

Stand Up To Cancer Co-Founder Laura Ziskin Dies at 61

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Los Angeles, CA - Acclaimed film producer and cancer activist Laura Ziskin died today at her home in Santa Monica at the age of 61. Ziskin, who lived with breast cancer for seven years, is survived by her husband, screenwriter Alvin Sargent, with whom she frequently collaborated; daughter, producer Julia Barry, and son-in-law, writer Eli Dansky.

The family requests that donations be made to Stand Up To Cancer: (via SU2C.org [1] or by mail: Attn: Stand Up To Cancer, c/o The Entertainment Industry Foundation, 1201 West 5th Street., T-700, Los Angeles, CA, 90017.)

Ziskin had a trail-blazing career as a producer and studio executive for 35 years. After her cancer diagnosis, Ziskin embraced an additional, unsought role as a cancer activist, joining with other women in the entertainment and media businesses (including Sherry Lansing, Katie Couric, Rusty Robertson, Sue Schwartz, Ellen Ziffren, Pam Williams, Noreen Fraser, and the Entertainment Industry Foundations Lisa Paulsen and Kathleen Lobb) to co-found Stand Up To Cancer (SU2C). The group marshals the entertainment industry's resources to engage the public in supporting a new approach to cancer research geared toward getting new therapies to patients quickly.

Earlier this year, Ziskin was awarded The Producers Guild of America's Visionary Award for her work as a film producer and her humanitarian efforts in the fight against cancer. Speaking of herself and the other SU2C co-founders, Ziskin said, "We realized we had the potential to make cancer the first-tier issue it needs to be and to impact how cancer is treated by using our skills as producers and quite literally "putting on a show. Stand Up To Cancer is my most important production and I am so touched and proud that the PGA is honoring us for it."

In late 2007, ABC, CBS and NBC committed to donating an hour of time for the first-ever "roadblock" televised fundraising event to proactively combat a major public health threat. Ziskin was executive producer of the initial, historic Stand Up To Cancer telecast in September of 2008, as well as a follow-up one in September, 2010, that aired on those three broadcast networks, FOX, and 13 cable providers. The shows, which featured hundreds of film and TV stars, recording artists, news anchors and sports personalities, were seen in 175 countries.

Donors of every type joined the movement, ranging from individuals all over the country to organizations like Major League Baseball, philanthropists such as Sidney Kimmel, corporations from an array of industries and foundations. Largely in connection with these two televised specials, \$180 million has been pledged to support groundbreaking "translational" cancer research designed to move

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Published on Medical Design Technology (<http://www.mdtmag.com>)

developments from the laboratory phase to new treatments that will benefit people battling cancer in record time. One of Stand Up To Cancers key goals is to foster increased collaboration among cancer researchers at different institutions. Currently, 355 scientists from 55 institutions collaborate, interact and share information through SU2C.

"Laura was the heart and soul of Stand Up To Cancer," said SU2C co-founder Sherry Lansing. "She dreamed big, and attacked every challenge with creativity, passion, perseverance and intelligence." Added SU2C co-founder Katie Couric, "Laura was one of the most courageous people I've ever known. Her fearlessness in the face of this relentless killer inspires everyone on the SU2C team to redouble our efforts to make cancer history."

Nobel Laureate Phillip A. Sharp, Ph.D., Institute Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the David H. Koch Institute for Integrative Cancer Research at MIT, chairs the Stand Up To Cancer Scientific Advisory Committee, which makes the recommendations about which projects to fund. Dr. Sharp said, "Stand Up To Cancers research is about bringing new therapies to the people who need them now. Laura was the "impatient patient and friend, constantly hammering that message home to everyone on the science side of SU2C - from the Scientific Advisory Committee and the American Association for Cancer Research, to the Dream Team members and young Innovative Investigators. We take the mantra Laura and the other co-founders reiterate to us very seriously: that we collaborate in every way possible in order to accelerate the pace of research"; That principle will forever guide our work."

Ziskins Film Career

A California native, Ziskin grew up in the San Fernando Valley. After graduating from the USC School of Cinema-Television in 1973, Ziskin began writing for game shows and then became the film producer/director Jon Peters personal assistant. She quickly became a development executive, moving into feature films with Peters' production company, where she worked on the 1976 remake of *A Star Is Born*, starring Barbra Streisand. In 1978, she was the associate producer of *The Eyes of Laura Mars*.

In 1984, Ziskin partnered with Sally Field in Fogwood Films and produced *Murphy's Romance*, which yielded an Academy Award nomination for James Garner as Best Actor. Ziskins passion for identifying new talent emerged early on. In 1987, she produced *No Way Out*, starring then newcomer Kevin Costner and Gene Hackman. In 1990, she was Executive Producer of *Pretty Woman*, starring Julia Roberts, which remains one of the highest-grossing films in Disney's history.

In 1991, Ziskin produced two films: the comedy hit *What About Bob?*, starring Bill Murray and Richard Dreyfuss, and the critically acclaimed *The Doctor*, starring William Hurt and Christine Lahti. In 1992, Ziskin produced *Hero*, directed by Stephen Frears and featuring Dustin Hoffman, Andy Garcia, and Geena Davis. In 1994, she produced Gus Van Sants *To Die For*, starring Nicole Kidman. Ziskin also

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developed and served as Executive Producer of Columbia Pictures' *As Good As It Gets*, which garnered Academy Awards for stars Jack Nicholson and Helen Hunt.

In 1994, Ziskin was named President of Fox 2000 Pictures, a newly formed feature film division of 20th Century Fox. Under her stewardship, Fox 2000 released such films as *Fight Club*, *Courage Under Fire*, *Anna and the King*, *One Fine Day*, *Inventing the Abbotts*, *Volcano*, *Soul Food*, *Never Been Kissed*, *Anywhere But Here* and *The Thin Red Line*, which garnered seven Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture. In 1996, Fox 2000 also pooled resources with Fox Searchlight to distribute Anthony Minghella's acclaimed *The English Patient*.

Ziskin turned to TV in 2001, executive producing the Norman Jewison-directed HBO Film *Dinner With Friends*, written by Donald Margulies from his Pulitzer Prize-winning play and starring Dennis Quaid, Andie MacDowell, Greg Kinnear and Toni Collette.

In March, 2002, Ziskin became the first woman to solo executive produce the Academy Awards. She held that position again for the 2007 broadcast, instituting the first-ever "Green" Oscars ceremony. The two shows garnered a total of 17 Emmy nominations.

The first of what will be four Spider-Man films for which Ziskin had a producing role hit theaters in 2002. *Spider-Man* and *Spider-Man 2* have grossed more than \$1.5 billion, and *Spider-Man 3* broke box office records worldwide to become the highest-grossing film in Sony's history. At the time of her death, Ziskin and her partner in Laura Ziskin Productions, Pamela Oas Williams, were at work on the fourth installment of the series.

In addition to her work with Stand Up To Cancer, Ziskin was actively involved in issues that concern the environment, health and families, having served on the board of Americans for a Safe Future, the National Council of Jewish Women and Education First.

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Ziskin's feisty spirit and hopeful outlook about the potential of cancer research was evident in a blog she authored just days ago, on National Cancer Survivors Day. Excerpts follow; the full text can be viewed at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/laura-ziskin/stand-up-to-cancer_b_870673.html [2].

All cancer survivors can vividly recall the moment the disease invaded their lives. After three years of repeated tests that always ended with being told everything was fine, I listened to my doctor's chilling voicemail: "You have lobular breast cancer, and you need to come in as soon as possible."

My head was spinning with questions like "What in the world is 'lobular' cancer?" One that's hard to diagnose, it turns out. The tumor's lace-like texture meant there were holes in the mass that a needle could pass through, resulting in "clean" biopsies while cancer lurked — and spread ... to 30 lymph nodes.

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The ensuing seven years have been quite an odyssey, but I am still here, fortunate to count myself among the 28 million cancer survivors worldwide ... And grateful, as one of the co-founders of Stand Up To Cancer, for all the support SU2C has received as we raise funds to help scientists develop better, less toxic treatments and get them to patients quickly.

Feeling fortunate and grateful doesn't mean I'm not mad, though. I'm mad as hell, not only about my years of misdiagnosis, but also that — despite many advances in the fight against breast cancer — the particular type of disease I have is still a challenge to treat. Cancer sucks, and each and every day I have moments of telling it where to go. And today, on National Cancer Survivors Day, I can shout it from the rooftops!

Whether it's to vent your own anger or frustration, or to show support for a loved one, it takes only seconds to "donate" your Facebook status (via <http://livestrong.standup2cancer.org/> [3]) and give cancer a piece of your mind...

While somewhat more crass assertions also readily come to mind, what I really want to say is: "Cancer, you can't survive ME!"

I couldn't have imagined my medical odyssey at its outset, in part, because some of the therapies I've received didn't exist seven years ago. Some, not even seven months ago.

This is an incredibly hopeful time in cancer research, with monumental discoveries occurring at a breathtaking pace ... In 2008, for example, only one cancer genome had been sequenced. Today, more than 100 have been, yielding an exponential increase in the number of targets for which scientists can develop tailored treatments.

All of which will lead to more survivors; more lives to celebrate.

So please join us today, with whatever message you wish to send cancer. Take a stand — for yourself, for a loved one ... for anyone in the fight. Let's make everyone diagnosed with cancer a survivor.

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