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Bob and B.G. Metzler travel around the area speaking about their experience with breast cancer.

It Takes Two

Bob And B.G. Metzler Beat Cancer Together **BY DIANE SILCOX-JARRETT**

BOB METZLER COMPARES HEARING HIS WIFE'S BREAST CANCER DIAGNOSIS with being struck by a thunderbolt. "It's paralyzing," says Metzler, whose wife B.G. was diagnosed five years ago. "When you first hear the diagnosis, you have no idea what the outcome is going to be." No matter what was going to happen, in their case, B.G. and Bob knew that they were in this battle together.

The Diagnosis

Without the persistence of B.G., doctors may not have found her cancer until it was too late. "My annual mammogram came back positive. They told me I could wait six months to see what would happen or they could do a biopsy," says B.G., who was 55 at the time. "I told them, 'I want to know what is going on.' It's a good thing I insisted because when the biopsy came back it showed I was in the early stage of breast cancer."

B.G. had no idea that she had cancer because there were no symptoms and no lumps. "That's why it is so important for women to have mammograms," stresses B.G., who is now considered cancer free.

Bob was walking through the airport in Los Angeles when he got the call about B.G.'s results. "That flight was the longest five hours in my life," he explains. "Everything in the world went through my mind."

Having your whole life change in such a devastating way in a matter of minutes is overwhelming to say the least. "You have to make the decision: Am I going to crumble or am I going to face this head on?" says B.G.

Because she has been involved with the community for several decades, B.G.'s tenacity is well known. In the early 70s B.G. was the weather anchor and producer for Channel 36 (now NBC 6). Then she worked at Discovery Place as vice president of marketing, development, and fund raising for many years. B.G. was working for Charlotte

Center City Partners, with plans to begin working on her own as a consultant, when she was diagnosed with cancer.

The Metzlers admit that they shed a few tears and were terrified with the news. "The hardest thing I had to do was to make those phone calls to my children," B.G. says.

Daughter-in-law Heather Jones Metzler remembers when she heard of B.G.'s diagnosis. "My husband and I were floored. When we first found out, there were more questions than answers, so it was very hard," says Heather. "It did not surprise us that she faced her diagnosis with determination. She is the most driven person that I know."

B.G. says a lot of help came from her family. "Heather bought me a nice flannel shirt to wear when I was so cold while taking radiation. I still wear it, and it makes me feel warm inside and out," B.G. says. All three of her children, Rob, Chris, and Lani, have been very supportive. "Lani has been in several of the breast cancer races sponsored by Avon in Los Angeles and has raised more than \$5,000," B.G. explains.

Tackling Treatments

With her lumpectomy a success, B.G.'s next step was a series of radiation treatments. It was during this time that she got another scare. B.G. went in for a normal checkup and when the doctor looked at her eyes, he told her she needed to see her eye doctor that day. B.G.'s doctor couldn't explain what he saw, but he was fearful that it was cancer. Her eye doctor proceeded with a brain scan, MRI, and a lumbar puncture. All the results came back negative.

"I was very frightened," says B.G. "I couldn't believe I was having to have all these tests."

The irregularity in her eye was caused by swollen optic nerves, a result of the tamoxifen she was taking. B.G. had papilledema, which is caused by intracranial pressure and occurs in a small percentage of women taking tamoxifen. Her doctors immediately took her off the

medication, but her vision is still impaired. "I still have the fuzziness, and I notice it most when I walk into a movie theater or go from light to dark fast," says B.G.

Supporting Others

While going through radiation, B.G. noticed that women undergoing similar treatments needed someone to talk to about their fears and feelings, and she wanted to do something to help. "I guess my >



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Above: Bob and B.G. Metzler's children, Rob, Lani, and Chris, gave B.G. tremendous support during her fight with cancer.

Right: The Metzlers' photograph was used on a banner at SouthPark recognizing breast cancer survivors in October 2002.

drive to help started to take over," says B.G. She soon learned that many women and their families needed support. According to the American Cancer Society, 475 women in Charlotte will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and 75 women will die of the disease in 2003.

During the summer of 1999, B.G. became involved with the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation and the Komen Race for the Cure. "Exercise was very important to me while I was going through treatment and always has been. I saw being a part of the race as something I could do to help," explains B.G.

Working with the foundation, B.G. met Neel Stallings, who was co-chairing the Race for Cure in Charlotte. "B.G. became a member of the education and outreach committee that I had started," says Stallings, who soon realized that B.G. was a natural for the foundation's speakers bureau. "She was very recognizable to many people in the Charlotte area because of her past jobs, and she just has a natural gift to communicate with people and make them feel at ease," says Stallings. "B.G. really built the speakers bureau up and did an outstanding job."

"Everyone who knows me knows I love to talk. The speakers bureau was something I knew I could do, and I could actually be out there helping people," says B.G. "Finding out you have cancer is so frightening. It not only affects the patient but it also affects the people around the patient, especially families."

Stallings decided to run for a national position with the Susan G. Komen Foundation, which left the chairperson position for the education outreach committee vacant. "I knew B.G. would be the perfect person," says Stallings. "She has great ideas and really knows how to network, but above all she is a good friend. When she speaks she shows deep integrity and is very compassionate to those in her audience."

A Team Effort

Bob has joined B.G. in speaking engagements and talks to members of the audience who are there as the support person. "It is a stressful position to be in because you want to do something to make it all better," he says. Together the Metzlers have spoken to hundreds of groups in Charlotte.

Last fall they were part of a television special on PBS station WTVI regarding cancer survivors. "We are both extroverts. I know this is what we are supposed to be doing," says Bob. "When I hear of a husband who is in denial and doesn't want to show up for appointments with his wife, I tell him, 'You have to be there for her. It's time to get over the woe-is-me act. You have to show support.'"

Married for 39 years, the Metzlers have always faced life as a team and breast cancer was not any different. From the moment Bob found out B.G. had breast cancer, he has been her main

support. "Everyone who is going through cancer treatment needs a support person. If it's not a spouse, then a friend or a family member," explains Bob. "It really helps to have someone else with you in the doctor's office because there are so many questions and so much information is thrown at you."

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During B.G.'s many office visits and treatments, Bob realized that the husband or support person could also benefit from a support person. "I think in many cases when something goes wrong, men, especially, just want to fix it and go on with their lives. Cancer isn't that way," says Bob. "There's nothing you can physically do to make things better. All you can do is be supportive." **TCW**

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For information about the Susan G. Komen Foundation in Charlotte, call 704/347-8181 or visit www.komencharlotte.org.