

Purpose Found in tragedy

By: Alexa White

Jim Zetz was a tough guy. As a contractor, he had his share of injuries and brushed off the pain. But in 2013, Jim experienced intense abdominal pain so great that he agreed to go to urgent care after some urging from his wife, Grace. He was admitted to the hospital where he underwent a battery of tests.

Jim and Grace were devastated to learn that Jim had inoperable, Stage 4 pancreatic cancer. He was sent home with an estimated 3-4 weeks to live and told to put his affairs in order. He beat his estimated departure time by going through chemotherapy, but despite the treatment, he passed away just over nine months later.

The last of Jim and Grace's children still in the home was 11-year-old Josie. All their other children were married, so it was clear that this last daughter would never have the experience of walking down the aisle with her father. But magic comes in many forms... a local photographer staged a fairy tale wedding and father and daughter created beautiful memories for Josie to treasure on that special day somewhere in her future.

The fairy tale wedding was memorialized on a video entitled "Daddy Walk Me Down the Aisle" and received over 2 million views on YouTube. The attention led to the video being featured on the Today Show, ABC News, and in People Magazine. Grace often finds

that people in our valley are familiar with the touching video, but have no idea that the father and daughter featured were their own neighbors.

The Zetz family story brought a lot of attention to pancreatic cancer and touched the hearts of so many. The outpouring of support that followed led Grace to find purpose amidst the tragedy. Grace, who is a nurse with over 20 years of experience, was frustrated that there was no early testing for pancreatic cancer. *"By the time pancreatic cancer is detected, it's too late,"* she explains. *"In fact 75% of those diagnosed with this horrible disease die within six months, and only 7% will survive 5 years or more. It's shocking."*

Jim was not the only member of the Zetz family to fight against pancreatic cancer. For many generations back, members of Jim's maternal side of the family had been stricken and taken by pancreatic cancer—eight members that they knew of. But it wasn't until Jim's passing that the family was told that the cancer was genetic.

The stark reality that the disease may affect one or all of her children was difficult to ignore. Grief-stricken, Grace decided to take action in the hope that others might be spared the sorrow of los-

ing a loved one to pancreatic cancer. With the support of her children, Grace founded the Zetz Family Pancreatic Cancer Research Foundation.

Grace knew that many nonprofits filled different needs within the pancreatic cancer community, and she aimed her efforts at an unfilled need. The Zetz' foundation reached out to Johns Hopkins University with a goal to fund the collecting of blood samples that the research center can use to advance their

progress in finding a cure.

"I was surprised to find that one of the biggest obstacles in developing early detection and finding a cure was that there were so few blood samples for researchers to study," says Grace. *"When Jim and I learned this, he donated two vials of blood to be used for scientific analysis. Although we knew this would do nothing to help him, we felt good knowing it might help to save lives in the future."*

Grieving, raising her daughter,

working her job as a nurse and running the nonprofit can be very overwhelming for Grace at times. *"But then I remember why I took this road,"* she says with strength. *"If I can help one person avoid the pain... It is worth it."*

On a national level, the nonprofit has gotten a lot of attention and support. The family-run foundation was recently recognized by the North American Pancreatic Cancer Alliance as one of the top 20 leaders in pancreatic cancer advocacy.

gorgeous gowns donated by Project Runway and other top designers.

"We are so grateful for the support of all those helping us to create a new future for pancreatic cancer detection and treatment."

~The Zetz Family

If you'd like to help, please consider making a donation to zetzfamilyresearchfund.org or sponsoring a patient sample kit for \$200.



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The Zetz Family Pancreatic Cancer Research Foundation held their first gala on November 7th, welcoming leading medical researchers, celebrities, and other supporters from across the county. The event took place at Pala Casino Spa and Resort and featured a superb four-course dinner, live auction, live entertainment, and a couture fashion show with