

SPIRIT

From Surviving to Thriving

BY BEATRIZ TERRAZAS

More than 10 million Americans are living with a history of cancer, yet the word still terrifies. The disease strikes almost randomly, and likewise chooses who lives, and who dies, indiscriminately. God, family, friends, and faith help us cope. But what about that other, less tangible quality? Sustained by traits we're born with, the instinct to survive—and even childhood lessons—each survivor has that individual flame that burns within and pushes the spirit beyond simply surviving to thriving. You need only step outside your door to meet someone living a rich life despite having had cancer, or someone who has found that a cure isn't necessary in order to live. Here, just outside the Dallas offices of *Heal*, we introduce you to some survivors who have mined their own spiritual depths to renew their sense of meaning and joy.

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JoAnne Dzina, 76: consultant for Doncaster, a North Carolina-based a clothing company

Diagnosis: 1982, age 52, stage 2 breast cancer, 13 of 20 lymph nodes affected

Treatment: Mastectomy, chemotherapy, and radiation

Prognosis: Likely recurrence within five years



JoAnne Dzina with friend and breast cancer survivor Dotty Kilpatrick.
Photo by Beatriz Terrazas.

More than two decades ago, when JoAnne discovered the Virginia R. Cvetko Patient Education and Conference Center at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas, she found hope. She started out as a patient in a support group, and within two years she was paying it forward by facilitating support groups herself. “It has meant a lot to me to be involved with those people,” she says 22 years later. Helping others this way has been a vital part of her recovery. “I’m here to give you hope,” she says. “I’m here to let you know you don’t really know what is down the road for you. ... There is life after cancer.”



JoAnne Dzina with grandchildren Elizabeth, Paige, and Maggie.

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Doug Campbell, 43: physical chemist at Abbott Laboratories in Irving, Texas

Diagnosis: 2000, age 36, stage 4 follicular non-Hodgkin lymphoma

[small-cleaved cell type]

Treatment: Chemotherapy and Rituxan (rituximab), a monoclonal antibody treatment

Prognosis: Incurable but treatable



Doug Campbell with daughters Meghan, Cassie, and Keely.

When doctors discovered the fist-sized tumor between his lung and heart, Doug, son of a Michigan auto plant worker, leaned on lessons gleaned from his blue-collar upbringing. “My dad had this great work ethic. ... It was fight, scratch, crawl to get ahead,” he says. That translated into the tenacity Doug needed to fight the disease. “I was not going to let cancer beat me. My family wasn’t going to be without a dad.” His three daughters, he says, are the reason he keeps fighting. He’s a member of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society’s Team in Training, and despite dealing with a second recurrence of the cancer, he’s training for a half Ironman Distance Triathlon.



Doug Campbell in training.

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Charolette D’Angelo, 63: office manager and executive assistant to director of a child care center for homeless children in Dallas

Diagnosis: 1986, age 42, breast cancer, seven of 27 lymph nodes affected; 1993, recurrence in other breast; 2002, unrelated stage 1 lung cancer

Treatment: Mastectomy and chemotherapy for breast cancers; surgical removal of right upper lobe for lung cancer

Prognosis: 30 percent chance of survival first time; 85 percent chance of survival after chemotherapy second time; no other treatments necessary for lung cancer



Charlotte D'Angelo in the kitchen with her husband, Mario.

Charolette, a wife, mother, and grandmother, has a poignantly honest sense of humor. Humor, she says, “is the only way you can get through so many difficult things that happen in your life.” One story she tells is of childhood accordion lessons and her breast catching in the instrument’s folds. “Who knew one day that wouldn’t be an issue?” she giggles. The ability to not take herself so seriously enabled her to begin piano lessons at age 60. “I practice every night, and my husband has to listen to every song.” she says. Her 13-year-old grandson, Brandon, plays cello and last Christmas they played *Jingle Bells* together.



Charolette D'Angelo preparing pasta with her husband, Mario, and serving her mother, Elizabeth Diaz.

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Meg Brown, 27: math teacher and basketball coach at Euless Junior High School

in Euless, Texas

Diagnosis: 2002, age 22, with stage 4 lymphoblastic non-Hodgkin lymphoma

Treatment: Chemotherapy and peripheral stem cell transplant, unrelated donor

Prognosis: 30 percent chance of survival if tumor responded to chemotherapy



Meg Brown, with mother Cathy, a breast cancer survivor, and friends and supporters Mary Ann Laney, Betsey Starns, Shirley Hammerle, and Caroline Starns.

In her memoir *Dancing With the Enemy: Letting the Good Outweigh the Bad*, Meg cites a positive attitude as essential to healing. In her last year of college, just as her mother finished chemotherapy for breast cancer, doctors found an 18-centimeter tumor wrapped around Meg's heart. Cancer is "an awful thing," says Meg. "But there are still so many good days that come with it." Throughout her treatment, the moments she felt well were devoted to time with friends. No hair? No problem. "I still laughed. I still had fun," she says. "It was my way of saying ... 'I'm not just going to sit in my house all day.' "



Meg Brown.

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Carolyn Blackmon, 71: choir and theater arts teacher in Royse City, Texas

Diagnosis: 1978, age 43, breast cancer, six of 12 lymph nodes affected; 2002, recurrence in her left lung

Treatment: Mastectomy and chemotherapy; one year later, preventive mastectomy of other breast; surgical removal of upper left lobe of lung and radiation for recurrence

Prognosis: Lung recurrence is slow-growing; PET scans every six months to monitor two spots remaining on lung



Carolyn Blackmon [checkered shirt] with daughters Kate Blackmon, Anne Payne, Molly Blackmon, plus grandchildren Emily, Bentley, and Reese.

Carolyn has gotten through two bouts of cancer with prayer, her husband's support, and a steadfast commitment to making the most of the time she has. When her cancer was first diagnosed, her four daughters were in choir, school plays, and often on the road showing horses. Carolyn and her husband, Eddie, were volunteer choir directors at DeKalb's First Baptist Church. With no time to feel sorry for herself, she worked right through treatment. When needed at church, she says, "I just slapped a wig on." When shows went on at school, "all the teachers helped." In spring of 2004, Carolyn retired from teaching in one district only to be rehired in another. She says her doctors' positive attitudes have helped her live "as if I were cured."



Carolyn Blackmon with grandchildren.

