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Vice Mayor Gold, Horace Mann Teacher Fuhrer Fundraise For Tower Cancer Research

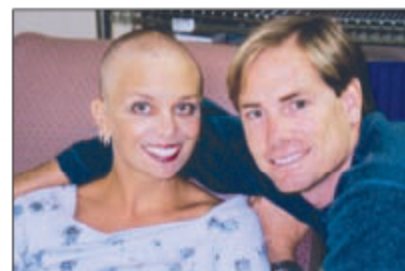
Part two in a three-part series: Beverly Hills leaders reflect on living through cancer

By Laura Coleman

For Vice Mayor Julian Gold, an anesthesiologist at Cedars-Sinai, there's nothing quite so humbling as facing one's own mortality. He learned first-hand how just how transformational a cancer diagnosis can be when he was diagnosed with leukemia in 2006.

"It was life-changing," he recalled. "There's nothing like a good dose of cancer to put the world in perspective."

For both he and his wife, Michele, the experience gave them a new perspective on life—one where they no longer let themselves get caught up in what wasn't important, instead spend-



Horace Mann teacher Christy Fuhrer with husband Christian 17 years ago.

ing their energy treasuring what was—family and friends.

On Dec. 1, Gold will be among the speakers at the "Imagine a Cure" fundraiser for the Tower Cancer Research Foundation taking place at Beverly Hills High School when both boys and girls varsity soccer teams kick for a cure in their matches against Windward school. The Beverly Hills-based foundation, which

honored Gold a few years ago, supports high impact research and clinical trials.

Now 11 years cancer-free, Gold said he believes it's critical to share his story to both inspire and support those going through the disease, as well as their caregivers, in addition to helping bring awareness to help de-stigmatize the disease.

"I think the survivors have a duty to serve as role models for those who are in the midst of this and give them some strength," said Gold, who has been involved with Relay for Life since getting elected to City Council in March 2011. "You need to show people that you can survive cancer and get back to a normal life."

Following his diagnosis, Gold spent the next several months undergoing chemotherapy and hospitalization in anticipation of a stem cell transplant. Gold, who is today 68, noted that had he received his diagnosis only five years before, in 2001, he would likely have not qualified to receive a stem cell transplant due to being considered "too old."

His wife, Michele, became his caregiver throughout the process, building on their already strong foundation and doing her best to shield their daughter, Becca, who was just 15 at the time.

"We thought we would protect her some," he recalled. But, of course, with Gold having lost all his hair and out of commission for 90 days straight, it was hard to miss exactly what was happening.

Fortunately, his daughter's friends at Beverly Hills High School and friends of the family throughout the community were incredibly supportive.

For Horace Mann first grade teacher Christy Fuhrer, who was diagnosed with breast cancer when she was 31, having the support of the community and her husband, Christian (who is today the principal of Beverly Vista), was instrumental.

"I've always been a determined person, but now I'm living proof to never give up," said Fuhrer, who is today 17 years cancer-free. "I'm still determined to live life to the fullest."

In fact, just three years ago, Fuhrer, together with her husband and a few other "middle-aged" teachers, formed a rock band called "Sorry" in which she plays the bass. The band is set to perform as part of the Imagine a Cure fundraiser.

Fuhrer had been married just two years when she was diagnosed with cancer. Her mother, who ultimately died from a recurrence of breast cancer six years ago, was first diagnosed at the age of 45, when Fuhrer was just 19 years old. Knowing that breast cancer ran in her family, Fuhrer said she was vigilant in performing self-examinations, but was still completely shocked when a small lump she detected proved to be malignant. Her doctor recommended intense chemotherapy (she went through four rounds) and a double mastectomy.

"It was pretty brutal," she recalled. "At the age of 31 instead of starting a family, I got to deal with cancer."

Chemotherapy hit her particularly hard and she was in and out of the hospital throughout the treatments, even needing a blood transfusion at one

point. She also dropped down to just 93 pounds. And once she was through everything—including her double mastectomy and reconstruction surgeries—it turned out that she was not able to have children on her own.

"Unfortunately, the chemo killed everything, the good and the bad," she said.

But there was a silver lining: her son Lucas, whom the couple adopted 14 years ago, the moment he was born.

"Christian and I just had the attitude of, when one door closes, we'll make another door open," she said. "You can't ever give up."

"We wouldn't be where we are today with our son Lucas if it wasn't for cancer [and] I was fortunate enough to live," she added. "So in a way cancer led us to our adopted son."

The disease also led her to volunteer with the Cancer Support Community, which offers support for people and caregivers going through cancer.

"When someone's diagnosed with cancer, there are so many people involved," she said. "Whether you're the caregiver, the friend, of, hopefully, the survivor, there are lots of layers to a cancer diagnosis."

Opening ceremonies for the upcoming fundraiser at BHHS begin at 4 p.m. There will be food, live music, local speakers and a moment of silence to commemorate those that have not survived. For more information or to donate visit: www.towercancer.org.

Said Gold: "People's donations are important because they really do support the efforts to create cures and you can see the living results of those cure."

Next week the Courier will explore stories of children in the community living with cancer.