

World Drive To Eliminate Cancer Urged

Amber Calistro's Death Spurs Mother To Action

By LINDA BOUVIER
Citizen Feature Writer

When cancer killed 4½-year-old Amber Calistro almost five years ago, her mother began a crusade to stop the dreaded disease from destroying the lives of others. The mission may be impossible, but for Patti Calistro Stiewing who wants to challenge the government, it's a reason for being.

"Most cancer, 80 percent, is caused by the environment," Patti says, based on her extensive reading and discussions. "To me that means 80 percent could be prevented. I see clear the environment, we save the future."

FOUR MAIN POINTS must be addressed, Patti says.

— There must be world attention to the issue of cancer. The focus must not be on just the famous people who get it.

— There must be an honest, objective, impartial, public, funded study on the state of cancer: its causes, detection methods, and all therapies available.

— All information that is gathered should be fed into a computer, through a volunteer company, with scientists and computer analysts studying the output.

— Then, implement a plan of action to prevent cancer.

"All the facilities for action are there, but they're being wasted, in my opinion," Patti says. "If all the information is available to people, then people can make their own choices."

Patti feels the government is the primary roadblock. "If I saw a true objective attitude with the government of the United States, if I saw the lawmakers really do care, I'd be satisfied. They may do studies, but what good is a study? I want to see action."

THE ASSERTIVE CRUSADER, who has been featured in local and national publications and on television, heads for New York City Aug. 30 to appeal to the United Nations. "I hope to meet with a U.N. representative, the mayor, the three networks, and somebody from Sloan-Kettering cancer center. I'm going to walk the streets with my sign which shows Amber alive and well on the front side and what cancer did to her on the back. I'll send out press releases to the media to highlight that I'm trying to help solve this world crisis."

She's furious with Congressman Bruce Morrison. Recently she went west to Washington for a scheduled appointment with the 3rd District Democrat, and when she arrived "he shook my hand and fled, leaving me with his assistant." She had hoped to impress upon the lawmaker the importance of effective legislation addressing the four main points she compiled.

Patti is an artist who has developed a 20-minute slide show detailing Amber's life and death, followed by a lecture on the causes, politics, and solutions of cancer. She shows the audio-visual to students and service organizations. A brochure she designed outlines "The Story of Amber". A month ago she sent her brochure to state legislators, seeking an appointment to address the issues and show the slides. To date, she has received no response. Even her communication to President Reagan has been ignored.

LEGISLATORS TEND to turn a deaf ear to her pleas.



Patti Calistro Stiewing is shown holding a photo, bottom left, of the back sign she wears when she crusades for getting information out to the public on cancer and its causes and solutions. The photo held in back, center, is one of her daughter Amber Calistro, showing the tumor behind her right ear. The other photos show Amber modeling when she was well, and lying down when she was ill. Amber was born Feb. 28, 1976. She died Oct. 30, 1980 following conventional radiation treatment and unconventional immuno-therapy, which uses proteins in the blood to keep the immune system at the optimum level to fight cancer. In August 1979, Patti discovered the lump behind Amber's ear. Doctors diagnosed it as benign. For the next six months, Patti traveled the state trying to convince doctors to perform a biopsy. Finally, in March 1980, rhabdomyosarcoma was diagnosed. "It was hard to put my faith in people who misdiagnosed the cancer," Patti says. Following radiation treatments, Patti opted for a less toxic approach to treatment and went to the Immunology Researching Center, Freeport, Grand Bahamas, for immuno-therapy at the clinic of Lawrence Burton, Ph.D.

(Citizen photo by Barbie Heid)

"They probably think I'm half-crazed, out of mind with grief," Patti says.

Patti is tired of taking the little steps to reach her goal. "I've gotten so much positive feedback since Amber's death. That's one of the reasons why I keep on trying," Patti says. "I've worked through my anger and now I reach out to others because I feel compassion. I still get letters from parents whose kids get cancer. I can give no real consolation. I can't say I've done everything possible. I've come to conclude the only thing I can do is try my best. More children die from cancer than any other disease. When it comes to the children, that's when you have to act."

For a healthier life, Patti believes that consumption of processed foods and red meat must be avoided and use of plastics, synthetic fibers, and chemicals should be reduced.

She advocates controlling pollution and returning to wind and sun energy to save the environment. She and her mate, Gary Stiewing, have altered their lives considerably. They live with his son Todd, 9, and their 3-year-old son, Toby, on a sloop in Milford Harbor. One of Patti's talents is painting children's faces at outings and parties.

OTHER COUNTRIES are not afraid to try different alternatives to combat cancer, Patti notes. "We should be able to make informed decisions, even those that don't have the backing of the American Medical Society."

"We're in a crisis. People don't realize it. When they do realize, they may see alternatives and make intelligent choices. We must look at alternative ways of living: ones that don't kill the environment and the earth."

Those who would like to contact Patti may do so by writing Box 505, Milford 06460.