

Diagnosis, Pancreatic Cancer!

Little did I know, those words would live in infamy and change my life forever. This was the sentence my brother, Steven G. Romiza, was handed on November 25, 2007. I am Steven's youngest sister, and although we did not see eye to eye on many occasions, I always looked up to him and respected his advice – even the unsolicited ones. I adored him. I knew, in my heart and in my mind that I could not just sit back and watch as this silent killer took him so brutally from us and I had to fight back. After Steven passed, I made a promise to myself and secretly to Steven that if there was any way that I could help in the fight against this disease, so other families would not have to endure the pain as we did, I would do my part.

So, I began my quest. I sat many days and nights researching on the computer the facts and myths about pancreatic cancer. I came upon many web-sites and links to various institutions claiming to have the key or the understanding of this awful killer. However, out of all of the research institutions that I contacted, I can honestly say, that the folks at Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions (JHMI) were the ones that welcomed me with open arms. Dr. Ralph Hruban, the head of pathology at JHMI, was the only one to return my call – a small town girl with an aching heart, and a strong desire to fight back. Dr. Hruban gave me the hope I needed to help me honor my eldest brother Steven and give him a voice in his fight.

So, for Steven and for all those families feeling helpless and hopeless, here is my chance to give you all a Voice and a chance to fight against pancreatic cancer:

“A Hero's Sendoff”

To honor my brother, Steven, we celebrated his life and his love of golf on September 11th, 2008 (his birthday), with a golf tournament, at the Falmouth Country Club in Falmouth Massachusetts. We raised over \$12,000, but more importantly we gave my brother a hero's sendoff – something Steven deserved. An exciting part of this fundraiser, was the ultimate fact that we raised money for the sole purpose of funding research in early detection and prevention of pancreatic cancer. The money we raised was utilized to support the hiring of a research fellow in the world renowned Johns Hopkins Medical Institutes in Baltimore. This research fellow is directly impacting the advances currently being made in the early detection science of pancreatic cancer.

All this was made possible by the family and friends of Steven. My heartfelt thanks goes out to all of you. I know Steven was there looking down upon us on that beautiful sunny day. The music, along with the golf, was a big part of the day. The music was donated by our cousin, Donnie Wilson and a friend Jeff Souza of the Portuguese Kennedy's. Steven enjoyed music and it was important to have the festivities surrounded by that which moved him.

The raffles included many donations from local area merchants. The Fuel Company donated home heating oil, in the memory of Katherine Santos who also lost her life to this silent killer. We also received an autographed book from the L.A. Raiders, in the memory of Eugene Upshaw who also lost his battle with pancreatic cancer in August 2008; in addition, we also acquired an autographed golf bag by Jack Nickolas.

At this time I would again like to thank, Dr. Hruban, from the bottom of my heart, for giving me the opportunity to succeed in my goal of honoring Steven and making a difference in the research of pancreatic cancer. Dr. Hruban introduced me to a woman by the name of Monica Monastra-Lodge, the daughter of the late Joseph C. Monastra – he too was handed a sentence the same as my brother. Monica's family established a Foundation in her father's name, The Joseph C. Monastra Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research (JCM Foundation); to not only honor him, but to pursue their fight against pancreatic cancer and provide a tool for families like mine to help in the fight. We did not have the ability to fund the event, but she had faith in me and advocated my efforts to the Foundation's board of directors. The Board approved my proposal and underwrote my fundraising effort.

Steven left us on March 18th, 2008 and for my family and friends, this helped tremendously with our healing process from losing Steven. He is never far from my side, walking with me where ever I go; he continually gives me the inspiration to find ways to help. So, for my next endeavor, I've written a song that is currently in the process of being recorded. My hope, is to donate sale proceeds, to the JCM Foundation, and continue the fight against pancreatic cancer.

Again, thank you Dr. Hruban and The JCM Foundation for taking me under their wing, finding the faith in me to carry out this endeavor, and guiding me through a very difficult time in my life. I'd also like to extend another very special thank you too all of our friends and family that helped celebrate Steven's life; through your attendance, donations, and time volunteered, you all made this possible, you all helped give Steven a voice and you all helped make a difference.

With my deepest and heartfelt appreciation,

Judith L. Young (Romiza)