

When most people think of Indiana's heroes, they might think of the firefighters, the police, the teachers, or the political leaders. I, however, see others as my heroes. Cancer patients go through both physical and emotional trauma as they work hard to fight such a horrible disease. These patients have truly inspired me. One patient in particular inspired me to create "Hats of Hope", a service project that has resulted in over 1,200 loom-knitted hats being donated to various cancer centers and hospitals throughout Central Indiana. Since I cannot personally honor each and every one of the many cancer patient I have met, I have decided to honor the cancer patient who I know the most, and who inspired "Hats of Hope". My hero has battled through two different types of cancer, the most recent being breast cancer. Through her surgeries and battling cancer with chemotherapy, she has proven time and time again that she can and will fight this horrible disease.

Barbara Josephine Jackson Soeurt was born in Knoxville, Tennessee on May 3, 1938. As a young teenager, she moved to Indiana with her parents, two brothers, and a sister. During her junior year in high school, her father was tragically killed in a train accident while working for the railroad. Following his death, Barbara's mother and siblings returned to Tennessee. She remained behind in Indiana in order to finish high school. She lived with her father's aunt and in 1956 graduated from Indianapolis' George Washington High School. As a woman of the 1950s, she decided not to go to college. Instead she remained in Indiana, went to work full-time at Link-Belt, married the love of her life on June 15, 1957, and soon started a family. A son was born in March of 1961. Two daughters followed. Like most women of her generation, she quit her job

to stay home and raise her family. She became very active with her children and their activities. She was a Boy Scout Leader, a Girl Scout Leader, and an active volunteer for the school's Parent Teacher Organization. Once her children were through elementary school, she returned to work part-time and within a few years was working full-time. After more than 25 years of service at K-Mart, she joined her husband in retirement. Three children and six grandchildren later, Barbara Soeurt is still raising her family. She is a loving and supportive wife, mother, and grandmother.

Barbara showed her tremendous strength and courage back in 2006. That was the year she was first diagnosed with cancer and underwent her first surgery to remove the endometrial cancer that was raging inside of her body. At the time, I was not at all aware of her surgery. She kept such a brave front that only her husband and children were aware of the cancer and the surgery. Toward the end of 2007, the cancer had returned. In January 2008, Barbara had her second surgery to once again remove endometrial cancer. This time, I was aware of her surgery and I was very frightened. This was going to be an even more invasive surgery than the previous one and would require a much longer recovery.

Following surgery in February 2008, Barbara decided, with the advice of her doctor, to begin chemotherapy in order to give her the best prognosis that the cancer would not return. After the first few chemotherapy treatments, she began losing her hair and commenting that her head was always cold. It was around that time that I decided to make her a loom-knitted hat. I was inspired by her fight, and I wanted to help in whatever way I could. Although she already knew how much I cared about her, the gift

of the hat just reiterated that fact. In a thank you note she wrote, “It was so sweet of you to put so much work and time into a hat for me. Thank you so much. I’m sure I’ll get lots of use from it.” Through a simple hat, I was able to touch her life. More importantly, she touched mine!

In March 2009, I held a workshop at the Brownsburg Public Library to teach others how to make the “Hats of Hope” for cancer patients. Barbara attended the workshop and learned how to make the hats. She said she wanted to give back and help other cancer patients and that is just what she has done. Of the 1,200 plus hats that have been donated, Barbara has made over 300 of them. Not only is she battling cancer, she is offering support to others who are fighting the same fight.

Barbara Soeurt is now in the process of battling cancer for the third time. She is scheduled for surgery on Monday, December 14. She has been so strong through all of her treatments. She has definitely been an inspiration to me and I am sure she has been an inspiration to others. Through the “Hats of Hope” project, I have been able to tell her story and let others know that cancer patients are some of the strongest people in society – both physically and emotionally.

In all of the years I have known Barbara, I have seen her as a strong, caring, supportive, loving, and helpful woman. Cancer patients are my heroes and it is an honor to nominate cancer survivor Barbara Soeurt, my grandmother, as my Hoosier Hero.