

When skin cancer hits home

It took the death of her spouse before a woman began taking sun protection seriously, but now she hopes to get others motivated less painfully.

By Lynn Rosenberg

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Many people who don't protect themselves from the sun may never get skin cancer. And certainly, you can roll the dice if you wish. But there are things I now do regularly to protect myself from it. I don't have to remember to do them; they're automatic. I was never this careful before my husband died of the disease. That tragedy was my motivator. But maybe I could be your motivator -- if you know a little bit about what my husband, Jerry, went through and what I went through as his wife.

From the moment he was diagnosed to the day he died six years later, I had my heart in my mouth. I was in a quiet panic -- sometimes not so quiet. I did everything I could for him, researching doctors and hospitals and treatments and calling anyone I knew who had experience with skin cancer for advice. I was even careful that we didn't socialize with people who had a cold, which could have compromised his immune system.

The diagnosis was dire from the start. He had ignored what he had seen on his arm; I discovered it one day at a picnic. I knew that in the not-too-distant future, it would take his life. Everything he had to go through was hell for him -- and a different kind of hell for me. That included the false hope -- a new drug, in trials. Could that save him? He tried it. He tried everything.

But he died. And for what? Skin cancer -- a disease that can be prevented and, if not prevented, can be arrested if caught early.

I hope you check yourself once a month after reading this. I hope that, if you see a mole or something that doesn't look quite right, you'll make an appointment with your dermatologist and not let it wait. I hope you take the opportunity my husband didn't take -- to use sunscreen, reapplying it every two hours if you swim or sweat, and to wear a wide-brimmed hat. I hope you don't bake in the sun or at a tanning salon (he never saw the inside of a tanning salon but 3 million people a year do).

In short, I hope you choose to save yourself. Only you can do it.

Since her husband's death, Rosenberg, a resident of Los Angeles, has begun manufacturing and producing UV-protective hats and umbrellas. She can be reached at lynn@soleilchic.com.