

BEATING THE ODDS



Meli with husband Roger Zandi

Meli Costea and her family were shocked when doctors found that the walnut-size lump on her femur was a rare cancer called T-cell lymphoma.

"I panicked – what do I do? I went to my husband, Roger, at his office; we were in agony and so overwhelmed," Meli says. They soon met with Dr. Ucar, who spoke with colleagues across the country about her as he begun to treat Meli's disease.

"We reviewed the latest information and consulted with national experts," Dr. Ucar says. "The disease was very serious and the prognosis guarded. Yet, we came up with a good treatment plan. She embarked on it very courageously, and she knew we would do everything we could."

"It helps a lot if you have good communication with your doctor," Meli says. "I felt very comfortable with everybody in the office, because every time I had a question, they answered me right away. Knowing in advance what to expect made it easier."

Meli has now been cancer-free for about 2 1/2 years. "She is able to remain active, and is cancer-free," Dr. Ucar says. "This has been a very rewarding experience; she overcame the odds against her. She's extremely happy right now."

"A doctor needs to be compassionate and dedicated," Meli says. "Dr. Ucar took half the pain away at the very first visit with me."

Roger managed to help get Meli to the clinic while maintaining a demanding work schedule, and recruiting a friend to take Meli to the clinic when he could not. The side effects of treatment required two hospitalizations, but Meli says she has learned how to get back to feeling healthy. "I became mentally stronger than I used to be," she says. Meli has also learned to pace herself. "It was hard to accept that I can't do everything I used to do. But once I accepted it, I could plan things," she says.

"You appreciate what you have more than before. You see things differently, and you kind of switch priorities in life. You become more selective of the things that are meaningful to your life."

MELI COSTEA



MILAGROSA RAMOS



WINNING OVER BREAST CANCER WITH LOVE & TRUST



Milagrosa with son Reynaldo(left) and husband Tony

Milagrosa Ramos is a gentle and proud woman who has survived breast cancer twice, and says she was saved the second time by love and trust – the love that she received from her family, and the trust that she placed in her doctor.

She was cancer-free for 11 years, when she found a lump on her sternum. "I thought it was nothing, as I would not believe that my cancer could come back," says Guing, which is the name her friends know her by. However, by the time her lump was diagnosed, it had become an aggressive Stage IV cancer.

"Do not second-guess your body," Guing warns. "Looking back, I should not have ignored this very obvious sign!"

"She's a very sweet person," says Dr. Ucar, who adds that Guing never gave up hope or became complacent.

"People sometimes think that if they're breast cancer-free for over 5 years, they're safe," Dr. Ucar says. "This proves that patients are at risk for cancer coming back, even after 11 years."

Although he encouraged Guing to get a second opinion, Guing says she felt so comfortable with Dr. Ucar that she felt she didn't need one.

"The first time I saw him, right away I said, 'This is my doctor,'" Guing says. Dr. Ucar's invitation to get a second opinion "convinced me that he is the one who's going to cure me," she says.

Guing's treatment included a major surgery to remove the new lump, along with chemotherapy and hormonal therapy. Although her treatment made her too fatigued to participate in life as she once knew it, Guing kept her spirits up with the support of her husband, Tony, their children and grandchildren.

"I got my strength from my mother, even though she was the one who was sick," says her son Reynaldo. "She is amazing. She is my mother and my mentor. The purpose of this experience is unknown, but it strengthened our family even more."

Guing's plan was to have her bedroom overlook her garden for a peaceful view while she healed. She says she enjoys "sitting in my lounge chair in my garden with my books." And her family keeps her smiling.

"I never take things for granted. I listen to the birds chirp and the leaves blow in the wind, and I thank Jesus every day."