

Features

Cancer victim blames himself

By LISA BOONSTÖPPEL-POT
The Herald

Al Rorison blames himself for getting cancer.

For years he smoked two packs of cigarettes a day, worked in a stressful occupation and maintained poor eating habits until a doctor discovered Mr. Rorison had a tumor on his lung.

Mr. Rorison, long-time Georgetown resident and current President of the Cancer Society, always worked in the automobile business. By the late 70's he'd managed to advance to the executive level at a car manufacturing company. His position was director of services which meant a lot of travel.

"It was a stress-filled job," said Mr. Rorison. "I began smoking which was an attempt to relieve the stress. I was always in such a rush, I never paid attention to eating properly."

"The bottom line is, I lost track of looking after my health," he admits.

This went on most of his career. Then, during a routine check-up the company insisted employees take, a tumor was discovered and later verified as malignant.

"It was decided by reputable medical people that the only

course of action would be an operation to remove the tumor and a major part of my lung."

It came as a terrible shock to Mr. Rorison, who had no idea he was sick, let alone stricken with cancer.

"I stopped to think of my life and I realized it was exceptionally good," said Mr. Rorison. "I still had an interesting future ahead of me."

"I was scared I wouldn't have a future or that I would be disabled. I was also worried about the loss to my family should I die or be disabled," he said.

His fears were not unfounded. The Canadian Cancer Society notes, in a pamphlet about lung cancer, this form of cancer is one of the best known and most feared of all diseases. "Today, lung cancer is the leading cause of death from cancer in men and the third leading cause in women," the pamphlet reads. "At least 90 percent of the disease is related to smoking."

Fortunately, Mr. Rorison's fears were never realized. The operation was successful and no traces of cancer were found in his body after the tumor was removed. Ten years later, Mr. Rorison is perfectly healthy, at 71-years of age, and strives to inform

others about cancer and how it can be prevented.

As President of the Halton Hills Unit of the Canadian Cancer Society, he works at supporting the mission of the Society which is "the eradication of cancer and the enhancement of the quality of life of people living with cancer."

"If I hadn't had that check-up, it might have been too late," he said. "People die of cancer today because it wasn't caught in time."

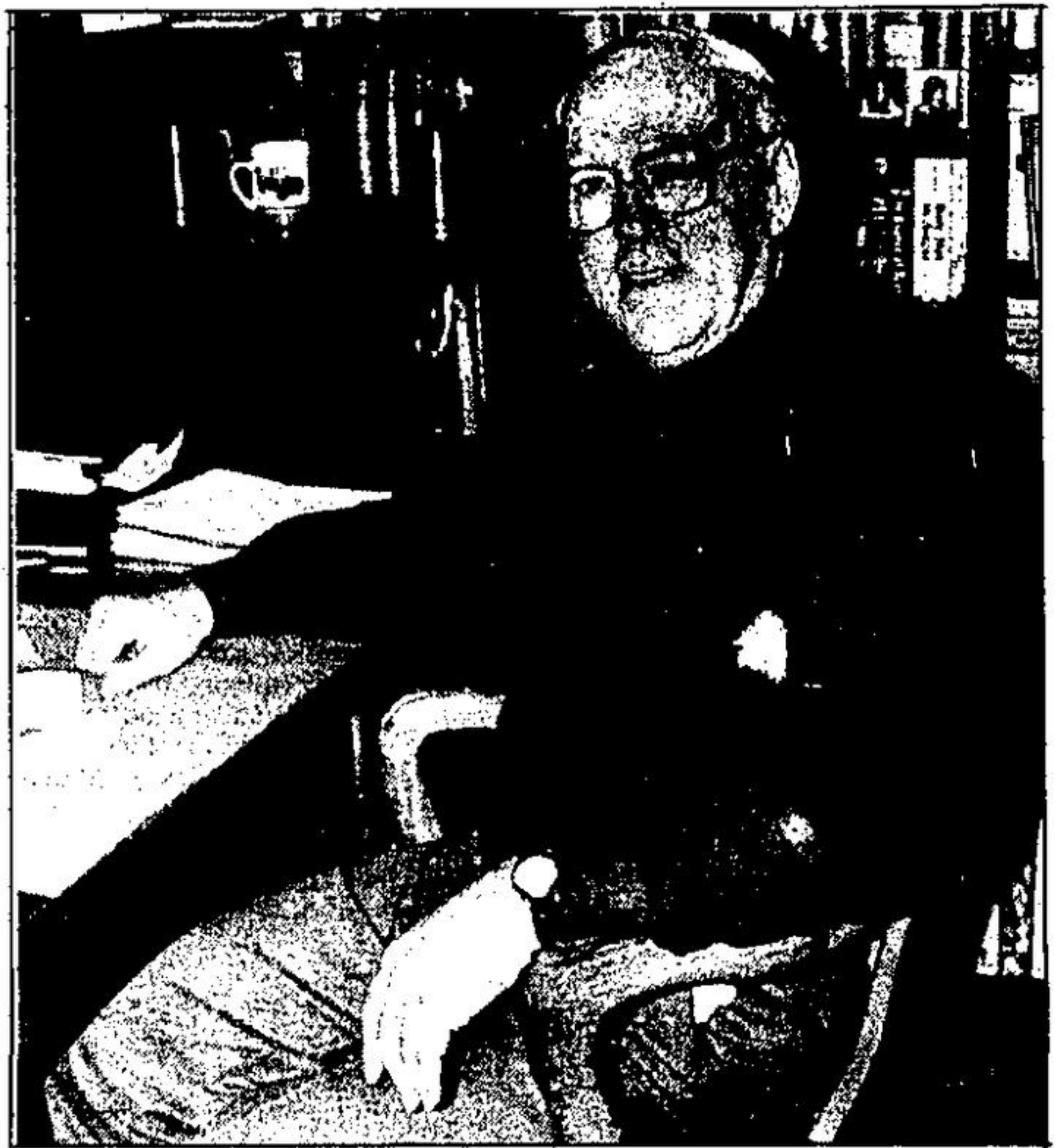
He also stresses the importance of a healthy lifestyle. "The doctors told me it was the combination of pressure from work, heavy smoking and not looking after my health that caused my cancer."

"Cancer has a very serious effect on a person. You're never the same after you've had it," he said.

Personally speaking, Mr. Rorison said cancer ended a successful career.

"I wanted to move higher up the ladder," he said. "The position I was always working towards, I never got, because of cancer."

"I could have gone a lot further in my career and my life if I had taken care of myself."



Ten years after an operation to remove a cancerous tumor on his lung, Georgetown resident Al Rorison, president of the Halton Hills Unit of the Canadian Cancer Society, is healthy and eager to inform people how to reduce the risk of getting cancer. (Herald photo)

Hopes remain high for toddler stricken with cancer

By LISA BOONSTÖPPEL-POT
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Like any other two-year-old, Matthew Lo Turco of Acton has enough energy to wear out any grown-up; a child-like innocence that unquestionably accepts change and an angelic expression that belies his mischievous actions.

If it weren't for his oddly fetching bald head, you would never know this winsome child has cancer.

Matthew has neuro blastoma, cancer of the nervous system. The insidious disease was already spreading inside Matthew's body at birth but it wasn't until he was two-years-old that Matthew was diagnosed with the disease.

"We never noticed anything unusual about Matthew when he

was born," said his mom, Marilyn. "He had a potbelly when he was two but that seemed normal for a child his age."

When Matthew went in for his second check-up, the family doctor gave the boy a thorough examination and found that Matthew's potbelly was due to a tumor on the adrenal gland which was pushing Matthew's kidney forward which was, in turn, extending Matthew's abdomen.

At that time, Marilyn refused to believe her son had cancer. "I convinced myself it was an abscess."

For 10 days, Marilyn and her husband Francis prayed and cried and when the results came in confirming their worst fears, they believed their son would die.

Neither parent had any real understanding of cancer except knowing that many people die from it.

Now, eight months later, they've learned through doctors, medical journals and their son's own ordeal, that many people do survive cancer. They now believe Matthew will live.

In the past several months, the Lo Turco's have fearfully waited in hospital while doctor's removed Matthew's adrenal gland and part of his kidney during six-hour surgery.

They have rejoiced when doctor's told them the surgery was a success. They have also resigned themselves to the fact their trauma wasn't over after traces of cancer cells were found in Matthew's lymph nodes and are now bearing the pain of watching their son endure chemotherapy.

Marilyn explained that because neuro blastoma is a moving type of cancer, meaning it isn't confined to one spot as with a tumor, the traces of cancer cells in her son's

body must be destroyed. Chemotherapy is a treatment where all the body's blood cells, platelets and white cells are destroyed. The cancer cells won't regenerate, blood cells can.

Matthew is now halfway through his 'chemo' treatments. He's already had six sessions which consist of a 10 day stay at The Hospital For Sick Children in Toronto. Each day, during that time, he has a half-hour chemotherapy treatment and is constantly on intravenous to weaken the impact of chemo's side effects.

After his time spent at the hospital, Matthew can come home, for almost two weeks before he goes back for the same treatment.

Although the chemotherapy is destroying the cancer cells, it also makes Matthew very weak since his bodies natural mechanisms against disease are also weakened. Matthew is very susceptible to colds and flus because of this and the family endured a small crisis at Christmas when Matthew became so weak and ill with the flu, he spent a month in hospital recovering. During recovery, chemotherapy treatments are halted because cancer victims need all their strength to overcome the illness.

Despite the operation, cancer cells and treatment, Matthew looks and acts like a healthy young boy.

"He doesn't know he's sick," said Marilyn. "He understands

that he needs to stay in the hospital and that he must have needles, but he doesn't know why."

She said Matthew has a great time at the hospital thanks to special child workers and volunteers who are specially trained to deal with sick children.

They make every effort to ensure Matthew's and other children's stay at the hospital is a fun one.

It hasn't been so easy for Matthew's parents. They now believe Matthew is going to live, but admit the whole ordeal has been "hell."

"It's the worst thing that has ever happened to us," said Marilyn. However, learning about cancer gives her peace, she said.

From reading literature about cancer and through doctors, she knows that because Matthew's cancer didn't spread into his bones and because there are no more tumors, Matthew will recover.

If, in two years, the cancer hasn't returned, the chances are good it will never come back and if in five years Matthew is still cancer free, his parents can truly believe they and Matthew won't have to suffer anymore.

Until then, they'll continue to rely on, what they term, the "tremendous support" from family, friends, the Acton community, the Acton Cancer Society and their belief that cancer can be beaten.



Spending quality time at home in the playroom are (left to right) Marilyn, Matthew and Francis Lo Turco of Acton. Matthew is undergoing chemotherapy treatment to remove the last traces

of cancerous cells left after a malignant tumor was removed from his adrenal gland in September. (Herald photo by Lisa Boonstoppel-Pot)

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