The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), the nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society, supports evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem. ACS CAN works to encourage elected officials and candidates to make cancer a top national priority. ACS CAN gives ordinary people extraordinary power to fight cancer with the training and tools they need to make their voices heard. For more information, visit acscan.org.

Cover Photo: The Texas Capitol is an extraordinary example of late 19th century public architecture and is widely recognized as one of the nation’s most distinguished state capitols. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1970, and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1986, for its “significant contribution to American history.”

Completed in 1888, as the winning design from a national competition, the Capitol’s style is Renaissance Revival, based on the architecture of 15th century Italy and characterized by classical orders, round arches and symmetrical composition.

Cover photo courtesy of the State Preservation Board, Austin, Texas
Special thanks to Pfizer for their financial support to underwrite this publication.

Pfizer’s Oncology Unit is committed to the discovery, investigation and development of innovative treatment options to improve the outlook for cancer patients worldwide.

By working collaboratively with academic institutions, individual researchers, governments, patient advocacy organizations and other stakeholders, Pfizer Oncology strives to cure or control cancer with breakthrough medicines and to facilitate access by patients to quality cancer care.

For more information, please visit pfizer.com.
Welcome to ACS CAN’s third installment of Cancer Stories and Tributes from Under The Dome.

With so many new legislators and a completely new class of statewide elected officials, 2015 marks the start of a new era for cancer policy in Texas. Our state has become a national trendsetter in cancer research and prevention policy, thanks in strong part to the efforts of our elected leaders and ACS CAN.

For all our successes, every story we have to tell signals that we have more work we must do. Cancer touches everyone; an estimated 113,630 Texans will be diagnosed with cancer this year, and more than 38,500 Texans will die from it. As physicians and as ACS CAN senior volunteers, we see its reach every day in the patients and families we serve, and in those we stand beside as advocates. We are grateful for our legislators’ commitment to this cause, both for their willingness to share their personal connections to cancer and for their support of our legislative work.

ACS CAN is proud to be a statewide and nationwide leader in advancing laws that promote cancer research and prevention and ensure better access to cancer treatment. Thank you for taking the time to read these stories, and thank you to everyone who helped make this publication possible.

Sincerely,

Lewis Foxhall, MD
Board of Directors
American Cancer Society
Houston, Texas

Rick Ngo, MD, FACS
Board of Directors
American Cancer Society
Cancer Action Network
Houston, Texas

The stories in this publication have been provided by the public officials. The views expressed by these officials are not necessarily those of ACS CAN.

The bronze miniature Statue of Liberty, mounted on a native limestone base, was presented to the State of Texas as a “pledge of everlasting fidelity and loyalty.” The statue was relocated from the south grounds to a new pedestal on the north grounds in 1997. At that time, the time capsule was recovered and given to the Capitol Area Council. It was buried at the Boy Scout camp near Bastrop in early 2008 and the plaque noting that it was to be opened in 2076 was to be placed nearby.
In honor of Lillian Villarreal

I remember when my dear friend, Lillian Villarreal, first told me she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Many thoughts and questions rushed through my mind as I wondered if she would be all right and what I could do to help.

Previously, when I heard the word cancer the first words that came to my mind were scared, resentment, sadness and loss. Cancer is a disease that discriminates against no one, and Lillian’s diagnosis provided me with a chilling reminder that anyone can be diagnosed with the “C” word.

But Lillian is truly unique and has repeatedly shown herself to be a selfless, caring and very determined individual. When a normal person would feel like they are fighting a losing battle and want to give up, Lillian perseveres and strikes back even harder. She takes care of herself, following through with all recommended treatments, but she also takes care of her family, goes to work and stays helpfully active in our community. Her positive attitude has encouraged us all.

Going through this journey with her, I have learned and seen the effects of cancer. It has brought greater understanding and awareness of the need to promote education and prevention.

Now, because of her, when I hear the word cancer I think of strength, courage and resilience. I want to face whatever difficulty life throws my way as courageously as she has faced hers. I am lucky and grateful to be able to call Lillian my friend.

REP. CAROL ALVARADO

REP. SARAH DAVIS

What does cancer mean to me?
Finding courage I never knew I had.

In 2008, I was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 32. What started out as a sharp pain eventually led to an invasive ductile carcinoma diagnosis. I have no family history of breast cancer and am negative for the genes. When I checked into MD Anderson, I rejected their “new patient” packet, for as I explained, I am too young to have cancer. Unfortunately, no one is too young. Cancer does not discriminate based on age, gender, race or religion.

During my treatment, many people asked me if I was afraid. I felt fear on many occasions, but really, I did not have much time to be afraid, as I was busy with blood draws, chemo and radiation.

No, the real fear settled in when all the treatment ended. It’s over. Go home. Live your life. Be happy you are alive. But how?

While I was struggling to find my “new normal,” I was absolutely sure that I needed to be a part of something bigger than myself. That’s when I decided to run for office. That moment was when much of the fear I had evaporated.

I believe that so many of us make decisions based on a fear of failure. But when you have overcome the most frightening of circumstances, fear becomes less relevant as a factor in your decision making, and you can find courage you never even knew you had!
In honor of Punching Esperanza Diwa San Miguel and in memory of Oliver Teresa Pettis Ellis and William Ellis Pettis

Almost everyone has had a family member or dear friend who has been affected by cancer. Cancer touches us all. I lost my mother, Oliver Teresa Pettis Ellis, to colon cancer and my uncle, William Ellis Pettis, to lung cancer.

My executive assistant, Ashley San Miguel, also has a loved one who battled cancer. Her grandmother, Punching Esperanza Diwa San Miguel, or “Lola Punching” as they call her in the Philippines, was diagnosed at age 63 with breast cancer. She was treated with a biopsy and radiation at first, but when that didn't work she underwent a full mastectomy. Ashley remembers her family sharing the news with her and the initial sadness and worry of her grandma’s diagnosis. But, she also remembers the joy of learning her grandmother was finally cancer free.

Thirteen years later, Lola Punching is still healthy. She ballroom dances three times a week and travels back and forth between the Philippines and Guam.

Her story and so many others speak to the importance of continuing cancer research, screening and prevention efforts in order to find cures for all cancerous diseases.

In memory of Jo Paul Archer

Sen. Craig Estes submitted this story on behalf of Jo Paul’s wife, Ann Archer. Her sister, Jennifer Smith, is the regional coordinator for Sen. Estes’ office.

In 2003, my husband, Jo Paul, was diagnosed with a precursor to leukemia. Two short years later, he developed full-blown acute myelogenous leukemia. Jo Paul endured radiation, chemo and a stem-cell transplant before losing his life to the disease. At only 36 years old, Jo Paul also left behind our two daughters, Katie Jo and Addi.

On the morning of Jo Paul’s passing, our two daughters and I made a commitment to do everything possible to eliminate the disease that had taken their daddy. I had once purchased a luminaria in honor of Jo Paul’s fight. Little did I know but that would be my first introduction to the American Cancer Society and the Relay For Life® program. That brief introduction to Relay proved to be the start of our active participation in the overall fight against cancer.

In 2006, my daughters and I formed Team Archer. We rallied more than 200 of our family and friends to participate in our first Relay For Life of Lubbock County. That year, Team Archer raised more than $15,000 in memory of Jo Paul. Not only were we able to raise a significant amount of money in support of the Society, but Relay also proved to be very therapeutic for us all.

Through our continued involvement with the Society and ACS CAN, we have seen our cancer-fighting “family” grow. It’s through the strength of these relationships that we continue our fight, and will continue to do our part to eliminate cancer entirely!
In honor of Emily Hinajosa

While breast cancer primarily occurs in women over age 55, there are many cases of women in their 20s and 30s who have been diagnosed with the disease. In Texas alone, breast cancer will claim the lives of 2,710 women this year.

In 2011, 26-year-old Emily Hinajosa was diagnosed with stage 3 medullary carcinoma breast cancer. At the time of her diagnosis, Emily had two small children and was the owner of a floral business.

Emily underwent 32 rounds of chemotherapy and 92 rounds of radiation. When the initial rounds of treatment did not work, she underwent a double mastectomy and reconstructive surgery. Although Emily’s cancer returned twice, her husband and children gave her the strength to endure years of challenging treatments.

Even though she was very sick and lost all of her hair, Emily bravely continued to run her business as best as she could. In spite of the significant strains on her body, family and finances, she remained positive and kept fighting. This experience gave her a new outlook on life, and she is thankful for each day that she is cancer-free.

Emily is a perfect example of how cancer is a disease that doesn’t discriminate. Since her diagnosis, she has become more aware of the impact cancer has on so many people, regardless of their age, race or socioeconomic background. Emily now volunteers for the American Cancer Society, in hopes her story will help others be vigilant of the importance of early detection.

Sen. Marsha Farney

I stand as a miracle to the grace of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and feel I owe a debt of gratitude to several of His servants: Dr. Kirk Calhoun, Dr. Jonathan MacClements and Dr. Steven Cox.

On behalf of the University of Texas Health Center at Tyler, I worked with Dr. Calhoun during the 82nd Texas Legislature, and he offered the question, “May I ask who your doctor is?”

“I don’t have one. I’m not sick,” was my reply. His haunting response was, “How do you know?”

So, at age 69, I had my first colonoscopy, which revealed a life-threatening cancerous tumor.

Swift arrangements were made for me to begin chemo, radiation and surgery.

Dealing with the effects and challenges one goes through with such a serious condition, I am blessed to have an incredible God, wonderful wife and outstanding doctors and staff that allow the peace of mind to go about my life with full understanding that no one is immune and is in need of annual checkups to avoid the traumas.

No greater words one can hear than, “You are cancer free!”

My gracious thanks to my new dearest friends and all of the staff at the UT Health North East. May God bless them all.

Rep. Dan Flynn

Rep. Dan Flynn, a cancer survivor
In memory of Rosalie Lilia Sanchez
Story submitted on behalf of constituent Claudia Rodas

My Tia Rosie’s children were her life. My cousins were always by her side, and she would always tell people that her kids came first in her life. Even in her last days, my aunt’s last requests included asking the rest of the family to watch over her children and grandkids.

She was a single mom, a hard worker and always so loving with an infectious smile. My cousins now display her characteristics – her eldest daughter is strong and bold, her second-oldest daughter is humble, her third child and eldest son inherited her laugh and lighthearted personality, and her youngest child wears his heart on his sleeve.

My aunt idolized her granddaughters, and I can only hope they will share how great of a grandmother she was with their two newborn cousins.

In April 2013, my Tia Rosie was diagnosed with stage 4 gastric cancer. She had no symptoms until the cancer spread to other parts of her body. The five-year survival rate for gastric cancer in the US is low, largely due to the lack of preventive screenings. As with many cancer diagnoses, we know prevention and early screening are the only known cures.

If I could talk to my aunt today, I would tell her how much we all miss seeing her smile, hearing her laugh and feeling her warm hugs. We think of her every day, and the pain and sorrow of losing her way too early in her life has not left any of us.

In memory of Tom Huberty and Marie Etterman and in honor of Maureen Huberty

Cancer has impacted my family in many ways. In 1980, my uncle, Tom Huberty, passed away after a long and debilitating illness fight with stomach cancer. Uncle Tom, like my Dad, was a hard-working, dedicated family man who lost his battle at age 50. He left my Aunt Bobby, an equally strong and hard-working woman, with seven children to raise on her own. She fought to make sure she provided a good home and opportunities for all of my cousins, and lived a good life, having recently passed away in 2013.

In 2006, my mother-in-law, Marie Etterman, lost her battle with cancer at the age of 56. She had just moved to Houston to be with her grandchildren and start a new phase in her life, when cancer took her at a very young age. She fought the disease courageously, but we caught it too late and ultimately she lost her battle.

Finally, in 2014, my mother, Maureen Huberty, was diagnosed with bladder cancer. To date, she has been successfully fighting the disease, and because of the new treatments offered today, we are very hopeful that she will make a full recovery.

Cancer is a terrible disease, and it impacts most families in some way. My mother is one of the lucky ones, and it is my hope with additional research and funding we can find a way to beat this disease once and for all.
In honor of Rebecca Esparza

Having gone through two surgeries to remove uterine fibroid tumors, Rebecca Esparza was sure her stomach and back pain in the summer of 2001 was simply more of the same. In fact, her doctor’s concern that it might be cancer didn’t bother her. Rebecca said, “I just blew him off. There was no way I had cancer at 30.”

She even put off having surgery. “I woke up from surgery on Thanksgiving Day with ovarian cancer and a radical hysterectomy,” she recalls. “I’ll never forget how it felt to see my parents holding each other up and weeping at my bedside.”

Rebecca was faced with having to undergo chemotherapy without health insurance. She navigated social services and received indigent care through the Nueces County Hospital District. By the time she started treatment one month after her surgery, the cancer had spread to her liver and the lining of her stomach.

Looking for more answers, her sister called the American Cancer Society’s toll-free number, 1-800-227-2345. “We got a packet about ovarian cancer within a week,” Rebecca said.

By the fall of 2002, doctors declared Rebecca was cancer-free. Wanting to give back, she became an avid American Cancer Society Relay For Life volunteer and started a support group at the local Society office.

In the spring of 2008, Rebecca was diagnosed with a second primary cancer of the thyroid. This did not dampen her spirit.

Rebecca knows she is a walking miracle, and wants others to know there is always hope.

In memory of Linda Kacal

Linda Kacal, was a loving wife, mother and grandmother. She was strong in her faith, was civically minded and always helped those in need.

My mother, Linda Kacal, was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and subsequently passed away on July 31, 2013. Her battle with cancer was sudden and brief. The toll that cancer took did not just affect her, it affected her family, loved ones and many friends as well. Mom was the first to console, offer assistance and put all others before herself.

Cancer hit our family first with my father and colon cancer, and we beat it. When mom was diagnosed, we just knew with her faith and medicine we would enjoy many years with her, but we were wrong.

Today, ovarian cancer often comes with a terminal sentence, and that is unacceptable.

In response to this horrid and sudden illness, I along with Rep. Ken King, have started KK125, a foundation to help raise awareness and prevent ovarian cancer. The KK125 Foundation was inspired by three remarkable women whose lives were all cut short by ovarian cancer: Linda Marie Kacal, Paulette Brooks King and Andrea Sloan.

These and thousands of other brave and strong women should never have had this terminal diagnosis without any opportunity to have a fair fight. Early detection and prevention is our goal, and we must be – we will be – victorious for our daughters.
In memory of “Miss Debbie” and her son, Todd

“Miss Debbie” was my three-year-old child’s Sunday school teacher. When learning of her breast cancer, Debbie elegantly responded that she would just “go forward and get better.” The same week she received her catastrophic news: her only child, an adult son named Todd, was diagnosed with Burkitt lymphoma.

Debbie had always supported and cared for everyone else. Being unselfish defined who she was. Over the next 10 years, Debbie lived with a bold combination of courage, humor and total selfless attention to everyone else. My three children were sensitive to her illness, curiously asking questions about life and death. They did not understand the “why” of it and neither did I.

My last memory of this lovely person, as she faded in and out of consciousness, was of her meeting my son’s future fiancée. Even as the balance of life shifted, she nodded in approval of Heidi, Lewis’ chosen life-mate. When Debbie died, it was not unexpected, and all had their own Debbie stories to fondly share.

Recently, my eldest child, Helen, texted me a photo of a race bib she donned in a Race for the Cure 5K in North Carolina. She ran in Debbie’s honor. Poignant and provocative, it touched me to see Debbie remembered, and that my child was this thoughtful.

Cancer is not always cured, but the powerful memories of those courageous fighters can soften the sting of physical death.

SUSAN LEWIS KING

In memory of J.W. Jankowski

Jen-E was married to her husband, J.W., for nearly 44 years. J.W. served as Sheriff of Washington County and was also president of the Sheriffs’ Association of Texas. At age 50, he was diagnosed with prostate cancer. After surgery and radiation, J.W. lived with the cancer at bay until it returned 10 years later.

After a courageous three-and-a-half year fight, he passed away in 2014. Throughout their journey, both whole-heartedly shared their story with others conveying how cancer research and clinical trials gave them more time to live, laugh and love with family and friends.

Jen-E is no stranger to cancer. Lung and throat cancer claimed her father’s life; he was only 54. At age 43, her mother had a uterine cancer scare, but survived after treatment. Her youngest daughter had skin cancer twice, but is now healthy due to early detection and surgery. Recently, her sister passed away from lung cancer.

Sen. Lois Kolkhorst with Jen-E Jankowski

In the words of Jen-E Jankowski, “Every day is a gift. We must live it to the fullest.”

Five times cancer has personally touched Jen-E’s life, and each time has changed it profoundly.

Her message to all is that cancer will never stop so we must never stop continuing to be aggressive. Strong research is the key to winning. It’s changing lives and prolonging them with new discoveries being made every day.

Cancer research and God’s grace gave Jen-E, J.W. and their children the chance to live each day to the fullest, while praying for a cancer-free tomorrow.
In honor of Martha Guthrie

I have family and close friends who have been confronted with the challenges of cancer. Some are no longer with us. Through the experiences of these loved ones, I have learned that hearing the words “you have cancer” is one of the most terrifying experiences you can have.

Cancer does not just affect your physical health; it brings up a wide range of emotions and leaves you feeling disoriented, frightened and unsure. It is in this moment that the love of your friends and family become the most treasured things in your life.

In December 2008, Martha Guthrie, a courageous constituent of mine, learned how important it is to have the love and support of her family and friends when she was diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer. After a lumpectomy, her oncologist recommended 33 rounds of radiation and medication to address her specific cancer.

Martha was overcome with emotions of sadness, anger, fear and uncertainty. Although this experience was difficult, she was supported every step of the way. Martha stayed strong, and in June 2009, she was cancer-free!

Martha’s husband of 40 years is now in the advanced stages of prostate cancer. Her experience has helped her to understand and support her husband during his battle with cancer. Martha and her husband realize that every day is precious. A sign with the words “DO GOOD TODAY” hangs above their door as a reminder to always help others, including the ones you love the most.
In memory of Mary Helen Hodges-Richardson

Mary Helen Hodges-Richardson’s cancer returned after 14 years of remission. Just after Thanksgiving my wife, Elizabeth, and I received the news that Mary had only a few weeks to live. Elizabeth rushed to her side. Elizabeth was managing our bookstore and I was managing our other store, while we raised our daughters, Beth (14) and Laura (11).

Mary had a wonderful attitude about dying. Even in her weakened state, she personally called all her friends to deliver the news. They came to visit, sent flowers and said their goodbyes. Mary comforted everyone and eased their sadness. She would say, “See you on the flip side.”

Cancer doesn’t wait for anyone. Every day, Elizabeth told me her mother was slipping further away. I took our girls to Houston to visit every Sunday. Having all our family together and the amazing support we received from hospice, helped us through this difficult time.

Mary was afraid she might die before Christmas, so she sent Elizabeth shopping for gifts for all the children and grandchildren. On December 18, 1991, Elizabeth was there when the oxygen machine went silent. Her mother was gone. Elizabeth and the family gathered around Mary and prayed. Mary was 63.

At some point in our lives, we all will be touched by cancer. Like Mary, many will lose their battle with cancer, but we can reduce this number. Through awareness, education and research, we can remove barriers and pave the way to a world without cancer.

In honor of women with cancer

When I was first elected to the Texas Senate, I was appointed to the Health and Human Services Committee at a time when health care was considered a “women’s issue.” Until then, my public policy efforts had been focused on education, but Lt. Gov. Bullock saw in my background, as a mother and volunteer for the American Cancer Society, a perspective on health care that led him to appoint me to this committee.

I had seen women and mothers in the workforce and in volunteer positions throughout the community who were responsible for managing the health care of their entire families, just as I had done for many years. I also saw many of these same women have to refocus their attention on themselves when they received a cancer diagnosis. For the more than 1,400 women in my district who every year hear the words, “you have cancer,” these words are life changing. Faced with the effects of this disease, as well as the effects of their treatments, they continued caring for their families while dealing with their own side effects from treatment.

 Nonetheless, these women fought and maintained their drive, hope, determination and desire to live. For many, they set a goal to see their children reach certain milestones in their lives and that became a driving force for them to fight every single day.

These women are among my heroes, and I will continue to work to see that Texas is a leader in defeating this disease.
In honor of Loretta Foster

Breast cancer is one of the most common types of cancer diagnosed among women in the United States. While statistics show that about one in eight women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime, with early detection, the five-year survival rate is about 98 percent.

A constituent of mine, Loretta Foster, is a perfect example of just how important early detection can be. At age 47, Loretta was a healthy, energetic wife, mother, grandmother and active member in her community. One morning, Loretta noticed an unexpected lump in her breast. Even though her last mammogram was just six months prior and she had no family history of breast cancer, she was vigilant and immediately scheduled a doctor’s appointment. After an initial examination, her physician ordered a mammogram and by that afternoon she was scheduled for a lumpectomy. Two weeks later, Loretta’s world was forever changed. In September 2011, Loretta was diagnosed with stage 1 invasive lobular carcinoma (breast cancer). She was immediately scheduled for surgery and later prescribed four courses of chemotherapy and six weeks of radiation treatment.

Although she lost her hair and the treatments made her very weak, Loretta never stopped fighting. While Loretta’s faith and the support of her family played a significant role in her recovery, she knows that early detection saved her life. She now volunteers in her community to educate others about breast cancer and increase awareness regarding the importance of early detection.

In honor of Brenda Lee Thomas

Cancer is one of the most frightening words anyone can hear. In one moment, your life is profoundly changed and you feel overwhelmed. Knowing where to go for answers and guidance can make this difficult situation a little easier.

On April 29, 2012, Brenda Thomas’ life changed when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. After noticing a lump in her left breast, she made an appointment with her doctor. Soon after she was diagnosed, she contacted the Austin Cancer Center (ACC) to schedule an appointment with an oncologist.

Throughout her treatment, Brenda’s family, friends and church were by her side offering encouragement. Although being diagnosed with cancer has a significant emotional impact, her friends and family would not let her lose hope.

Brenda was able to find support from resources at the ACC, the American Cancer Society and Travis County Health and Human Services. These resources and Brenda’s strong faith in God played a significant role in her recovery.

Just one month after treatment, Brenda’s doctor could no longer feel the lump. Even though she is back to her regular routines, Brenda’s cancer experience has changed her outlook on life. Her experience with cancer led her to a career with Travis County as a caseworker, where she is able to help others find the resources they need.

Brenda makes the most out of every day, and is currently writing a book about her journey with cancer. Brenda never thought she would be diagnosed with cancer, but she was and she survived it!
In honor of Janet Kibler

Janet Kibler is the epitome of a fighter. She was first diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer over 20 years ago. Dealing with a cancer diagnosis was not on her agenda. She was busy with life – working and watching her nieces and nephew grow up and graduate from high school and college. She added fighting cancer to her list and was eventually declared clear of cancer.

In August 2002, things again changed for her when Janet was diagnosed with stage 4 metastatic cancer. While her cancer became more aggressive, so did her treatment – which she knows will continue for the rest of her life. And so did her resolve to fight back against this disease and help others confronting the challenges fighting cancer presents to patients and caregivers.

I became acquainted with Janet through her involvement with the Relay For Life movement in my district. She is passionate about fighting back and is totally committed to helping others through the Relay For Life event and advocacy. She makes a difference in the lives of others, while she fights her own battle. She inspires those around her to join her in the fight. I’m honored to know Janet and have her chairing the Relay For Life of Arlington.

Rep. Chris Turner, a cancer survivor
I’ve been cancer free since 1995. But my battle, like the ones my parents fought, left a deep and lasting impact on me.

It freed me to do some things I’d always found a reason not to do, such as run for public office. It also provided the clarity of a short-term focus on a long-term vision, which drives my public service.

Probably the greatest gift of my cancer was the simple opportunity to survive it. I survived because I had access to early, effective and frequent health care. I believe strongly that others should have the same opportunity.

That is one reason I spearheaded the effort to transform the health care landscape in Austin through 10 goals in 10 years, including a new medical school, a teaching hospital and a stronger safety net for those who are uninsured. One of those 10 goals was intensely personal: to make Austin a center for comprehensive cancer care.

The result has been a $50 million partnership between the Dell Medical School at the University of Texas and the LIVESTRONG Foundation. Together, they’ll create the next generation of doctors capable of providing world-class, patient-centered cancer care for all patients regardless of ability to pay.

My hope is that the LIVESTRONG Cancer Institutes will ensure that more of our loved ones will survive the beast, as I did, and will live on to love, dream and realize their own second chances.
In memory of my wife, Cindy, and my parents, Ralph and Caroline Zerwas

As a practicing physician for more than 30 years, I have seen many lives impacted by numerous types of cancer. Perhaps there is no other disease that creates greater fear among patients and their families.

In 2012 and 2013, I became much closer to these dreaded diseases, having lost both my parents within a month of each other. They both lived with us in the final years of their lives, and ultimately lost their battles with bladder cancer (Dad) and metastatic colon cancer (Mom). Fifteen months later, Cindy, my dear wife of 35 years, passed away due to a highly malignant brain cancer, called glioblastoma.

This journey has been one of incredible loss, but also one of a great appreciation for those who devote themselves to the treatment and ultimate eradication of these diseases. Each of my loved ones were also the recipient of excellent palliative care and hospice toward the end of their lives, and each of the caregivers in these settings became an integral part of our family for life’s final journey. Every step of the way they were there to make their passing one of dignity, honor and respect.

My children and I have been deeply moved by our loved ones’ courageous battles with cancer. We hope and pray others are not afflicted with these conditions, but we also recognize tremendous progress is being made to eradicate them, and applaud those who help us through life’s final journey.
On behalf of the more than 113,000 Texans who will be diagnosed with cancer in 2015, thank you!

Thank you to the legislators who submitted stories for this third edition of *What Cancer Means to Me: Cancer Stories and Tributes From Under the Dome*.

DID WE MISS YOUR STORY?

No problem. ACS CAN plans to publish the fourth edition of *Cancer Stories and Tributes from Under the Dome* in 2017, and will be collecting more stories.

If you have a cancer-related story to share and would like it to be included in the fourth edition, contact:

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