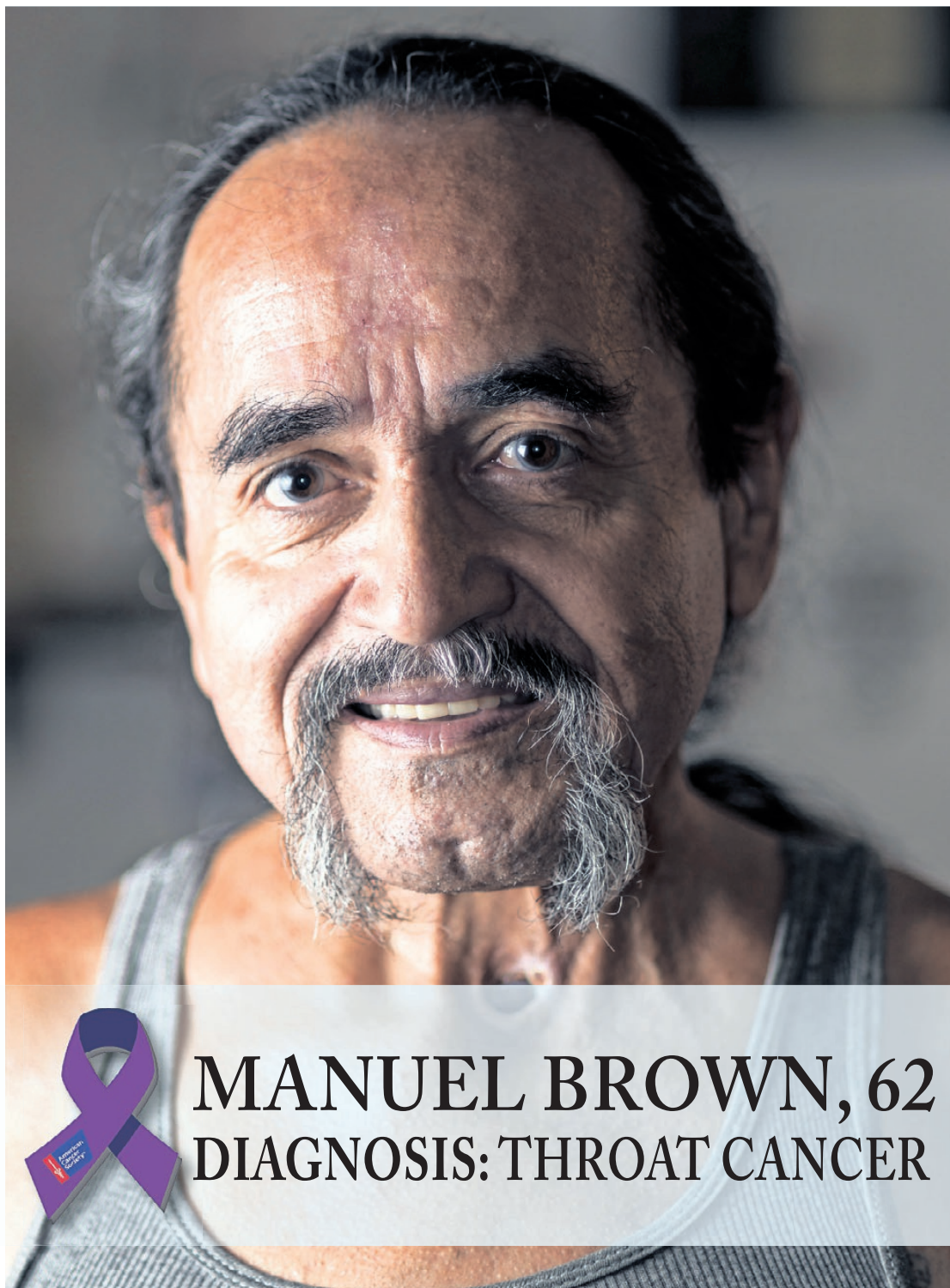


Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



MANUEL BROWN, 62
DIAGNOSIS: THROAT CANCER

to die, right? So, it's surgery."

At the time of his surgery about a week later, Manuel weighed 358 pounds. The tumor was preventing his thyroid from functioning properly.

"The surgery was supposed to be eight hours," Julie said. "Manuel was in surgery for 18 hours. They cut him from ear to ear. He looked like Frankenstein because he had the staples and all.

"He was in ICU for 31 days. His body wasn't functioning right because now he had no thyroid."

A short time after his surgery, Manuel underwent radiation, followed by chemotherapy.

The throat surgery "didn't heal right and left two holes where his pureed food would leak into his lungs," Julie said. "They call it a fistula. It didn't close for two-and-a-half years."

"I lived off of Ensure through a G-tube," Manuel said.

"He couldn't get the prosthesis until it closed," Julie said. "He couldn't talk during that time. He had to write everything down.

"Those two-and-a-half years were the hardest of our lives. He went from 358 to 89 pounds because he was refusing to eat — he wanted to die.

"During that time, our daughter was getting married. I told him he needed strength to be there. He said, 'No, I need to talk.'"

Friday," Julie said, "the doctor put it in and said, 'OK, say something.'"

"The first words out of his mouth, he looked at me and said, 'I love you.'"

"The next day our daughter got married, and he gave her away. He was a pants size 28. He was tiny."

Manuel did not regain his appetite. Eventually "one of my girlfriends came over," Julie said. "She took him to the bowling alley. She made him bowl and she took him to eat.

"When they came back, he said, 'Oh, I liked that.' She took him bowling three days a week. Now he is 193 pounds. She got him into bowling. We call her our angel."

During Manuel's recovery "I went to nursing school to learn how to take care of him," Julie said. "I graduated in 2012.

"I wanted to know the abbreviations for the medicines and what they were doing."

Manuel's illness has changed his perspective. "He was more into work all the time," Julie said. "Now, since his surgery, it's all about the family, the kids, the grandchildren.

"Back then, we had a lot of money," Julie said. "We had a home and everything. Once you get sick, you hit a brick wall. Everything stops."

At one point, the family was homeless. They moved to the High Desert four years ago to be near family.

"You have to learn to live with it. In a sense, I think it was a blessing because he's more lovable, more helpful. It changed him completely," Julie said.

Manuel joined a support group through ATOS Medical, the company that supplies his laryngectomy care equipment.

"They were so helpful," Julie said. "But he didn't like the first meeting and didn't want to go back.

"They had people for the caregivers too. I would go into the bathroom so people wouldn't see me cry. I told Manuel, 'We are going to go whether you want to or not.'"

“I see people smoking. I tell them, if you smoke you could end up like this.”

Manuel had surgery to prepare for the prosthesis on the Thursday before his daughter's wedding. "On

The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Apple Valley
- **OCCUPATION:** Medical retirement; former elevator technician "for the rich and famous"
- **FAMILY:** Wife Julie, four children and 12 grandchildren.
- **HOBBIES:** Bowling
- **PHILOSOPHY:** No particular philosophy

By Alberta Hale Crigler

In 2008, Manuel Brown was concerned when he became hoarse and the problem would not clear up. That began a puzzling and frustrating medical mystery that was finally solved in May 2010 with a shocking diagnosis.

During their journey, his wife, Julie Brown, learned to speak

for her husband when he was unable. Now, often one of them begins a thought that the other completes.

"I was gaining weight. I wasn't eating because I was trying to lose weight," Manuel said. "But then I started losing my voice and had shortness of breath."

A month before Manuel



was diagnosed with throat cancer, a doctor said "he has a bad, bad infection," Julie said. "They put him on IV antibiotics. The doctor suspected bronchitis."

"I got a lot of different diagnoses except cancer," Manuel said.

Finally, Manuel got an appointment at Los Angeles County+USC Medical Center.

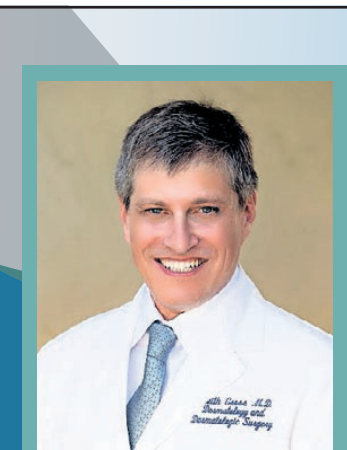
"They took me into the back," he said, "and within five minutes, I came out screaming for my wife: I have cancer!"

That day, doctors told Manuel that he had only two weeks left to live. They said his only chance of survival was surgery to remove his larynx and thyroid, which would leave him unable to speak without a prosthesis.

"I looked at him, he looked at me," Julie said, "and I said, 'I know you don't want



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Q WHAT DOES SKIN CANCER LOOK LIKE ?

A The skin cancer which occurs most commonly is basal cell carcinoma. It may appear as a non-healing sore or bump on the skin. These should be diagnosed and treated early as their continued growth makes treatment more difficult. If you have any questions about a possible skin cancer, be sure to consult a Board Certified Dermatologist.

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