

Debbie Zelman, founder of Debbie's Dream Foundation, loses battle with stomach cancer



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By **Rafael Olmeda**
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The news was grim.

Doctors told Fort Lauderdale lawyer Debbie Zelman that she had incurable stomach cancer. She was in stage IV. She had a 50 percent chance of surviving one year, and a one in 25 chance of surviving more than five.

That was nearly a decade ago.

Zelman, whose battle prompted her to start the Debbie's Dream Foundation to raise awareness and fund research to combat the disease, died early Saturday morning at Westside Regional Hospital in Plantation. She was 50.

"During Debbie's long struggle with stomach cancer, I never heard a negative or defeatist word from her," said Madelyn Zelman, Debbie's mother. "Her positive attitude and determination to fund research to find a cure and to help others fighting this deadly disease while undergoing her own treatment should be inspirational to all."

Her death came a little over three months after her last public appearance, which was at a birthday celebration at the Bonaventure resort in Weston. The event doubled as a fundraiser, netting \$80,000 for the foundation.

"Debbie inspired us every day with her unparalleled strength and determination," said Andrea Eidelman, executive director of the foundation. "No words can sufficiently express our sorrow at Debbie's death. We lost our hero today and we will honor her memory by dedicating ourselves to continuing the work to which she was so passionately devoted"

"When Debbie was first diagnosed, there were really no resources out there at all for somebody who had stomach cancer," said longtime friend Jennifer Kapp. "It was a terribly hopeless feeling for her."

Zelman, who lived in Davie, founded Debbie's Dream with the goal of "aggressively funding research and putting the money into progressive and cutting edge treatments," said Kapp, who was the foundation's first vice president from 2009 to 2012.

Zelman was born in Brooklyn but grew up in Plantation. She received her law degree from the University of Miami in 1992.

She is survived by her husband Dr. Andrew Guttman, her three children, twins Zachary and Rachel Guttman (age 19), and Sarah Guttman (age 12), her parents Madelyn and Dr. Donald Zelman, her two sisters Tammy Zelman Caress and Shari Zelman Sprague.

A funeral service is scheduled for 11 a.m. Dec. 26, at Temple Kol Ami Emanu-el, 8200 Peters Road in Plantation.

In lieu of flowers, donations are being accepted at the Debbie's Dream Foundation, 2 S. University Drive, Suite 326, Plantation, FL, 33324. The organization's website is www.debbiesdream.org.

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