

4 Ways Katy FIGHTS CANCER

Local survivors share how they stay positive while battling this difficult disease

Written by Lisa Westbrook | Photography by Juliana Evans

Cancer is not a topic discussed casually - it is relentless and insidious. Each person afflicted is unique. Their battle is fiercely individual, however, all have one thing in common - their lives will never be the same. Here are the stories of four brave Katyites, and how they are putting up a fight.



1

FOCUS ON BLESSINGS

Gina Morell-Hickey woke up one night feeling nauseated with excruciating stomach pain. She was taken to the hospital where it was determined that her colon had ruptured. She had two surgeries, was released, and then told she just needed to add fiber to her diet. Later, one of the physicians looked at the records and called her to recommend a colonoscopy. He found a tumor mass the size of a fist in her transverse colon. Adding the fiber with the tumor obstructing the colon had only made matters worse.

"Most of us that are stage four will never completely be done with treatment. But as long as the chemo is working, the cancer is not taking over."

— Gina Morell-Hickey

She started chemotherapy in November 2008. In July 2009, she was told she was cancer-free. However, a scheduled PAP exam confirmed more tests were needed and revealed cancer was detected in her liver, ovaries, lungs, sternum, and clavicle. Chemotherapy was started in August 2010, with a terminal diagnosis which continues to the present day. Morell-Hickey continues her daily battle, crediting her mom as her biggest cheerleader. "Most of us that are stage four will never completely be done with treatment," she says. "But as long as the chemo is working, the cancer is not taking over."

Morell-Hickey shares that her secret to maintaining the motivation to fight, is remembering to focus on the blessings in her life rather than strife. "I still absolutely love to work in my yard," she says with a smile. "And the occasional indulgence of a little Dutch chocolate ice cream."



2

FIGHT FOR FAMILY

One evening in August 2011, former Katy tiger Sarah Garcia became very ill. Unsure of what she was suffering from, Garcia saw several specialists and ran a multitude of tests. Ultimately, in December of that year, the doctor came back with a diagnosis - stage three breast cancer.

Garcia and her fiancé Eric Fowler weighed their options and poured over treatment plans. A month later, Garcia made the decision to have a mastectomy performed to remove her left breast and 14 lymph nodes.

Cancer survivors Gina Morell-Hickey, Sarah Garcia, Shirley Crotty, and Rosie Barrera, share their stories of how they are beating cancer





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Garcia went through feelings of sadness and isolation, but through it all, Fowler encouraged her. "He told me, 'I want you to be strong and fight,'" she remembers. "So I did." Now, at 37 years old, Garcia is determined to live a life of service. She hopes more can be done to support women who are young without insurance. "I advocate for two charities, Avon Walk for Breast Cancer and End Domestic Violence Against Women," she explains. "My mantra is to stand strong, stand together, and fight for a cure. No woman should be left behind."

"My mantra is to stand strong, stand together, and fight for a cure. No woman should be left behind."

— Sarah Garcia



3

PRAY FOR A MIRACLE

When Shirley Crotty was diagnosed with stage four cancer originating in her colon, spreading to her liver, and up into her chest cavity, she did what any faith-filled, God-loving woman would do - she prayed about it. After six months of chemo and shrinking to a mere 95 pounds, Crotty's family knew they had experienced a miracle. "The treatment almost completely obliterated the cancer from her system," says daughter Valerie Goddard.

A follow-up PET scan recently showed a slight recurrence on her liver, so Crotty will begin chemo again soon. "She is feeling really good now and this next round of chemo does not scare her as she knows the powerful healing of prayer," says Goddard.

"The next round of chemo does not scare [Shirley], she knows the powerful healing of prayer."

— Valerie Goddard

Besides an incredible faith, Crotty enjoys excursions with her family, such as going on a ski trip where she had a celebration of life photo taken, and a visit to Boulder, CO with her husband.



4

LIVE IN COMMUNITY

Rosie Barrera and her husband Leonard have lived in Katy for over 30 years, raised their six children here, and Rosie taught school for 25 years. Life was playing out just as they had planned. But in August 2012, she was diagnosed with stage four pancreatic cancer.



Gina Morell-Hickey holds a special cross that was given to her during treatment



Sarah Garcia is an active participant in Relay for Life



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Shirley Crotty relies on her strong faith and the support of her family



Rosie Barrera is currently battling stage four pancreatic cancer

A black and white artistic photograph of a woman's face and shoulder, looking down, set against a dark background.

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Rosie is very specific in her message to anyone with cancer. "Do not give up, and stay alive long enough for a cure," she says. On April 30 of this year, over 700 people attended a benefit, Fight Night, so that she could seek both traditional and alternative treatments. The alternative treatments, under the supervision of Dr. Allibone at the Houston Wellness Clinic, consist of ozone therapy infusion, large vitamin C infusion, and a special vaccine that was developed for her unique needs. Rosie said, "I feel I have the best of both medical worlds." She eats as many organic foods as possible, and takes curcumin - a spice most people know as tumeric.

"Stay positive and walk with the Lord - even in the midst of knowing pancreatic cancer is hard to beat, it is the only way to handle this."

— Rosie Varrera

Encouragement and family time are healing as well. She savors the moments with her husband and her family, including 13 grandchildren, with additional cheer provided by Coco the family dog, a chocolate Labrador retriever. "Stay positive and walk with the Lord," advises Barrera. "Even in

the midst of knowing pancreatic cancer is hard to beat, it is the only way to handle this." KM

LISA WESTBROOK is a freelance writer and librarian living in Katy. She wrote this article in memory of her younger sister Laura Ruth McCaskill, who died of lung cancer in 1999 at the age of 32.

Suggestions for Staying Positive

- Reach out for Support
- Get out of the House
- Pursue Creative Outlets
- Try Volunteering
- Don't be Afraid to Talk
- Exercise Regularly

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