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REMEMBERING KRISTEN HARTLAND

West University dad hopes memorial fund aids others

Wife succumbed to breast cancer on June 7 after three-year battle

By **KIM HUGHES**
Chronicle Correspondent

West University Place resident David Hartland is still in shock over the death of his 28-year-old wife Kristen from breast cancer.

But he's honored her spirit will live on through their 21-month-old son Sam, and the Kristen Hartland Memorial Fund at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, 1515 Holcombe Blvd.

The fund was established to help with research on pregnant women with breast cancer.

Kristen was 26 years old when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2002. David said despite an initially successful six rounds of chemotherapy, the tumors started growing back.

On New Year's Eve 2002, David said Kristen underwent an emergency mastectomy, followed by radiation.

"That seemed to work real well and, in fact, they classified her as 'no evidence of disease,' " David said. "So things were good, we were moving on, we were done with cancer, we were ready to get on with our lives."

David and Kristen decided to try having a baby and to their surprise, she became pregnant immediately.

"That was a miracle in itself, because chemotherapy wreaks havoc on the reproductive system," David said.

About six months into the pregnancy, Kristen's persistent shoulder pain brought her to an emergency room for treatment.

That's when the couple learned the cancer was back and had spread to her liver.

"Scans showed there was so much cancer in her liver that it was swollen to twice its normal size," David said. "That and the baby were pushing up on her diaphragm and referring pain to her shoulder. We fell



Dave Rossman / For the Chronicle
David Hartland, 28, and his son Sam, 21 months, look at photographs of Hartland's late wife Kristen, who passed away June 7 from breast cancer.

RESOURCES

RESEARCH HELP

The Kristen Hartland Memorial Fund was set up by David and Kristen Hartlands' friends, West University residents Larry and Alecia Lawyer, to help with research on pregnant women with breast cancer at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, 1515 Holcombe Blvd.

To donate, call the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center at 1-800-525-5841 or visit the Web site at www.kristenhartland.com.

apart. They gave her eight weeks to live."

Immediate treatment

David said doctors didn't know if they should try to take the baby early, so they could begin treating Kristen immediately.

"But Kristen wanted to hold on to the baby as long as she could, even if it was just another eight weeks gestation," David said. "She was thinking of the baby."

Kristen began treatment while still pregnant, under the watchful eye of Dr. Richard Theriault, an M.D. Anderson Cancer Center doctor who specializes in the treatment of pregnant women with breast cancer.

As a result, Sam Hartland was born healthy on Nov. 18, 2003. And Kristen also seemed to be doing well.

"Kristen's health began to improve and by January (2004) she was flirting with remission," David said. "There were really no visible tumors left."

But tumors started to appear again in Kristen's liver last fall. By April, tumors appeared in her brain. Kristen died June 7.

"I believe that if it wasn't for Dr. Theriault and his work, probably Kristen would not have been around for two more years and Sam would be less likely to be here," David said.

Theriault, a professor in the department of breast/medical oncology, said he sees far more cases like Kristen's than he would like.

"In the statistics, we see that one in 3,000 or three in 10,000 women may be pregnant with breast cancer," Theriault said. "The goal is to treat mom without harming the baby. You have to be very cautious. Surgery is safe, but the thing that is most concerning is chemotherapy. We do it after the first trimester if it appears to be relatively safe."

Theriault said his area of study is to look at the outcome of these babies and their mothers, long-term.

'A wonderful gift'

"We've been doing research without funding, so we are very humbled and grateful for such a wonderful gift on behalf of Kristen," Theriault said.

The fund was set up by David and Kristen's friends, West University residents Larry and Alecia Lawyer.

"The funds will go directly to the doctor's research and efforts for pregnant women with cancer," Larry Lawyer said. "This is a real tangible way to remember Kristen. People wanted to unite and do something. They felt so frustrated that Sam is left without a mother."

Meanwhile, David said he has been taking time off work to raise Sam, as Kristen would have wanted.

"When it's just me and him in the house, he goes around looking for her, goes to our room to see if she's in bed," David said. "I just walk around the house with him and let him see that it's just him and me now."
