

# Patient Spotlight – Cancer Changes Everything

By Rayva L.G. Harrell

In this month and season that the world sets aside for Thanksgiving, I am gently reminded each day of the many things God has given me to be thankful for. Of course this includes my family, friends, and dream team of angels. But most of the ordinary things we forget or assume to be a normal way of life – springing out of bed without nausea, a simple trip to the grocery store without a mask, energy that lasts throughout the day without a nap(s) or the simple refreshing taste of water that now assumes the metallic chemical taste of the poison that could provide life. Cancer changes everything!!!

I was given a book very shortly after my stage 4 pancreatic cancer diagnosis (with metastasis to my liver). It is called *What Cancer Cannot Do – Stories of Hope and Encouragement*. The book sat for days, weeks, even after I had begun my first chemo treatment. My admittance and acceptance had not sunk in yet. Was this book for ME? However one morning when I was in a very dark place I reached for the book of simple stories, scriptures of peace laced with information to encourage, many from survivors. It soothed my soul and has often been what I need in the wee hours between the moon of night and sunrise of another day.

Cancer has become my wake up call. I believe that God must have given me all of this because he knew I could handle it (Oh yes, in May I also suffered a stroke). In the 8 short weeks since I began [chemo treatment](#), amongst anger, sadness, disbelief, and emotions that flip like a switch, I have discovered a new found relationship of thanksgiving for the awareness of life and living.

On October 25th when picking up my LA Cancer Challenge bib number for the walk the next day, I met Allison Miller, a warm and friendly woman who then introduced me to Ms. Agi Hirshberg who greeted me with a loving embrace that will never be forgotten. My acquaintance to this disease is new and unfamiliar still but my initiation to the Hirshberg Foundation feels like home. The work that the Foundation continues doing year after year, season after season is true through the efforts of research and endless hours of dedication, education, and determination of finding a cure for this beast. If it's truly the work that God has called us to do, then he will help us do it, and we will find goodness and fulfillment in it.

As the year closes out and a new one of hope begins, let us all remember to be thankful the entire year round. All are not called for the same purpose, and all will fight and not win the battle. However *"there is no medicine like hope, no incentive so great and no tonic so powerful, as expectation of something better tomorrow."*

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## **Event Spotlight – Purple & White Fight Night**

By Ashley Janover

Purple and White Fight Night was set to start at 8pm but when I arrived at the venue and peaked my head around the curtain at 7:45pm there was a line outside the door. I knew in that very moment that the evening was going to be a success.

Every year my advocacy group "Team Hope" throws an annual

charity event. I do everything that I can to raise as much funds as possible and entertain the crowd. The term "fight" in Purple & White Fight Night represents a tenacious drive to fight back against a disease that has forever changed our lives. My mother's name was Betheny Janover and she passed away from Pancreatic Cancer on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the age of 54. She was diagnosed with Stage 3 Pancreatic cancer and survived a year. Danyelle's lost her father at 41 years young after a 2 year battle with Lung Cancer. By raising money for the advancement of research and creating awareness amongst those who do not understand the seriousness of this disease we are making a genuine difference in their memory.

This year the event was a socially conscious fashion show, a concept I truly believe in. I knew that if I wanted to incorporate a fashion show, it would have to be a socially conscious brand. All items must be made in NYC, eco-friendly. We featured designer Daniel Silverstein's current line. He strives to create a collection that melds his personal design aesthetic with the zero waste design techniques he has developed. At the height of the evening over 200 attendees were enjoying Daniel's designs, pop-up shops, and a lavish auction & raffle. Dress code: Cocktail Chic!

Right before my partner Danyelle and I gave our speeches we ran into the ladies room and walked in a stall together. We gave each other a big hug, took a deep breath and each exchanged a couple of words about how proud our parents would be if they could see what we had done for them. In that very moment, I knew Danyelle felt all the pain I had experienced over the last 3 years. My friend had also lost her best friend, her father. We understood each other, and I was instantly at ease.

Giving my speech was a particularly extraordinary part of the evening. It was only then when I saw all the faces in the crowd;

my friends, family, and everyone who came in from out of town to show their support. I wanted everyone to understand about pancreatic cancer and how unique the Hirshberg Foundation is. At the end, *when I thanked my mom I saw everyone's eyes fill with tears and I thought to myself, "wow, I am not the only who is honoring this woman and I'm certainly not the only one who was in some way affected by this disease."* The moment was powerful and I felt an overwhelming abundance of love and support in that very instant.

My mother was my very best friend and she always told me that through hardships, rejection, and mistakes, success will come. Three years after losing her we've succeeded in raising thousands of dollars towards the advancement of research. I remain inspired every day to maintain my relationship and dedication to the Hirshberg Foundation. Moving forward, Purple & White Fight Night will be even larger, include more people, present bigger prizes, and double the money raised for pancreatic cancer!

\*Thank you to Daniel Silverstein and sponsors Picks for Peace, Creeds of Love, Canopy Brand Group, The Wild Ivy, and Trusted Nutrients for supporting our philanthropic efforts.

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## **Patient Spotlight – Connecting with Ljubica Stankovic**

Since our inception in 1997, The Hirshberg Foundation has been dedicated to providing information, resources and financial aid to patients and families. It is always a pleasure for us to stay

in touch with the families and patients that we have supported. We enjoy having them as part of our 'foundation family' and love to see them at our local events.

We were fortunate to have met Ljubica Stankovic this past February as she joined over 20 other patient/survivors at our 10th Annual Symposium held at UCLA. Her surgeon, Dr. Anand Annamalai was also in attendance. In March 2013, Ljubica was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, had a Whipple procedure in April, and by June was starting 6 months of treatment. Her postoperative regimen consisted of 6 rounds of chemotherapy (Gemzar and 5FU), 6 weeks of radiation as well as a biweekly pancreatic cancer vaccine which was part of a phase III clinical trial. She completed her last treatment on Christmas Eve 2013, but still continues to receive monthly vaccine "boosters".

Jelena Trifunovic, Ljubica's daughter, contacted me for our Patient and Family Support Program while her mom was in the hospital. I helped provide Jelena with local resources for when her mom was discharged. Jelena and I have shared emails from time to time through this journey and she has been so wonderful at keeping us updated on how her mom is doing and participating in Hirshberg sponsored events. Jelena says, "We are very grateful for each day. Within our family, my mom has earned the nickname 'Jaka Baka', which in Serbian means 'brave grandma.' We have gained an incredible, invaluable network of friends through the Hirshberg Foundation and Cancer Support Community."

Since completing her treatment, Ljubica has been focusing on her diet, trying out new healthy recipes and drinking plenty of tea. In addition to acknowledging the exceptional doctors that provide her with top-notch care, she adds, "Most importantly, Filip Trifunovic, my two-and-a-half year old grandson, is my natural healer!" Ljubica is looking forward to vacation, spending time with family and friends, and more grandkids! "It's

not easy...but every morning my motto is 'Life is beautiful!'"

To find out more about the Patient and Family Services we offer, please contact me at (310) 473-5121.

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## **You Can H.E.L.P. Fund Spotlight – A Tribute to a HERO**

Curt Sandoval, an ABC 7 Eyewitness News anchor in the Los Angeles area, is an active supporter of the Hirshberg Foundation. He met Lori, the wife of a fire department captain who had just lost his battle with pancreatic cancer, and put her and her family in touch with us. As a tribute to John, Lori's family created a **You Can Help Fund** to spread awareness and to raise funds for pancreatic cancer research. The Hirshberg Foundation is honored to share John's story and look forward to involving Lori, the kids and the Santa Clarita firefighting community into our family at future events.

John was a hero in more than one way. He put his life on the line every day to help protect the city of Santa Clarita as well as Los Angeles County over the years as a firefighter, paramedic, engineer and as Captain at Fire Stations 111 and 73. He was a dad to two beautiful boys and the loving husband to Lori. September 2013 through December 2013, John was not only fighting fires, he was also fighting pancreatic cancer.

As a family they enjoyed traveling to many locations where John taught the boys a love for different experiences, cultures,

history and above all, to have compassion for their fellow man. Appreciating what the world has to offer and not living in a bubble were lessons regularly passed down. Whether good or bad experiences, there were many “Mazzocco Adventures.”

To read more about Captain John Mazzocco, please view his Fund Page at <https://pancreatic.org/fund/captainjohnmazzocco>

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## **You Can H.E.L.P. Fund Spotlight – James S. Hillgren Memorial Fund**

*“A Dedication to our Great Friend & Colleague at CLG”*

By Sarah Banks

James S. Hillgren was a devoted husband, a loving father, and an engaging leadership coach at The Continuous Learning Group. In October of 2011, Jim lost his 10-month battle with pancreatic cancer. Throughout his diagnosis he was known for his positive attitude and for remaining honest & objective about his diagnosis even as the disease became more challenging. His CLG business partner of 15 years, Steve Jacobs, described him as “a warrior” as he endured vigorous treatments and, in a letter written to the company he wrote “we will miss Jim more than words could ever describe.”

An executive at CLG, Jim wore many hats as a business partner, a Chief People Officer, and leadership coach. One of Jim’s final projects was co-authoring the book *“The Behavior Breakthrough”*.

As a special way to honor his memory, co-authors, partners, and mentees dedicated the book in Jim's memory. The company then reached out to the Hirshberg Foundation to set up a memorial fund as a special tribute to him. After the book release in May 2013, CLG will be contributing a portion of the book royalties towards research and supporting patients and families facing pancreatic cancer.

Jim believed in giving back and it was a code he lived by. One of Jim's favorite quotes was, "There's a time to earn, a time to learn, and a time to serve." The two people closest to him at CLG, Steve Jacobs and long-time Executive Assistant Donna Dotson, spoke fondly of his calm yet proactive nature expressing that Steve has said "Jim created a sense of purpose and camaraderie. When he spoke people always listened, yet he focused more on others than himself. He had a strong presence and a great sense of humor but he encouraged others around him to shine."

The company has always seen their motto "When it's time to make things happen" as a call to action amongst peers and clients alike. Undoubtedly, his knowledge, expertise, and caring guidance helped people unleash their true potential. Jim's real gift was that he had a gentle, quiet approach. People were naturally drawn to him and he had the innate ability to create calmness where there was chaos. Throughout his illustrious career, Jim's thoughtful leadership and his inviting, calm style were ever-present in all that he did as a CLG senior executive.

He was a dedicated member of the Continuous Learning Group family since 1998 and his peers at CLG will remember him as an exceptional and generous man. Jim Hillgren's legacy will continue through the work of individuals and organizations around the world.



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# You Can H.E.L.P. Fund Spotlight – David Barach Fund

*“In Loving Memory of Uncle Dave”*

By Sarah Banks

An avid runner for most of her life, Lexy Green wanted to do something special to honor the memory of her Uncle Dave so she signed up for her first half-marathon. Diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2012 at 55 years old, her Uncle Dave fought the disease for two months. His efforts to remain physically and emotionally strong inspired his nieces Lexy, Christy, and Livy. The three sisters were very close with him; growing up he took them to play dates, sports events, and was incredibly supportive. To his nieces he would always be a spirited, lovable, and memorable man in their lives. It felt only natural to honor his life through an experience that would inspire hope. An unforgettable experience as a tribute for an unforgettable man, they thought.

Lexy and her sisters decided to coordinate efforts to fundraise for pancreatic cancer research while Lexy prepared to run the 2013 Austin Half-Marathon. Christy and Livy helped spearhead fundraising while Lexy trained. The sisters started a H.E.L.P. Fund with the Hirshberg Foundation and began asking friends, family, and their sorority sisters to donate. Their mom stepped in to help fundraise by reaching out to colleagues and loved ones. Lexy says, “The money my mom, sisters and I raised in his memory, in such a short period of time, is a testament to his character and how many people absolutely adored him.”

David Barach meant the world to these girls and they worked together to honor his memory. Livy reflects, "Our Uncle Dave was adored by family, friends, co-workers, and all who came to know him. He really was such an amazing person and his good nature and positive spirit will forever be an inspiration to everyone who knew him." Lexy added, "This experience was truly a journey beyond anything we've ever done. It was so meaningful and overwhelmingly inspiring, and something that we plan to keep doing!"