

A spouse reaches out

Husband creates cancer foundation in his wife's name

By EVA LOAYZA
Staff Writer

EAST WINDSOR — Bob Walsh is slowly learning to talk about his wife.

Christina Walsh, wife and mother, died in August after a 2½-year battle with breast cancer.

Running the Christina S. Walsh Breast Cancer Foundation, created this month in Christina's memory, has put him in a position where he has to talk about her, said Walsh. That has had a therapeutic effect.

"The direction we're going in, carrying out her wishes, has allowed me to deal with the pain of losing her," said Walsh, his grief heavy in his voice.

This week and early next month, the Walsh foundation will kick off its first major fund-raising events with benefit rock concerts at the Robert Collins Arena at Brookdale Community College in Lincroft.

Walsh's work with the foundation also has helped him explain things to his daughter, who has started asking very detailed questions about her mother — "amazing for a 3-year-old."

Walsh said he tries to keep it simple and quick so she understands. "I let her know mom is better now and has to be with Jesus in heaven to be better."

The couple, who met through a mutual friend, had been married six years. Christina, a special education teacher, was diagnosed with breast cancer in November 2001, four months after their daughter was born.

The disease became severe and, with Christina's time very short, the couple took their daughter to Disney World this past June.

The experience was bittersweet. The cancer had already invaded her right lung by September 2003. In Florida, they discovered the disease had progressed to her left lung.

Christina spent four days at a Florida hospital and was transported by air ambulance back to New Jersey.

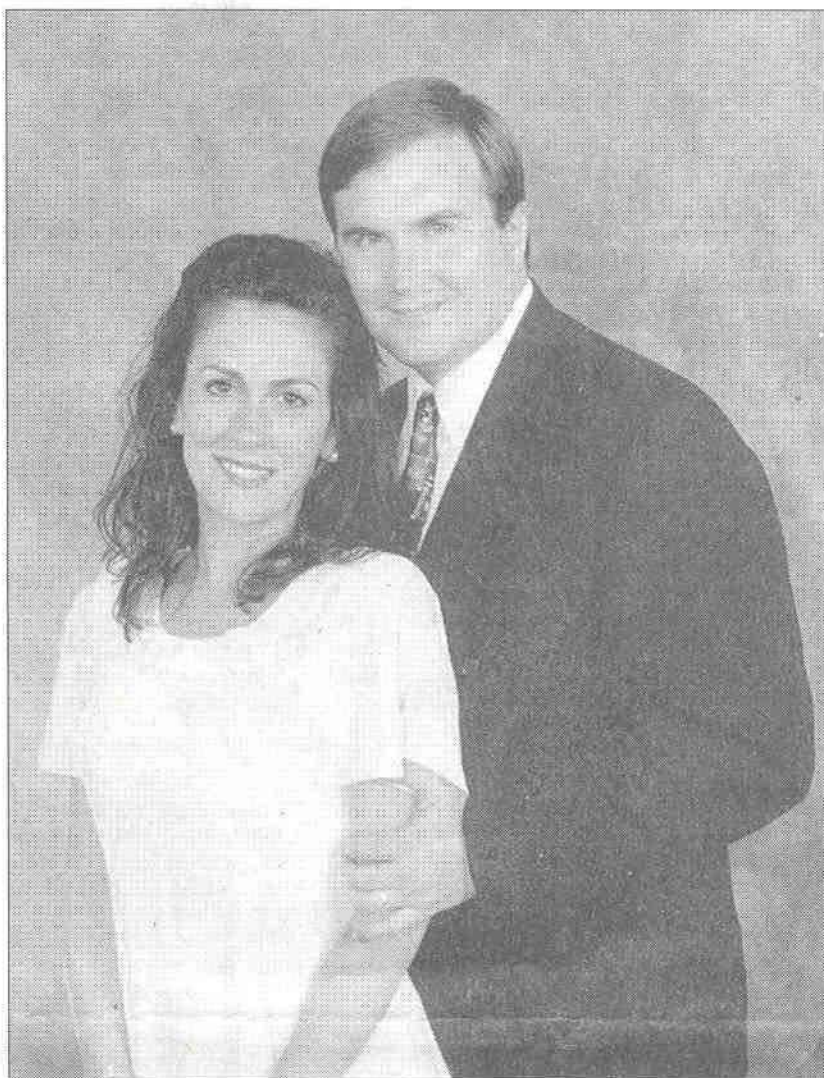
Bob Walsh remembers how she struggled with her breathing during their trip, "but she did all she could for our daughter."

Walsh has plenty of pictures from the vacation, but says, "What sticks with me, is (my daughter) had to see her mother taken out of the hotel on a stretcher and an ambulance."

Walsh said the bill for the ambulance was \$11,000 and was not covered by her insurance. When friends and family members found out, they put together a collection and paid the bill.

Inspired by their generosity, Walsh said Christina decided she wanted to help people in similar situations. He said the two talked about creating a foundation two weeks before she died.

Walsh said there are a lot of necessities not covered by insurance, and hopes through the foundation to start a fund at a hospital to provide financial assistance to breast cancer patients and their families.



Christina and Bob Walsh of East Windsor are seen in a family photo. Christina Walsh died after battling breast cancer and Bob Walsh now runs a foundation named for her.

'The direction we're going in, carrying out her wishes, has allowed me to deal with the pain of losing her.'

Bob Walsh

Walsh foundation funds will be used to help hospitalized patients in need of treatment, medicine, medical tests, telephone service and hospice care. The assistance will also extend to patients' families, who may require meals, parking fees, hotel accommodations and other necessities which would not be covered by insurance.

The foundation's first fund-raising efforts will celebrate one of Christina's loves: music. Radio station 94.3 FM The Point has joined the foundation's efforts and is sponsoring benefit concerts this Sunday and on Saturday, Nov. 13. A portion of the proceeds will go to the foundation.

Sunday's concert, featuring Finger Eleven, with special guests Lynam and Roots of Rebellion, starts at 7 p.m.

The concert on Nov. 13 features Los Lonely Boys and Alex Band and The Calling; it starts at 8 p.m.

Walsh also wants to raise awareness among women, especially younger women who may still think of the disease as something only older women get.

"(There) seems to be a lot of attention to research and testing, mean-

while millions of people are suffering with the disease," said Walsh. "There is no cure. Everyone is at risk. (Christina) had no risk factors of any kind, she had no history, she was in great physical condition, she didn't smoke, drink, do drugs. There is no reason she should've had it, but she did."

Walsh said his wife was a sports fan, and especially enjoyed baseball and football. She also loved aerobics and all types of music. Asked if she would have approved of the bands lined up for the concert, he lets out a small laugh and says she would have.

"She would wake up with a smile on her face, despite the tremendous amount of pain she was in every day. She did not let cancer get in the way of what she wanted to do," said Walsh. "She never gave up hope, she fought to the last hour."

Tickets are \$20 for the concert on Sunday and \$35 for the Nov. 13 concert. Tickets may be purchased at Jacks Music Shoppe, 30 Broad St., Red Bank; Brookdale Student Activities Department; online at www.ticketweb.com or by phone (866) 468-7619. For more information, call (732) 224-2639.