

CONTENTS

A Skinny Chef You Can Trust

BY KAREN PATTERSON

With just 40 percent of his stomach left, gastric cancer survivor Hans Rueffert nevertheless eats like there's no tomorrow.

People might think that means he's a glutton. Actually quite the contrary: Rueffert, a 37-year-old chef, helps others understand that it's quality, not quantity, of food that matters.

In July 2005, Rueffert had just finished being a contestant in *The Next Food Network Star*, placing third from among thousands of applicants and nine show competitors. He was back home in northern Georgia, feeling lethargic and suffering blackouts. Doctors, looking for a source of internal bleeding, found a stomach tumor.

Rueffert went to M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, where, that August, surgeons removed half his esophagus and 60 percent of his stomach. Fifteen of 29 lymph nodes were positive, he says—"one more and my cancer would have been stage 4." Chemotherapy and concurrent radiation followed at Piedmont Hospital in Atlanta.

"Being a food guy, not being able to really eat or think about food obviously was a huge complication," Rueffert recalls, noting that, after he'd gained 15 pounds munching at Food Network tapings, his weight dropped from 215 to 138.

At 6-foot-4, he now weighs about 150. And yes, he's heard the saying about never trusting a skinny chef. But his work since his cancer diagnosis has, in fact, been built on people's trust.

For one thing, Rueffert—who just cleared the four-year mark with no evidence of disease—is reaching out to others. He serves on the board of directors for the Gastric Cancer Fund. And through M.D. Anderson and ImermanAngels.org, he's mentored about a dozen new gastric cancer patients so far, providing advice on concerns like diet and side effects. "It's scary when you're first diagnosed and you don't know whether you can live without a stomach. They ask me and I say, 'Yeah, you can.'"

In general, he advises gastric cancer patients to avoid sugary and high-carbohydrate foods, recommending high-protein meals and snacks—like quinoa, beans, nuts, lean meats, and fish—instead. "The weight-gain shakes and protein bars most people go to for quick weight gain just seem to go right through many of us gastric cancer patients," he says.

Meanwhile, home chefs and restaurant patrons are trusting Rueffert to please their palates. A TV cooking show he began on local cable might be picked up by

the PBS affiliate, he says. And he's taking over his parents' restaurant and lodge, the Woodbridge Inn in Jasper, Georgia.

Also, drawing on his cancer experience, Rueffert has written and self-published a book, *Eat Like There's No Tomorrow*. People assume the title refers to pigging out, but his goal is for people to be sated by eating wholesome foods, no matter the quantity.

Rueffert also teaches about food at the Cancer Wellness Center at Piedmont. "It's not your average cooking class. We talk about whatever ails them," he says of his students.

Over the long term, he hopes to inspire people who don't like to cook to get into the kitchen and reap their own culinary rewards. "I want people to think, 'If that were my last meal, I'd be completely content with that.'"

Get one-of-a-kind recipes from gastric cancer survivor and chef Hans Rueffert [here](#).