

# Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



**MARIA HALTOM, 73**  
**DIAGNOSIS: FOLLICULAR LYMPHOMA,**  
**RENAL CELL CARCINOMA**

## The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Hesperia.
- **OCCUPATION:** Retired.
- **Family:** Jose Haltom, 74, husband; Melisa Haltom, 48, daughter; and sons Fabian, 49; Mike, 42; and Angel, 38.
- **Activities:** Going to church and active with congregation.
- **Philosophy:** Everything that happens in life is something that God has put there, even though we don't understand it.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Maria Halstrom very recently received two diagnoses that have changed the course of her life. Halstrom speaks only Spanish, and her daughter, Melisa Halstrom, translated her initial reaction:

"I was shocked because it was the last thing I expected to hear," Maria said. "At the moment, I was not able to digest that news."

Melisa continued, "She had no symptoms. She had some chest pain, and she thought she was having a heart problem."

"My brother Mike was there, and they called me at work. I said take her to the hospital."

"She went into the hospital on June 8. They looked at everything thinking it was her heart, but a CT scan showed three masses in her abdomen."

Since Maria's heart rate was slow, she stayed in the hospital. While she was there, "they did a biopsy on the largest mass, which was 9 cm and now is 10 cm. It was follicular lymphoma," Melisa said.

A more recent scan has also revealed a small mass on Maria's right kidney.

"They thought it was lymphoma, too," Melisa said. "But on Sept. 27, she had a biopsy and it was renal cell carcinoma. It is a different type of cancer."



Now Maria's family is preparing for the journey that lies ahead.

"As a family we are all a little confused, lost," Melisa said. "Reality hasn't hit yet."

"She is scheduled for removal of her right kidney on Nov. 13," Melisa said. "They want to do that before the chemo. It will be six treatments – one every three weeks. That is pretty much all we know right now."

"The diagnosis is so new that we are still in a state of denial. We haven't had time to digest it. We haven't had time to process anything other than we know she has been diagnosed."

"People who have been through it say I did this, I did that. But what do we do?"

"I go to every appointment with her and I am the one who translates for her," Melisa said. "I worked in physical therapy for about 10-1/2 years, so I have some knowledge of the terminology."

Melisa said her father is compromised from an injury he had in 1999. "He lost two fingers on a machine, and it affected him mentally and emotionally. It was a big thing for him to be

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*“As a family we are all a little confused and lost.”*

medically retired. From one day to the next, he was injured, was in the hospital, and then was told: You no longer can work.

"He is pretty much, what did the doctor say? What are they going to do now? He always asks the same question; he forgets and asks again."

"He is concerned and stressed. I see the worry, but he is really quiet; he doesn't say much."

"Everyone knows what is going on, but we haven't had that moment where we can discuss what we are going to do about it. My dad is kind of lost."

"We are so scared to say anything right now. I think we really haven't accepted it yet. The other day I was speaking to Angie Miller (of High Desert Angels), and I started crying. It was the first time I have cried since we found out."

Melisa works as a senior case manager for a law firm. She said the attorney she works for, who she met many years ago, "has experienced ovarian and uterine cancer, and she is very understanding."

"She is very supportive; she gives me days off when I need them. I have been very blessed to find this person and to work for her. She was the caretaker for her mother, who passed many years ago."

Melisa said her parents also are trying to recover from losing their home in 2017. "They were the victims of a loan modification scam," she said.

"They are retired. They worked so hard for their home, and it was taken away because someone decided to steal from them. They still have the hope they might qualify for something in the future."

This week, Maria will receive financial help and information about resources and support available to cancer survivors. She will be the honoree Saturday at the Cues for a Cure 8-Ball Tournament and Fundraiser event.

Admission is free, and everyone is welcome at the event, which will be held at The Rusty Bull beginning at 3 p.m. All money raised will benefit eight honorees battling cancer in the High Desert.

The event is the final tournament prior to the championship Oct. 20.

There will be music, karaoke, drawings and more as well as cancer resources.

For more information, call Angie Miller at 760-987-1674 or visit HighDesertAngels.org



The American Cancer Society provides a 24 hour service to answer questions about diagnosis, insurance, local support and resources

**www.cancer.org or**  
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