



ARM YOURSELF AGAINST OVARIAN CANCER

Biography

Anne Rita Monahan, Founder and President

From an early age, Anne Rita Monahan had big dreams. She dreamed about many of the same things other girls did, but somewhere in those early years she developed an inexorable determination to follow her dreams and make them happen. Born in Dedham, Mass., Monahan enjoyed an active life during her formative years filled with activities such as Irish step dancing, where she became the two-time Massachusetts State Champion and was named the New England Regional State Champion at just 11 years old. She graduated from Dedham High School in 1979 and went on to earn an associate's degree in business administration from Massachusetts Bay Community College; graduating with high honors from both institutions. Monahan's fortitude and drive continued to forge her path as she began working full time while pursuing her studies part time in the evenings and on weekends. In 1985 she graduated cum laude with a bachelor's degree in business from Boston College. With her hard work and strong determination to succeed, Monahan continued to excel in all that she set out to do.

Although born and raised on the East Coast, in 1987 Monahan traded in her snow boots for sunglasses and headed west to Tempe, Ariz. to attend Arizona State University. Monahan continued to work full time while putting herself through school and soon earned a master's degree in business administration with an emphasis in marketing. She then landed a job in corporate marketing and advertising for a Phoenix firm. For over 15 years she thrived in that field until she decided to venture out and fulfill a lifelong dream of opening a gymnastics studio. Her gymnastics studio, located in Phoenix's central corridor, was her pride and passion for over five years.

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In approximately 1990, Monahan began experiencing troublesome physical issues including abdominal pain, cramps, constipation and diarrhea, which prompted many trips to several doctors; continuously returning with the diagnosis of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). On her 40th birthday, in October of 2001, Monahan went to yet another new doctor with her persistent symptoms. Monahan's severely swollen abdomen on an otherwise extremely thin body, due to unexplained rapid weight loss, led this doctor to realize the urgency of her symptoms. After over a decade of misdiagnosis, Monahan was finally referred to an obstetrician/gynecologist who performed a pelvic exam, a vaginal ultrasound and the CA-125 blood test. This specialist, having found tumors on each ovary, held her hand and regretfully gave her the shocking diagnosis of possible ovarian cancer. He then informed her that surgery would be the only definitive way to confirm the diagnosis. The next day Monahan found herself in an obstetrician/gynecologist oncologist's office where she began her battle with a myriad of uncomfortable tests and procedures with close friends and family supporting her.

With the realization of the long and arduous journey the illness might take, Monahan was forced to sell the gymnastics studio she had worked so tirelessly to build in order to focus on her health.

Monahan's debulking surgery, to remove the tumors, was originally scheduled for the end of November, which Monahan's family and friends felt was too far away given the diagnosis. The strong insistence and persistence by her sister, a nurse, paid off and the surgery was moved up to October 31, 2001. The debulking surgery was performed and, unfortunately, ended up including a total hysterectomy. Soon after, Monahan began and completed her first round of chemotherapy. Two months after completion of chemotherapy, Monahan returned to full-time work as a Business Counselor at the Maricopa Community Colleges Small Business Development Center (SBDC).

After 17 hopeful months of remission, the cancer returned. Monahan was faced with a long road of more chemotherapy, more painful procedures and complications resulting from her condition, including an additional debulking surgery, multiple bowel obstructions and colitis. She continued her work at the SBDC for five years until she had to retire due to the ovarian cancer and the side effects of the chemotherapy.

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Over the past six years Monahan has, and continues to face many losses and struggles. She has experienced the loss of health, personal relationships, her dream business, her job and—common to many cancer victims—the emotional struggles due to the tolls the cancer takes on both the body and the mind. In spite of these struggles, Monahan’s love and concern for others gave her a new charge and a new direction. Monahan’s unstoppable spirit has turned her painful experiences with the disease into a message of hope for other women with the establishment of her Foundation.

In September of 2007, Monahan established the Anne Rita Monahan Foundation, which is fighting to “ARM” women against the disease of ovarian cancer. The Foundation’s initiative is to raise awareness of the symptoms of the disease, which are often difficult to identify, and raise funds for research to find a reliable screening for the disease. As Monahan continues to fight her stage-four battle with this painful, incapacitating illness, she is determined to save other women from the horrors of this disease. With that same unyielding determination she has demonstrated throughout her life, Monahan is fulfilling yet another of her dreams with the creation of her Foundation; telling her story so that other women’s lives can be protected.

Monahan has lived in central Phoenix for over 20 years. She continues to fight her cancer one day at a time with ongoing rounds of chemotherapy. She enjoys swimming and especially loves walking and spending time with her two dogs. When she is able to take time off treatments, Monahan enjoys traveling and most recently visited Morocco, France and Italy.

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