

The Faces of Cancer

Si Conners

I was born in 1925 in Texas of African-American parents. My mother had breast cancer; otherwise there was no history of cancer in my family.

0–19 years

I was a willing, anxious student, hard working and eager to please. I was the last of four children and, early on, developed the skills of getting along with others and negotiating for what I want. I was 12 when my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, and I helped with her care when she came home from the hospital. My older sister also had sickle cell disease. Because I helped take care of her, I was familiar with the health care system in my community and understood how to obtain medical advice when I needed it.

20–39 years

I went to the university in Houston to earn my bachelor's degree in history, then went on to study law. After I passed the bar, I worked as an advocate for the NAACP. My wife and I had no children, but I was active in the church youth group and coached Little League.

40–59 years

My first serious health problem was diagnosed as diabetes at age 48. Initially, it was hard to control, and I saw an internist on a regular basis. Even after the diabetes was controlled with insulin, there was some concern about my kidney function, so I continued regular check-ups.

60+ years

Despite my regular check-ups for diabetes and high blood pressure (I had developed this by age 65), I had not undergone cancer screening and was beginning to think I should. When the community offered free screening, I took advantage of the opportunity and, at age 70, was diagnosed with prostate cancer. Prostate cancer is believed to grow slowly, and because of my age, I did not want to undergo surgery or radiation, so I chose to be treated only with hormones.

Si died at age 73 from diabetes. Many of the families whose children he had coached in Little League came to his funeral.

Rosemarie Winters

I was born in 1932 in West Virginia of wealthy Caucasian parents. My family had a history of high blood pressure and heart disease, but not of cancer.

0–19 years

I was only an average student in school, although my teachers consistently told my parents I could do better if I tried. Both my parents smoked. Not surprisingly perhaps, I began smoking as well at age 16. I was plagued with allergies and mild asthma through school and was never interested in sports. Instead, I loved to socialize, and even as a teenager, I was a moderate beer drinker.

20–39 years

I joined the work force instead of going to college or getting married right out of high school. As a secretary, I worked hard during the week and partied hard on the weekends. I still smoked, despite several attempts to stop.

I was married at 27 and had a child at 29. I never remarried after my divorce at age 36.

40–59 years

By 45, I had developed significant bronchial problems. I had a persistent cough and frequent bouts with deep chest colds and congestion. I finally stopped smoking at age 55, but my hacking cough persisted.

60+ years

I was diagnosed with lung cancer at age 63. By the time the cancer was detected, it had metastasized to my brain and was producing headaches, nausea, and vomiting. My doctor gave me chemotherapy and radiation, which made me feel tired and sick, but the cancer never went away.

Rosemarie died three months later just a little shy of her 64th birthday. Her family grieved, but was not surprised. Rosemarie's doctor had told them that the five-year survival rate for lung cancer is only about 13 percent.

Brian Eaken

I was born in 1935 in Chicago to middle-class, African-American parents. My family had no history of cancer, though my father smoked till he died of a stroke at age 70.

0–19 years

I was an inconsistent student, excelling in subjects I enjoyed and ignoring subjects that didn't interest me. I didn't smoke or drink as a teenager, and, aside from periodic allergies (allergies possibly secondary to my father's smoking), I enjoyed generally good health. I loved sports, especially baseball, and won a scholarship to play ball for a local college.

20–39 years

I was injured during my third year of college baseball and eventually stopped playing. I began to drink and smoke and socialize, was married soon after finishing college, and divorced a few years later. After my divorce, I moved into a small apartment and focused most of my energies on work and success. I knew that I ate unhealthily but really didn't have time to fuss with meals.

40–59 years

By age 40, I was on medication for high blood pressure; by age 46, I was taking insulin to control my diabetes. Eventually, I developed a cough that wouldn't go away and finally was diagnosed with emphysema. My poor health forced me to slow down, and by my late 50s, I was semiretired.

60+ years

My stroke at age 60 forced my full retirement. An X-ray a year later showed small spots in one lung, which were surgically removed.

Brian seemed to be recovering well from the lung cancer, but died at age 63 from a second, serious stroke.

Mario Devencenzi

I was born in 1932 in northern Minnesota, of Italian ancestry. I was the second oldest of eight children in a relatively poor family, so I felt some real responsibility to help my family. My family had no history of cancer.

0–19 years

I was an average student in school, but in response to tough financial times in my family, I dropped out of school at age 10 to take a job in the ore mines. I felt good to be able to bring my pay home each week and to be able to hold my own in the rough-and-tumble environment of the mines. By age 13, I had started smoking like many of the men I worked with; by age 15, I was up to three packs a day.

20–39 years

I continued to work in the mines after I was married. Although my first marriage ended in divorce a few years later, I married again and eventually had six children, one of whom died at age 2 of an infection. I was generally too busy to worry about my health. Besides, most of the time, I felt just fine! My primary interests in life were cards, TV, and drinking with the guys.

40–59 years

By my mid-40s, I had developed a persistent cough and was starting to feel chronically fatigued or in my words, “to feel my age.” Welcome relief from my normally strenuous work came at age 48, when I was promoted to supervisor. Now I wasn’t in the mines as much, but instead spent most of my time behind a desk.

At age 59, I noticed with alarm that there was blood in the stuff I was coughing up out of my lungs. Worried now, I went to the company doctor, who ordered X-rays. X-rays revealed cancer that involved significant portions of both of my lungs and was too advanced for surgery. Eventually, I was too sick to work.

60+ years

Although I was too sick to work, I did go to chemotherapy and radiation treatments. My doctor also tried surgery, but I continued to feel worse.

Mario died at age 61. He was survived by 5 children and 12 grandchildren.

Kathy Becker

I was born in Kansas in 1976 of Caucasian parents. My family was middle class, with four children (I was the youngest). There was no history of cancer in my family.

0–19 years

My childhood was unremarkable. I was a good student, had no major childhood illnesses, but had the flu about every other year. I never smoked or drank. I participated in sports, but was often tired.

When I was 14, I dropped out of sports because I was so tired. I also bruised easily and sometimes experienced pain in my bones. My mother noticed my bruises, and two months later, my parents took me to a pediatrician in response to anorexia and abdominal pain. My physical examination and blood cell counts indicated leukemia; I was referred to University Hospital for appropriate therapy. I was lucky I got involved in a clinical trial and got the very best of care! It paid off, too, with remission and a good chance for a healthy, productive life even after cancer.

20–39 years

At age 20, I was still in remission (cancer-free, and it had been six years since my treatment). After I finished college, I joined the Peace Corps and traveled to South America where I taught school and helped a rural community establish a small library and a computer center. I returned home at age 28 and settled down in Kansas to lead a “quieter” life.

40–59 years

I was happy as a school teacher and part-time librarian and never missed being married. I traveled each year—sometimes to Europe, other times to Asia or South America—and continued supporting charitable organizations that built schools and libraries for poor children around the world.

60+ years

I retired at age 60 and returned to visit the little town in South America where I served in the Peace Corps so many years ago. What a change the 21st century has brought to those people. Connected now to the rest of the world by the Web, you would think they'd have little need for the pitifully small library I helped them build. Still, they cherish the books (especially the children's books), and I feel good that my efforts are still yielding benefits for the people I knew when I was there, and for their children.

Cherisse Nicholson

I was born in 1950 in Arizona, of European ancestry. My family was well off financially, and I was always encouraged to set my sights high and live life to the fullest. My father died of prostate cancer at age 74, and my mother's sister died of breast cancer.

0–19 years

I had a carefree childhood, growing up in sunny Arizona. Despite my fair skin and freckles, I loved the sun and spent lots of time outdoors. My father loved golf, and I usually caddied for him. I also spent my summers in California on the beach. After I graduated from high school, I headed off to college to major in political science.

20–39 years

My good health continued through college and after. Although I started smoking in college, I watched what I ate, got lots of exercise, and kept my smoking to four or five cigarettes per day. I took birth control pills from age 17 to after I was married; then, after my marriage and career as a congressional aide were established, I had three children (at ages 26, 29, and 34). My one serious sorrow was my three miscarriages (at ages 31, 32, and 36). My husband and I love children and would have been happy to have had 10!

40–59 years

Despite my family, I continued an active professional life. My golfing background came in handy as I was the one golfing with the business people and politicians I needed to network with. I continued to take care of myself and got regular check-ups.

In my late 40s, I noticed dark "liver spots" on my hands, shoulders, and nose. I also began to worry about what I perceived to be excessive wrinkling, probably from years of being in the sun. My doctor noticed the spots too, but I was worried about scarring and didn't want them removed. By age 54, some of the spots were getting larger, and when I was 56, I had them removed. Though the diagnosis was definitely skin cancer, the doctor told me the margins were clear and the outlook was good.

60+ years

I am retired now, but continue an active life. Since my initial bout with skin cancer, I have had 11 more discolored spots on my skin removed, but have had no other health problems. I faithfully visit the doctor for check-ups twice a year and now wear sunscreen when I am outside, even when the day is cloudy!

Carlos Montano

I was born in 1937 in Southern California of Mexican immigrants. My father's aunt and my mother both had cancer, but I am not sure what type.

0–19 years

As the son of immigrant migrant workers, I spent lots of time in the fields. I attended school only sporadically and almost never went to the doctor. As a consequence, I received only some of my childhood immunizations and got used to the habit of going to the emergency room only when I had serious problems.

Life was tough during this time, but my family was close-knit and we survived.

20–39 years

As an adult, I finally settled down in one place, got married, and started to raise a family. I finished my GED and continued working in agriculture, eventually becoming a supervisor on a large commercial farm. My three children attended school regularly, and I became involved in a variety of community initiatives, including one designed to reach all local children with information about the importance of washing one's hands and with the opportunity to receive proper immunizations.

40–59 years

I remained active in the community, especially in programs that improved access to health information (such as, information about pesticide use and sun exposure) and gave farm workers and their children access to health care. At age 59, I participated in a community health cancer screening and had three moles removed from my back. They proved to be noncancerous, but the screening also revealed early prostate cancer, which my doctor immediately treated with surgery and radiation therapy.

60+ years

I am definitely feeling my age these days, but I have a positive outlook on life. My doctor says I am doing "OK," and I interpret that to mean I am on my way to full recovery.

Maria Delgano

I was born in 1939 in Washington, DC, of Puerto Rican parents. My family had no history of cancer, though my father had smoked for his entire adult life.

0–19 years

My family was poor, and I grew up angry and rebellious at what I perceived to be life's injustices. I was a poor student in school, and by 14 was smoking two to three packs of cigarettes a day. By 15, I was drinking with my friends; at age 17, I was hospitalized a couple of times for injuries related to street fights.

20–39 years

As an adult, I finally found a job as a transport clerk in the subway system. The job paid reasonably well and came with a good health care plan, but I was busy with my four children and did not regularly seek health advice. I knew the doctor would tell me to eat better and to stop smoking and, for sure, I didn't want to hear that!

I developed a troublesome cough in my mid-30s, but explained it away as the result of the damp environment of the subway system. By then, I was wishing I had a different type of job, but I didn't really have any skills or qualifications. Because I couldn't afford to quit working, I stuck it out.

40–59 years

As I aged, my coughing and wheezing continued to be a problem, especially during the three to four times a year when I had a cold or the flu and couldn't breathe. I stayed active at work and in my family, until age 59, when a serious attack of chest pain sent me to the emergency room. Subsequent X-rays revealed lung cancer, with metastasis to my bones.

60+ years

Doctors treated my cancer with chemotherapy, not so much as a cure, but to improve my survival time. They warned, though, that even if the cancer responded well to the treatment, it likely would return within a few years.

Today, I live with my oldest daughter, who scolds me when I do too much and trigger an attack of coughing and chest pain. I am proud of my family's accomplishments and am hoping to be present when my oldest grandson graduates from college next year.

Ed Manning

I was born in 1930 in Kentucky, son of Caucasian parents Katie and Jim Manning. My mother died of breast cancer at age 47, and my father died from a stroke at age 61.

0–19 years

I had a normal childhood in rural Kentucky. I was an average student despite frequent absences due to flulike symptoms and fevers. My doctor told my parents that my immune system may not be very robust, but my mother ascribed my frequent illnesses to my distaste for vegetables. Fruit was okay, but vegetables? Never!

20–39 years

As I got older, I continued to suffer with colds and flu, often having as many as five to six bouts with it a year. I never smoked. I always thought it was bad business for a salesman to smoke and I drank minimally. My wife and I had two children and loved to fish and sail with them all summer.

40–59 years

As I aged, I began having other health problems. At age 42, I was diagnosed with diabetes and put on a strict diet. My doctor also noted my chronically high blood pressure and prescribed medication to control it. By my late 40s and early 50s, I had also developed several allergies.

Despite my health problems, these were good years as I watched my children grow up, get married, and start families of their own.

60+ years

I was diagnosed with skin cancer at age 62; after my doctor removed the two or three discolored moles on my arms, I had no further problems. In fact, today I feel as good as I ever did. The changes that I *have* introduced into my life are that now I eat my vegetables and I also wear sunscreen!

Margaret Alexander

I was born in 1957 in Utah, of European ancestry. Several members of my family have had cancer: My older sister had breast cancer at age 36, my mother had ovarian cancer at age 49, my mother's sister had breast cancer at age 47, and my mother's mother had breast cancer at age 54.

0–19 years

My childhood was uneventful. I met my future husband my first semester in college and was married at age 19. A few months after my wedding, I was pregnant.

20–39 years

My first child was born when I was just 20, and two more followed at ages 24 and 27. I breastfed each baby for about six months.

Despite the children, I finished my nursing degree and got a job as a nurse in a local hospital. Aware of the history of cancer in my family, I regularly practiced breast self-examination. I was not referred for a mammogram because I was considered too young.

At age 32, I agreed to participate in a research study. In 1996, as part of that study, I learned that I carry an altered gene that increases my risk for breast and ovarian cancer. On the strength of this new information, I was able to get mammograms at regular intervals.

40–59 years

At age 42, my mammogram showed some suspicious calcifications. A biopsy revealed breast cancer. I had a partial mastectomy with 12 lymph nodes removed. Because 3 of the 12 nodes showed cancer, I had both radiation and chemotherapy and was put on Tamoxifen (a drug that reduces the chances of breast cancer developing) for five years.

60+ years

I feel great these days and am grateful that the research study led to my cancer being detected early. I continue my practice of regular self-examination and see my doctor twice a year. I have had no recurrences of the breast cancer and feel confident of the future. Because the altered gene I carry also predisposes me to increased risk of ovarian cancer, I considered having my ovaries removed, but finally decided not to take that step. But, I will have regular check-ups!

Leila Johnson

I was born in 1929 in Los Angeles of African-American parents. My father was part owner of a small corner grocery store, and my mother taught piano lessons. My family had no history of cancer.

0–19 years

I was a quiet child who loved to read and to write poetry and short plays, which my friends and I would stage. I was a good student and neither smoked nor drank. After finishing high school, I started college, majoring in English literature.

20–39 years

I finished my degree and, at age 22, married my childhood sweetheart. My husband and I moved to rural Georgia, where I taught high school during the school year and gardened during the summer. Because of regular insect invasions, I used pesticides often, but always washed my vegetables before eating them. I also oversaw the pesticide spraying that I sometimes hired people to do in my gardens.

After two miscarriages, I had my first child at age 28.

40–59 years

I had my second and third children at ages 31 and 37. Although I breastfed the first two children for a year each, I didn't breastfeed the third.

Because of the distance I had to travel to see my doctor, I had only sporadic health care most of my life. I examined my breasts when I remembered to—perhaps two or three times a year—but typically I did not have regular clinical examinations.

Mammograms at ages 50 and 56 were normal; I experienced menopause at age 53 and went on hormone replacement therapy.

60+ years

I found my first lump in my breast when I was 63. When I saw the doctor six months later I was diagnosed with breast cancer. By then, the treatment was full mastectomy. After my surgery, I was put on a schedule of radiation therapy and chemotherapy, then started on Tamoxifen, a drug that reduces the risk of developing breast cancer. Today, I am doing poorly—the cancer has metastasized to my liver and is not responding to therapy.

Avi Rothstein

I was born in 1950 in New York City. My family was of Eastern German descent; sadly, most of them died in the Holocaust. One uncle, who also lives in New York, seems hale and hearty.

0–19 years

I grew up in a poor neighborhood and didn't get regular health care. Despite this, I was a healthy child (though my mother often scolded me for not eating my vegetables). I was raised on a traditional Kosher diet; I didn't smoke, even as a teenager, and drank only occasionally.

20–39 years

After college, I went to law school and then lived and worked as a lawyer in New York. My job carried very high stress, and I had little time to relax. I even ate on the run, except for rare weekends that I spent on Long Island with my wife's family.

40–59 years

At age 41, I saw a doctor about my stomach. I had long suffered from an irritable bowel, but when the doctor found blood in my stool, even I was concerned. A subsequent colonoscopy revealed several polyps in my colon—one cancerous.

The cancer had not spread, so the surgeon was able to remove it completely. The experience prompted me to have colonoscopies every other year. I want to catch the polyps before they can become cancerous.

When my uncle heard I had colon cancer, he decided to go in for colon screening. When he was found to have polyps too, we both enrolled in a genetic testing program to see whether we carried predisposing genes. Both of us have a predisposing mutation, one of several known to increase risk of colon cancer.

60+ years

I am doing well these days, but now I eat my vegetables and see my doctor regularly.

Elizabeth Gries

I was born in Milwaukee, the youngest of three children of a Polish mother and a German father. My father worked as a supervisor in a factory, and we lived in a nice but not fancy part of town. My father's sister died of lung cancer when she was in her 60s (she was a heavy smoker); my father died of a heart attack in his late 40s.

0–19 years

I was an average student in school and considered myself pretty healthy and happy. I always ate well (I loved fried foods and meat), got lots of sleep, and had regular check-ups. In fact, my only serious health problem as a child was a broken leg when I was 11. (My grandparents never forgave me for jumping down from the loft in the barn on their farm . . .)

20–39 years

I got a job as a secretary for a car parts manufacturer after high school, but quit after I was married at age 23. I drank a little (just socially) and also smoked just a little (maybe a pack a day). I had three children (at ages 26, 29, and 33) who kept me busy and active. I was always very healthy (though I tended to be a little overweight) and saw my doctor at least once a year for a check-up.

40–59 years

I developed high blood pressure and high cholesterol in my early 40s, which I struggled to control by changing my diet. When I was 45, my doctor finally put me on medication to control these problems. But when I was 53, I had a heart attack. You can believe I stopped smoking then fast! I also tried even harder to eat a lower-fat diet. After menopause (I was 56), my doctor put me on hormone replacement therapy, but it made me gain weight and eventually he said I could stop taking it (I was 59).

60+ years

After my husband died, I sold my home, moved into an apartment, and spent lots of time with my children and grandchildren. I continued seeing the doctor regularly and, when I was 79, a routine mammogram revealed breast cancer. Luckily (especially since I didn't examine my breasts very often), we caught it early. I had a lumpectomy and radiation therapy and had no problems from it afterward.

Elizabeth died at age 83 from a second heart attack. She was survived by three children and seven grandchildren.

Mark Harris

I was an African-American man born of middle-class parents who lived in Detroit, Michigan. My only sister died of lung cancer when she was in her 50s, but I don't know of any cancer in the family except that. My father was a salesman and traveled a lot, so I didn't see him much when I was growing up.

0–19 years

I didn't like school much, though I was a good student when I tried. I gave my mom some problems sometimes (mostly I just got in trouble for skipping school or fighting) and quit school when I was 16 to work on a production line for an automobile manufacturer. I didn't take care of myself those days—I partied a lot on the weekends and often forgot to eat.

20–39 years

The company I worked for encouraged me to get my GED and, in my early 30s, I was promoted to a supervisory position. Life was good. I was busy with a home and family (a wife and four kids), but found time now and then to do some woodworking and metal sculpture as a hobby. The company provided good benefits, including a company-provided physical each year, so I stayed pretty healthy. The doctor discovered I had high blood pressure, but the medicine I took controlled it and I didn't worry.

40–59 years

My interest in woodworking and sculpture really took off after my children left home and I retired (age 55). I won a couple of amateur art awards and also developed an interest in traveling.

After a few years of suffering through the Michigan winters, my wife and I moved to Arizona, where I became active in AARP. I was especially interested in the rights of retirees and was an advocate for improved access to health care for the elderly. I didn't go to the doctor regularly because I felt good, but I wanted to know I could get good care if I needed it.

60+ years

I had a mild heart attack at age 74, but still didn't worry much about my health. My wife died a couple of years later of breast cancer, and I was diagnosed with prostate cancer at age 80. They didn't operate because of my age and heart condition.

Shirlene Hvinden

I was born in a little town in eastern Minnesota of Scandinavian parents. I have three older brothers and one younger sister. We lived a pretty normal middle-class lifestyle: My father worked as a school teacher during the year and as a used car salesman during the summers, and my mother stayed home and took care of us. My grandfather died of skin cancer when he was pretty old and my mother's sister died of breast cancer.

0–19 years

I loved to read as a child and did well in social studies and spelling, but poorly in math and science. I also loved to play and, despite my fair skin, spent most of my summers outdoors. I had allergies so I took medications regularly and saw the doctor often.

My mother cooked good, substantial meals (meat and potatoes) and I ate well, though I didn't like vegetables and wouldn't eat a bite more than the "spoonful" my mother made me eat of any vegetable but corn. After I graduated from high school, I went to college in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

20–39 years

When I was 21, I finished my education as a nurse, got married, and took a job at a community hospital in the outskirts of St. Paul. I had a son at age 22, then went on birth control pills until I was 28. Although I spent lots of time at the hospital, I rarely went to the doctor myself. I enjoyed my job, didn't drink or smoke, and certainly didn't experiment with drugs or do anything dangerous.

40–59 years

My life during these years was quiet and peaceful. My son lived at home as a college student, so I saw him often. I worked full time and contented myself with keeping house, sewing, and reading. I also began to volunteer one Saturday a month teaching teenage mothers how to care for their newborn children at a health care clinic in downtown St. Paul.

60+ years

When I was 61, I was asked to participate in a PLCO (prostate, lung, colon, ovarian) screening trial sponsored by the National Cancer Institute and administered through a local hospital. I was put into the group that received screening. The tests revealed that although my lungs and ovaries were okay, there were six large polyps in my colon. One of them appeared to be invasive, and the doctor ordered immediate surgery and chemotherapy. I did well for a time, but four years later, a routine check-up revealed more cancer.

Shirlene died at age 66 from colon cancer. She was survived by her husband and unmarried son.

Clarence Robinson

I was born in Nashville, Tennessee, of African-American parents. My parents worked hard, but were poor and struggled to make ends meet for my two older sisters and one older brother. My father and his brother both died of lung cancer in their early 60s.

0–19 years

I was a pretty good student, but I loved music more than anything. I had a natural ear and could play both the guitar and the piano before I was 8. My talent and hard work earned me a spot in a band when I was 12. By the time I was 16, I had quit school to go on the road. That was a good time, but tough—we ate and slept as best we could in those days, often grabbing any food we could find on the road. I also started smoking and drinking when I was 15 and didn't really start taking care of myself until I joined the army at age 18.

20–39 years

I stayed with the army till I was 25, then left and continued with my music, traveling for many years with a couple of the big bands. I didn't go to the doctor much, but, then, I didn't need to go. I always was pretty skinny. I guess living on cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, and women doesn't really promote gaining weight.

I don't think I have any children . . .

40–59 years

I developed a persistent cough in my early 40s but ignored it, figuring it was natural given my age and lifestyle. By now, I had stopped traveling and had settled down in a small apartment in Nashville, working as a back-up musician, mostly on piano. I never married, but with steady work and not traveling, I started eating better and getting more regular sleep.

60+ years

When I was 62, I gave up the lease on my apartment and moved in with my older sister. I had developed mild tremors by now and it was getting harder to play the piano. My cough continued—if anything, it was getting worse. When I was 67, the doctor told me I had mild emphysema. An X-ray at age 69, though, showed significant and inoperable lung cancer.

Clarence died at age 70 of lung cancer. He was survived by two older sisters and one older brother.

<p>Sami Khalafa I was born in San Francisco in 1926, of an African-American father and Japanese mother. My family lived moderately: My parents were not rich, but they provided me with everything I needed and then some. My mother developed Alzheimer disease when she was in her late 60s, but there was no history of cancer in my family.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">0–19 years</p> <p>I was not a great student. Education was important to my mother, however, so I tried very hard. My father died of a heart attack when I was 15, so my mother and I went to live with my mother's sister. Our lifestyle didn't change much—we still ate mostly an Asian diet and our lives revolved around family activities.</p> <p>When World War II started, my mother and her sister were sent to Utah to an internment camp for Japanese nationals living in the United States. I went with my mother and continued my schooling. It was there that I met the young Japanese man who was later to become my husband.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">20–39 years</p> <p>After the war, we moved back to San Francisco, where my mother began to take in laundry to support us. Soon after our return to the city, I was married, and my husband and I worked with my mother to build a good laundry and tailoring business. I was in good health except for a little arthritis from the regular sewing.</p> <p>We had three children, but one died in infancy. We thought it was SIDS, but the doctors later said that it was thalassemia. After my children were born, we began to eat a more “Western” diet of meat and potatoes.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">40–59 years</p> <p>Our children both went to college. Our son became a successful businessman; our daughter went to law school and works as a defense lawyer in New York City. I worked less in the business and spent my time offering workshops at the community center on Japanese culture and language. It was important to me to promote an understanding of Japanese culture among people of all ethnic backgrounds.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">60+ years</p> <p>I was shocked when I was diagnosed with Parkinson disease at age 62. I had been active and healthy all my life, needing little in the way of health care. The Parkinson disease, on the other hand, took years to control. During that time, I saw my doctor regularly. When I was 67, she convinced me to have a sigmoidoscopy (an examination of my colon); it revealed three polyps, one of which had invaded other tissues. They removed the cancer surgically, but my relief at that was clouded by the Parkinson disease, which was getting worse.</p> <p>Sami died at age 69 of Parkinson disease. Her husband and children remember her each year with a special family dinner on her birthday.</p>

Frank Trueblood

I was born in 1930 on a reservation in Wyoming, of Native American parents. I don't know of anyone in my family who had cancer.

0–19 years

I always hated school and did everything I could to avoid going. Our family was poor, but so was everyone else on the reservation, and somehow we got along. I don't remember going to the doctor much as a child, though when I broke my arm, my parents took me to the clinic for treatment.

To get off the reservation, I joined the army in 1947 (I lied about my age). It was in the army that I started drinking and smoking.

20–39 years

I moved back to Wyoming after I was discharged from the army. By then, I had decided that I wanted to be a rancher, and I went back to school on the GI bill to get a degree in agriculture. I did the rodeo circuit for a while when I was in college and after, but after a few more broken bones, I gave it up for full-time ranching.

40–59 years

Life on the ranch was good—I ate well (lots of meat and black coffee) and drank hard with my men. I never married (it was no life for a lady), though I have two kids who live in the city with their mother. It's just as well the kids don't live with me. Way out on the ranch, there's not much for them to do and there're no doctors and only a little local school.

I sometimes worry that I don't have a family to take care of me if I get hurt, but there's really nothing I can do about it. I don't even have health insurance because I can't afford it. I guess it's okay. I don't trust doctors anyway. The last time I saw one, he told me I had to quit drinking because I was developing liver problems. I ignored him; I've known plenty of men who've enjoyed booze all of their lives and still lived to a ripe old age. So what does he know?

60+ years

I developed a little abdominal pain after I passed 60, but I treated it with antacids and it always seemed to settle down afterward. One day, though, when I was 67, I got kicked by a horse and had to go to the hospital. They noticed blood in my stool and insisted that I get a test for colon cancer. Sure enough it was there, and before I knew it, they had cut me open and removed it. I went for chemotherapy for a while, but I'm okay now. Even the doc says I'm probably going to make it. The doc also says he can help me stop drinking. I'm lucky to get a second chance, so maybe I'd better try.

Angela Seader

I was born in 1940 in St. Louis in a middle-class, African-American family. My parents were healthy most of their lives. As far as I know, there was no history of cancer in my family.

0–19 years

I got a basic education but never was much interested in school and quit when I turned 16 to help out at home. I was a healthy child and never went to the doctor much. When I was 19, I got married and moved to Chicago with my husband.

20–39 years

I started to smoke a little after I was married, but I never smoked much (not like my husband who smoked three packs a day). I had three children, though one died at birth. After the birth of my last child, I gave up smoking completely. I guess I figured I inhaled enough smoke with my husband's habit.

My husband had health insurance through his work, so my kids got good health care. My youngest had asthma, so we were at the doctor's often with her.

40–59 years

I went through menopause at about age 55, and because I was concerned about osteoporosis, I went on hormone replacement therapy right away. I didn't have any serious health problems except for occasional upper respiratory infections, a chronic cough, and frequent bronchitis (I was always sure the problem was the secondhand smoke from my husband's cigarettes). I had a mammogram every year and generally tried to keep in shape. I really wanted to live to see my grandchildren!

60+ years

When my husband died of lung cancer (he was 72), I was really glad I quit smoking. But at age 76, the doctor made me get a chest X-ray to see what the cause of my chronic cough was. He discovered a massive tumor in the middle of my left lung. It was too big to operate, but I did have chemotherapy. Eventually, I had to use oxygen in order to breathe easily. Finally, one of my upper respiratory infections turned into pneumonia.

Because of my advanced lung cancer, I decided to refuse treatment with antibiotics.

Angela died three days after being hospitalized with pneumonia. She was survived by six grandchildren.

Sam Major

I was born in downtown Chicago in 1939, of African-American parents. I was the middle child of three. My parents both smoked, but there wasn't any history of cancer in the family.

0–19 years

I was an okay student and finished high school with no problems. I was sick a lot as a child, but mostly it was just little stuff, like colds and the flu and such. Seemed like I was always on antibiotics as a child though.

I was a picky eater. Mostly, I liked really basic food, like my mom's fried chicken and such. For sure, I didn't like eating vegetables!

I started smoking when I was 17, but I never had what you'd call a bad habit. Maybe three-quarters of a pack a day, maybe a pack now and then. Nothing really big.

20–39 years

I moved to Milwaukee when I left home and became a salesman. I got a little college under my belt by going to night school and eventually got to be in charge of auto parts sales in a pretty large district. By then, I was married and had a son, but I didn't see my family too much because I was traveling three and four days each week.

40–59 years

I slowed down a little as I got older and picked up some hobbies—a little wood carving and some reading. I was still traveling, though, which was hard on my wife. How she put up with me for 32 years, I'll never know.

When I was 57, I started feeling pain in my abdomen and finally went to the doctor. He thought it might be a bladder infection and put me on antibiotics, but they didn't work. Finally, they did a test and found a tumor in the lining of my bladder. The tumor was pressing against my urethra, and that was what was causing the pain. They had to take the bladder out and put in a pouch for my urine that I have to drain by hand. They also put me on both chemotherapy and radiation therapy. It was a tough time.

60+ years

I'm 60 now and doing just fine. I still see the oncologist regularly, and he makes sure I'm taking good care of myself. Last year, I even quit smoking, at his insistence. Next thing you know, I'll be eating my vegetables!

Eleanor Hartman

I was born in 1933 in Oregon of white, middle- to upper-class parents. We had a big home outside the city, and I went to a private school just up the lane. There wasn't any history of cancer in my family.

0–19 years

I was an okay student in school—Bs and sometimes a few As. I don't remember having any serious health problems. I had my tonsils out at 8, and I had two broken arms from falling off my horse. Other than that, my childhood was uneventful. We were a pretty traditional family, you know, meat and potatoes for dinner, no smoking, only social drinking, and that not very often.

20–39 years

I went to college right out of high school, but quit after three years to get married. My husband owned a small accounting firm, and I was a housewife. We had one daughter. I raised her and spent the rest of my time volunteering at her school and at the local hospital.

My health was pretty good during these years. I was sometimes tired, but I took iron and tried to get lots of rest. My husband and I didn't go to the doctor much because we were trying to keep our health insurance costs as low as possible. (When you're self-employed, health insurance costs can be very high.)

40–59 years

My daughter got married and moved away, and I filled my time with more volunteer work. By now, my husband's company had grown much larger, and he was busier than ever before. I was glad he was successful, but pretty lonely. I had my gall bladder out when I was 48, but other than that, I had no serious health problems.

60+ years

I started slowing down after I passed 60. My husband wanted to retire, and we both wanted to travel. But I started having abdominal pain, and one day, I noticed that I was bleeding from my rectum. I went to the doctor right away and learned I had pretty advanced colon cancer. Talking to the doctor, I realized that the periodic diarrhea that I had in my late 40s and 50s probably was related to the cancer, but how was I to know? I thought it had to do with losing my gall bladder!

They operated to remove as much of the tumor as possible and placed an internal arterial pump to deliver chemotherapy to my liver to help control the cancer that had spread there. Six months later, a scan showed more tumors in my liver. The doctor told me there is nothing more they can do except try to control the symptoms. She estimates that I have six months to a year to live.

Christopher Bartling

I was born in Memphis in 1920, the second of six children of African-American parents. We were pretty poor in money, but rich in love. My father died of prostate cancer when he was 82.

0–19 years

We were a happy family. We worked hard and played hard and ate well (lots of barbequed beef and pork, heaps of french fries—the works!).

Despite my parents' love and attention, I grew up a little wild. I finished high school, but I started drinking when I was a teenager and never really stopped. I got a job as a laborer on the railroad after I graduated from high school and never worked for anyone else.

20–39 years

I settled down outside of Memphis and had a comfortable life. I still drank pretty heavily on the weekends, but it never interfered with my working. In fact, by now, I was making my own moonshine liquor and handing it out or selling it to my friends. I almost never went to the doctor and probably didn't eat all that well, living alone as I did. My friends used to say I needed a wife to take care of me, but I liked the bachelor's lifestyle.

40–59 years

When my mother died of a heart attack (I was 42 at the time), I felt kind of alone in the world. I had brothers and sisters, but didn't see them often. So one day, I decided to get myself a dog. It was a good thing—the dog kept me company on the weekends and waited patiently all day for me to come home and play with her after work. I never was much for exercise (as a laborer, I figured I got plenty when I worked), but I started taking long walks with the dog. Those were good times. The doctor even says that's probably why my heart is so strong.

60+ years

I retired from the railroad the day I turned 65. Retirement was pleasant—I spent most of my days puttering in my garden and playing with my still and experimenting with different kinds of brews.

They found the cancer when I was 75 years old. I started to lose weight and had some pains in my abdomen, so I went to see the doctor. She said I had pancreatic cancer, pretty far along, and that there wasn't much they could do for me. They wanted to put me in a nursing home, but I told them they could keep their nurses and their treatments: I was going home. I had a good life and if it was time to go, that's the way it was.

Christopher died eight months after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. He was 76.

Jonah Wexler

I was born in 1983 in Los Angeles, of middle-class Caucasian parents. There was no history of cancer in my family.

0–19 years

After a routine pregnancy and delivery, I developed normally for the first few months of my life. My mother took me for regular check-ups and immunizations.

Because I was a first child, I got lots of attention. My caregivers noticed early on that my eyes were different colors (one was blue and the other hazel), but the doctor said not to worry. A few months after my first birthday, my mother noticed my left eye was always red and I seemed to be squinting. In response to her concern, my doctor examined me more closely and sent me to an ophthalmologist for a complete examination. This exam revealed that I had retinoblastoma, a form of cancer that develops inside the eye. I was treated with surgery and radiation and within a few months was pronounced “cured” and “doing fine.”

The rest of my childhood was uneventful.

20–39 years

I went to college right after high school and eventually graduated with a degree in biology. I went on to study genetics in graduate school and finally earned my certification as a genetic counselor. I was married a couple of months afterward, and my wife and I moved to Philadelphia, where I got a job as a genetic counselor.

My wife and I were unable to have children, so we adopted two, a boy and a girl.

40–59 years

After our children went away to college, my wife and I sold our home and moved into an apartment overlooking the river in Philadelphia. I continued my work in genetics, now as director of a major center for genetic counseling and testing. When I counsel parents whose children have retinoblastoma, I often think back to how scary it must have been for my parents to have an infant with cancer. I try to help my clients as much as someone long ago must have helped my parents.

60+ years

Although I’ve enjoyed my career in genetic counseling, I have to admit that I’m looking forward to retirement. I am grateful that I have remained cancer-free since my first bout with it as an infant, but I am not naive: I get regular check-ups and watch for changes that could signal another problem. There’s no doubt in my mind that early detection and treatment is a key part of surviving the disease.

Mary Snyder

I was born in 1950, of Caucasian parents living in a suburb of Chicago. My father was a math teacher in the local high school, and my mother worked as a nurse. There wasn't any history of cancer in my family.

0–19 years

I was an okay student in school, though I never liked it much. My parents divorced when I was 11, and my mother and I moved into the city. She continued working as a nurse, but also went back to school to get her master's degree. She wasn't around very much those days—I guess she was dealing with her own problems—and I was alone a lot. I started hanging out, began smoking and drinking, and finally, in the middle of my junior year, I dropped out of school.

I became sexually active when I was 14, and though I tried to get the guys to use condoms, often they didn't. Because I was scared I'd get pregnant, I finally went to the local clinic and got birth control pills. I still worried though, about what I might catch from a guy.

20–39 years

When I was 21, a girlfriend and I got an apartment together, and I started working as a receptionist at a car dealership. The health plan wasn't real good there, and I only went to the doctor when I needed another prescription for birth control pills. When I was 26, a routine Pap smear showed some abnormal results. When I went back to be checked again, it was normal. I figured the doctor must have messed up and didn't go back for my next check-up.

I finally went for another check-up when I was 33. This time, the results were clear: I had cervical cancer. I was pretty scared and called my mom to ask her about it. She said that this type of cancer has a high survival rate if it is caught early. They removed the cancer and gave me some literature about risk factors associated with cervical cancer. I learned that condoms protect against more than just pregnancy, and promised myself that in the future, I'd always have a supply handy.

40–59 years

Since my experience with cancer, I've become more careful about lots of things in my life. I'm eating a better diet, I stopped smoking, and now the guys I see always wear condoms. I'm even thinking of going back to school.

60+ years

With retirement just around the corner, I've decided to move out of the city back to the little suburb where I was born. I'm thinking I could get a little apartment overlooking the park where my dad and I used to walk the dog, and maybe I can volunteer in the local school.

Shaun O'Malley

I was born of Irish-American parents in 1936 in western Pennsylvania. My dad worked in the steel mills, and my mom ran a little coffee shop. Both my parents had skin cancer before they were 60.

0–19 years

I was a good student in school but always preferred to be outdoors rather than cooped up inside doing homework. I loved any type of sports, especially baseball. When I was in high school, I started working on a construction crew in the summer. Because of my fair skin, I got lots of bad sunburns, but I didn't really care.

20–39 years

I continued working in construction after I finished high school. Soon I was a foreman and making enough money to get married. My wife and I both enjoyed socializing; on Friday nights, I especially enjoyed hanging out in the local bar where I would play darts and watch TV.

We had two kids, both with fair skin and freckles, just like their dad.

40–59 years

I started gaining weight when I was in my 40s, not bad, but a little, and my wife started nagging me about seeing a doctor. When I was 45, to make the wife happy, I finally went for a check-up. All the doctor found was that my blood pressure was a little high. She gave me medication for that and cautioned me to continue getting my exercise.

When I was 57, my wife started nagging me again, this time about some moles and freckles on my neck and shoulders that she thought were suspicious looking. I went back to the doctor again, but this time, she referred me to a dermatologist. Sure enough, my wife was right: Several of them were cancerous and had to be removed.

60+ years

Now that I understand about skin cancer, I go for regular check-ups. So far, I haven't had another problem, but I'm not taking any chances. I also have started nagging my children about wearing sunscreen and about seeing that their children do too.

Paul Ashland

I was born in 1924 in northern Michigan of African-American parents. My older sister had lung cancer when she was in her 60s, but she was a smoker, so we weren't surprised.

0–19 years

We had a normal childhood: My father worked, and my mother stayed home to watch the kids. We ate well—my father especially loved steak and baked potatoes for dinner—but I wasn't overweight because I was active in sports. I started chewing a little when I was 18 (I also started drinking a little—all the guys did it).

20–39 years

After I finished high school, I got a good job with a trucking company and started making long-distance hauls with a partner. I was on the road a lot, so I didn't really develop any hobbies or outside interests. We traveled five days out of seven, and slept and ate on the road. Chewing helped me keep awake on long hauls.

40–59 years

By the time I was in my mid-40s, I started gaining weight. When I developed headaches, I went to the doctor to see what was wrong. He said I had high blood pressure, but said I could control it with diet if I tried to. I lost some weight on the diet he prescribed, and the headaches went away. I'm usually pretty good about sticking to the diet, though I do like a drink or two after a long day on the road.

60+ years

I retired when I was 65. Retirement was hard on me: I was used to traveling and didn't really have friends except for other truckers. To ease my loneliness, I hung out at the terminal and helped load and unload the trucks just for the heck of it.

When I was about 69, I noticed soreness in my mouth and saw something that looked like a large canker sore. I figured it would go away. It didn't. Then I noticed a lump underneath it. It was pretty sore, so I decided to see a doctor. She took a biopsy and found that I had throat cancer. The surgery was tough, and I don't look the same. I don't go out much now, even to the docks. My mouth is dry and sore all the time from the radiation. Between that and the chemotherapy, I really can't eat much and don't taste what I do eat. I continue to lose weight and feel bad most of the time. I really miss seeing the guys from the docks.

Paul died at age 71 of cancer. Twelve of his buddies from the trucking company attended his funeral.

Sharon Washington

I was born in 1938 in rural Vermont of African-American parents. We lived in an expensive neighborhood (my father worked as a chauffeur for a wealthy businessman), but we were always pretty poor.

0–19 years

I was an excellent student in school. My mother taught me to read when I was very young, and I read everything I could get my hands on—historical novels, science fiction, poetry. We couldn't afford to buy many books, but that was okay: There was a little public library just up the road that I could ride my bike to, and I spent lots of happy hours there, reading and dreaming of the day I would have my own library.

When I finished high school, I decided I wanted to become a librarian. With my parents' encouragement, I applied to several colleges. When one accepted me and offered me a job so I could work for my tuition, I moved away from home, promising my folks that one day they'd be proud of me.

20–39 years

It took me six years to get through college because I had to work for my tuition, but it was worth it. After I graduated with a degree in library science, I moved back to New England to be near my folks and to work as a reference librarian in a small college library. I had a good life; though I never married, I stayed active socially and enjoyed gardening, skiing, hiking, and, of course, reading.

40–59 years

In my early 40s, I had some problems with migraines and depression; the doctor prescribed an antidepressant. Other than that, I was in good health till my late 50s.

Just after I turned 58, I started feeling some pain in my abdomen. I ignored it until the bloating got so bad that it was interfering with my gardening. When I went to the doctor, she sent me for tests immediately and discovered that I had ovarian cancer. The oncologist operated, then put me on chemotherapy but said that we caught it so late that I had only a 25 percent chance of recovery.

60+ years

Sharon died at age 61 of ovarian cancer. Her will directed that her large personal library be donated to the little public library in Vermont where she spent so many happy hours as a child.

Leon Sanchez

I was born in 1940, the third of four children of Hispanic parents. My parents were fortunate: They were healthy and independent (they owned their own small farm in western Alabama). The only serious illness in the family was when my father—and then, 20 years later, my older brother—were diagnosed with prostate cancer.

0–19 years

We lived a simple, uncomplicated life. We ate well (lots of meat and vegetables) and played and worked hard. My parents believed in education and insisted that we all finish school, whether we wanted to or not. I was not an honor student, but I got consistent Bs. Math was my best subject and history my worst.

20–39 years

As an adult, I continued working on my father's farm and eventually inherited it from him (my brothers and sister had moved away). I loved the outdoor life—it was hard work, but honest, and it gave me a good feeling to work the land I owned. And it produced a good living for my wife and two children. The only disadvantage of the farm was how far we were away from the town and a doctor (especially if we needed one fast).

40–59 years

After my children moved away (one to college, the other to start his own landscaping business in the suburbs of Birmingham), my wife and I became even more isolated, going into town only once a month or so for supplies. We loved the quiet life on the farm and had few worries.

60+ years

By the time I was 60 or so, I was beginning to feel my age. Finally, I decided it was time to see a doctor for a check-up. I wanted to make sure that I was in okay health, and I wanted to ask him why I was starting to feel pain when I urinated.

The doctor checked me over and pronounced me healthy in all regards except one: Tests revealed that, like my father and older brother before me, I had prostate cancer. Because of my generally good health, they were able to operate, and then they treated it with radiation. I don't keep up much with modern medicine, but whatever they did, it must have worked, because the pain is gone now and I feel better than ever.

Marcy Sterling

I was born in Florida in 1942, the oldest of two girls born to Scandinavian parents. I think my grandmother died of colon cancer, but I don't think anyone else in my family had cancer.

0–19 years

I had a wonderful childhood. My sister and I loved the beach and adored being outdoors—Florida was a great place for an active life. We went sailing almost every weekend. And we spent many, many hours playing on the beach and in the water. Even the sunburns we kept getting (our fair skin never tanned) didn't discourage us—as soon as we were healed, we'd be back outside.

I was a good student and went on to college after high school. My goal was to become an elementary teacher (preferably a kindergarten teacher).

20–39 years

After college, I got a job teaching fourth grade in an elementary school in Miami. After my practice teaching, I had decided that I really enjoyed the older kids more than the younger ones, and fourth to fifth grade seemed just right. I enjoyed teaching, and I think I was pretty good at it. I still loved the outdoors and took every opportunity to be out in the sun, whether during the week or on weekends.

As I got older, I began to watch my health and especially my skin more and more. I read about the link between sunburns and skin cancer and that worried me. I married a physician, and he insisted that I use sunscreen regularly and remember to wear a hat outdoors. I still loved sailing and going to the beach (so did he), but now I was careful to guard myself and our little son against getting burned.

40–59 years

Thanks to my husband's concern, I saw my doctor for annual check-ups and followed her instructions religiously. I developed slightly elevated blood pressure as I aged, but the doctor found a combination of medication and diet that controls it, so I didn't worry about it.

Because of my history of sunburns, she also checked me carefully for any changes in moles or any other signs of skin cancer. Sure enough, when I was 56, she found a few that were beginning to change. Eventually, I had three of the moles removed surgically. Both the oncologist who did the surgery and my regular doctor said that because we caught the skin cancer early, my chances of recovery were very good.

60+ years

My husband and I are both retired now, and tennis, golf, sailing, and the beach are still regular parts of our lives.

Shawna Thomas

I was born in a little town in Louisiana in 1950 of African-American parents. As far as I know, there was no history of cancer in my family.

0–19 years

My father had been in the army before I was born. When he came home, he went to college on the GI bill. After college, he became a history teacher in the local high school. We lived in a small but nice house on the outskirts of town. My mother had a garden and raised chickens, so we ate lots of vegetables and eggs.

I had asthma as a child, so I saw the doctor regularly. Other than that, my childhood was uneventful. I was a good student and dreamed of becoming a doctor myself.

20–39 years

I worked hard in college and, after several tries, was admitted to a medical school for women in Philadelphia. After I finished my training, I returned to Louisiana to work in a clinic near the little town I grew up in. When I was 30, I married a local businessman and we started a family. I had two children.

Because of my medical training, I was very careful about watching my body for any changes. One morning when I was 38, I discovered a spot in my left breast that just didn't feel right. I went immediately to my doctor, and he sent me for further testing. Sure enough, it was a small breast tumor. I had a partial mastectomy (in those days, they often removed more tissue than they had to), followed by chemotherapy.

40–59 years

After I recovered from the cancer, life was different for me. The shock of being ill had caused me to re-evaluate my priorities. I reduced the number of hours I was spending in the clinic, preferring to spend more time at home with my husband and children. I regularly examined my remaining breast tissue and also went for regular cancer check-ups. Fortunately, we had caught the cancer before it spread, and five years after my surgery, I was still cancer-free.

60+ years

My children are grown, and I am retired now, preferring to volunteer instead of work for pay at the small hospital the town finally built. My husband died last year of a stroke, and I decided to offer a scholarship in his name each year to a young person from the area who wants to go on to college. Life is good. After all these years, I have finally lost my fear that the breast cancer will return (but I still see my doctor regularly).