



Carolyn Francis

NOMINATED BY HER SISTER, CARLA BAILEY

Carla Bailey was diagnosed with breast cancer and quickly scheduled for surgery in the spring of 2013. She was the mother of five children, and her husband, Jonathon, a colonel in the Army, was in Atlanta and about to be deployed to Iraq.

Those were difficult, stressful times for Carla and her family.

“My sister really stepped up and took on a big part of the burden,” Carla says of twin Carolyn Francis, one of four recipients of the 2020 Stefanie’s Champions Award that recognizes and honors caregivers, the often-unsung heroes of cancer journeys.

Carla and Carolyn are identical twins and have had a special bond since birth. They intuitively seem to know how their other half is feeling and what she needs. “You basically just have to do what has to be done,” says Carolyn, who runs her own business but put her work and personal life on hold for her sister. “I moved into her house and slept in the same bed with her. I was there the whole time to make sure she was taken care of. Carla has a special-needs daughter, and I made sure she was taken care of.”

Carolyn organized a meal train, scheduled family and friends to visit and help clean, provided some financial support and went with Carla to all of her medical appointments, including chemotherapy treatments. Whatever needed to be done, Carolyn made sure it was done.

“I think the hardest part for any caregiver is the feeling of helplessness,” Carolyn says. “You feel like you’re doing



everything you can, but you still feel like you could be doing even more. You can’t take your sister’s pain away, and it’s such a hard journey.”

Because they are identical twins, Carolyn was also concerned about the possibility that the sisters had an inherited genetic mutation that increased breast cancer risk, so Carla underwent genetic testing at the OSUCCC – James. “It was negative, which was a relief, and since we’re identical twins, that meant I was also negative,” Carolyn says. “Since we do have a family history, I get tested regularly and make sure our family members are aware and get tested.”

Carla and Carolyn say their faith was a large part of their shared cancer journey. “Our church is getting together for the virtual Step Up for Stefanie’s Champions run,” Carla says. “We’re such big supporters of the Stefanie Spielman Comprehensive Breast Center. There are other members of our church who have been treated there, and the run is so important for us.”

About five years after her initial diagnosis, Carla felt a lump in her armpit. “They found more cancer,” she says, adding that her breast cancer had metastasized and spread to her brain. She was treated at the Spielman Center again. “My frame of mind is I’m comforted in knowing that my doctors, who are now my friends, care a lot about me and are doing everything they can, and that my twin sister and my husband, who’s retired from the military, are here and doing everything with me.”

Being a caregiver has been an educational experience for Carolyn. “I learned how strong my sister is and all about the beautiful family of breast cancer survivors. We’ve met a lot of people through this journey—some of them still here and some of them not—and to see their strength has made me a champion for all survivors.”

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