with containers and take half the meal home with them. It was probably their only food for the entire day.

"I came back braver and smarter and more empathetic," she continued. "I came back feeling several layers I didn't know existed had been peeled away. In the world of advocacy there is a lot of kissing ass, but I don't have time for that. Coming back, I felt different and looked at everything differently, including advocacy. I'm better able to see the bigger picture and to really feel the heart of that advocacy work."

She's also doing more with less. Downsizing is a new ethic. "Since Peru, I've been fascinated with what I can do without. And it all started in that kitchen. I got strafed there emotionally, but in a good way. Seeing the mean ingredients they had and the great dishes they made from them woke me up."



WATCH LINNEA'S STORY ON VIMEO



came when the group left Lima for the excursion to Machu Picchu.

“It was a very special experience,” she recalled. “We went from a huge smoggy city to this other world of fertile lands and a different culture. I really enjoyed being in the Sacred Valley. Not only was it beautiful, but the way people lived was a lot more simple. They didn’t have a lot of resources but were very resourceful and seemed very happy. It made me want to go home and get rid of my stuff.”

There were tours of the ancient Incan city and lots of selfies, but Tanessa found herself charting her own path through the ruins of Machu Picchu. “I did find myself wandering off. I sat in one of the little temples and just soaked it in and tried to feel the energy and feel grateful for all the people who supported me, who sent me there and were eager to know and be a part of my experience.”

Along the way, Tanessa found, if not answers, then an understanding. “I felt that I wanted a very clear direction on how my life should go, but it was more clarity about how my life should feel. For the rest of the trip I followed that guidance. If I didn’t feel like going for coffee with the group and instead going for a walk and meeting a local or trying out my Spanish, then that’s what I did. I built a lot more trust for myself. There is something thrilling about relying on my own guidance.”

Tanessa has been relying on her own intuition ever since. “I’ve found my voice and I’ve been able to say ‘yes’ to a lot of opportunities that have taken my life in different directions. I’ve gotten very involved in breast cancer advocacy. I’m involved in things that may not add up to a career, but it is a passion.”



## Tanessa Noll



2016 Peru

Tanessa Noll learned about A Fresh Chapter from Sheila, a friend she met at a conference for Young Survival Coalition, a resource group for women with breast cancer. Once they connected online, Tanessa was amazed at how her new friend used her cancer experience to make a difference, which included fundraising to volunteer in India with A Fresh Chapter. Tanessa saw the connections Sheila made with her tribe, the love she shared with the people she served and the joy that came through every update about being immersed in a different culture. When Sheila returned, she shared a post about an upcoming application deadline and encouraged her friends to apply. Tanessa found the idea of healing the emotional wounds of cancer intriguing. Plus, the next Odyssey trip was to Peru, a country she had always wanted to visit.

There was just one problem: the application deadline was the next day.

Maybe traveling to exotic locations wasn’t in the cards for Tanessa. Other people did those things. She was a stay-at-home-mom. It had been an ordeal just to arrange childcare during her chemo treatments.

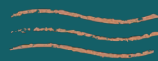
“It was a very quick decision,” said Tanessa. “I didn’t have a lot of time to think it

through. And once I was in the interview process, I tried to back out of it. I wasn’t completely on board. I didn’t know how to leave my children. The idea of fundraising was scary. I think the block was really just a lot of fear. I was convinced that it was not possible to go back to that adventurous part of myself. I was afraid of what might happen if I said yes to that.”

For Tanessa, Peru was a way to reconnect with her old self. She finally did say yes. Yes to raising money for the trip. Yes to leaving her husband and children for two weeks. And yes to the adventurous side of herself. A friend who worked in fundraising encouraged her to share her story through social media. Tanessa offered donors a printed account of her trip complete with photos. She began writing again. She had always been an avid writer. One of the appeals of A Fresh Chapter was the program’s focus on writing as part of the recovery process.

“I identified as a writer and welcomed that option to write and reflect. They sent everyone journals to take on the trip, and I was excited to start writing again. I went with volunteering in mind and wanted to write in my journal as much as possible, because I was looking for answers. I loved connecting with people but also needed to find time for myself.”

Answers could have come from any direction: from the volunteer work helping victims of abuse and trafficking, from activities with other members of the group, or from simply experiencing a different culture and language. For Tanessa, answers



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