

# Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



**MARY RUF, 64**  
**DIAGNOSIS: MESOTHELIOMA**

## The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Victorville
- **OCCUPATION:** Retired
- **FAMILY:** Cliff Ruf, 70, husband; Elizabeth Howard, mother; BJ (Betty Jean Tidwell), 68, sister; Grandsons Christopher Garrett, 18, and Matthew Garrett, 17
- **HOBBIES:** Sewing, quilting, crafting and studying ancestry
- **PHILOSOPHY:** It wasn't my time, and I am glad that I am still here for my grandchildren.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Mary Ruf says she got mesothelioma from second-hand contact with asbestos on clothing her husband, Cliff, wore home after working on Navy ships.

Secondary exposure is a common way that women come into contact with asbestos. That happens when they launder contaminated work clothes.

"He was on a ship in the military," Ruf said. He had it on his clothes.

"I would shake his laundry out to wash it. I am not the only wife out there (with mesothelioma)."

Ruf said her husband served during the Vietnam era. Back then, she said, "Asbestos was all over ships. Men were protected,



but they didn't worry about the families.

Ruf's cancer was discovered in 2016 when she was seeing her doctor for an unrelated problem.

"I had a bad cough for about six months," she said. "The doctor said before my appointment, he wanted an X-ray done.

"November 2015, I had an X-ray and nothing was there. But Jan. 27, 2016, an X-ray showed a tumor the size of a quarter in my lung.

"I went in for a biopsy. We saw the doctor in February 2016, and he said, 'you have cancer.' I said, 'ok, what do we do to get it out of me?'"

"At this point, my husband has broken down and is crying. I said, 'dude, we need to get it out of me.'"

"I had chemo every Friday for eight weeks, in at 9 and out about noon. I had radiation Monday through Friday, plus I was still working."

But doctors said the chemo wasn't doing its job. "So, on June 27, 2016, they removed my right lung, half of my number

four rib, and they cracked my sixth and seventh ribs.

"The tumor was about the size of a golf ball when they went in.

It was a long battle those seven months. It is still a battle. I go to City of Hope every three to four months to get scans and blood tests.

It's a hard road. When you get slapped in the face with 'you have cancer,' it's really hard. I thank God every day I am alive.

"I don't do what I used to. It takes me all day to vacuum and mop the house, but I can do it. It is a change of life, too. I don't take it lightly. If there is something I want to do, we do it. Tomorrow I might not be here. You take life one day at a time.



*"The tumor was about the size of a golf ball"*

Ruf said she and her older sister, BJ, had not been in contact for almost 30 years. But when BJ heard about Ruf's cancer, she contacted Cliff.

"That brought us back together as sisters," Ruff said. "She was at all my surgeries. Anything I needed, she was there for me."

Ruf's grandsons helped with her care, too.

"My grandkids stayed with us for about a month right after my surgery," she said. "They helped me get up; they would get me to the bathroom door, and I would make it the rest of the way.

"They would make sandwiches, get my ice pack, sweep floors, vacuum and mop. They did a lot of stuff.

Ruf said originally she found support at San Antonio hospital in Upland, "but the drive was so hard to make.

"Now that I found out

there is stuff going on up here, I try to go.

"I go to the Relay for Life 24-hour walk. In 2016, I did the City of Hope walk. I didn't get very far – I got about two miles and I was done."

Ruf recently received results from her latest checkup. "I am still cancer free. I am really happy about that; it is two years going clean," she said.

Ruf advises others battling cancer: "Be strong. Don't give up. Never give up. Fight it, because once you quit fighting, you are done.

## Caregiver Perspective



Cliff Ruf said when he heard his wife's cancer diagnosis, "I literally broke down. I couldn't see myself losing her. This year we have been married 45 years, and we have been together almost 48.

"I didn't want my wife to get sick. We wore respirators, we didn't breathe the stuff in, but she did.

"When she had chemo, I would sit there with her and crack jokes and make all the nurses laugh.

"A lot of the women (getting chemo) came in by themselves. They actually acted like they were going to give up.

"I told some of them: Never, never give up. You fight it. Fight it to the last moment.



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