

Letter: Bringing awareness to pancreatic cancer

To the community,

It is another November and for the last couple of years, that means I join other advocates across the county in declaring November is Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month.

I attend local city council meetings where proclamations are presented, distribute pancreatic cancer awareness posters and fliers, join others from the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network in continuing to encourage our legislators to pass bills for cancer funding and being connecting with volunteers and survivors promoting pancreatic cancer awareness and action.

My involvement started when my mother, Jeanette Criner, has diagnosed with this dreaded disease over five years ago. Unfortunately, she lost her battle with pancreatic cancer seven months after her diagnosis.

I have stayed involved with the cause to honor her memory and knowing that if she was still here she would be a dedicated advocate with others fighting this deadly cancer.

Pancreatic cancer is one of the deadliest forms of cancer, the fourth leading cause of cancer deaths in the U.S. with only a five year relative survival rate of 6 percent and within the first year of diagnosis, 73 percent die. My mother was one of those statistics so I chose every year for the last three years to share her story so these statistics have a face, a person behind the numbers.

I have written about her story before, her active life here in Lake Tahoe, enjoying her gardening, hiking and family time, still working but looking forward to "semi retirement" and continuing her extensive travels to her other favorite place,

Australia. Then the devastating news, I remember that late summer day like it was yesterday, she told me she might have pancreatic cancer and the biopsy was scheduled the next week.

Once we knew, suddenly everything changed. I, along with my dad and husband, we became her main caregivers. Overnight, the roles reversed, for she was the rock, the center of our family and now she had to adjust to a different role, in the fight for her life. Despite her tenacious demeanor, her determination to survive this disease, her treatments and the support of her medical team, family and friends she lost the battle far too soon.

My mother's death, like all the others who have lost their lives to cancer, creates a void that can not be filled. This is never more painfully obvious than when it's a birthday, the holidays or other special events. She never got the chance to attend her grandchildren's college graduations. She never heard the news that her oldest granddaughter became engaged to her college sweetheart, a young man she knew before I, her mother, ever did. We have lost her wisdom and guidance in dealing with the difficulties that life throws our way. She is remembered and missed everyday by those who loved her and I know that if she was here today she would be a volunteer and advocate for others as she always was in life. She was always encouraging and supportive, giving of her money and her time and believed that was her obligation in this world. Her example encourages me continue to join others in promoting awareness and fighting for research funding, finding early deflection methods, expanding and improving treatments options and, maybe, one day, a cure for pancreatic cancer.

Thank you,

Denise Rury, South Lake Tahoe