

# Md. mother holds 22-hour vigil outside White House to honor daughter, other cancer victims

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WASHINGTON — Forty years after then-President Richard Nixon declared war on cancer, a Maryland woman whose daughter died from the disease in 1980 is staging a vigil at the White House in hopes of persuading another president to keep up the fight.

Patti DiMiceli, of Annapolis, Md., held a 22-hour vigil outside the executive mansion Thursday and Friday to honor the 22 million people she said have died from cancer in the past four decades. Her vigil also honors their loved ones and those who have worked over the years to find a cure for the disease. The victims include her 4-year-old daughter, Amber Calistro, who died in 1980 from cancer of the connective tissues.

“If I have the power to give them hope, to help them overcome and understand and take this horrible tragedy and transform it into something beautiful and good and helpful, I’m going to do it,” she said. “I believe we have made progress, but not enough, for sure.”

Cancer is the nation’s second-leading cause of death after heart disease — killing about 500,000 people a year. The nation’s overall death rate from cancer has dropped 18 percent since the early 1990s, according to the American Society of Clinical Oncology. Today, two out of three people diagnosed with cancer live at least five years, up from about one of two in the 1970s, according to the ASCO.

Progress has been made, especially against childhood cancer. In 1975, fewer than half of children with cancer survived for five or more years; today, 80 percent do, according to the American Cancer Society.

DiMiceli has written a book, “Embrace The Angel,” about her life and experience with her daughter’s cancer. A tumor grew to the size of a baseball on the back of Amber’s head before she fell into a coma and died on DiMiceli’s 27th birthday.

DiMiceli held a similar vigil in 1997. This time, she said she expected family and supporters to join her at times throughout the vigil, but added she’d likely walk mostly alone during for the 22 hours.

“When you see me, I represent millions of others,” she said. “There are millions of people suffering out there. So it is for them that I walk.”

Online: <http://www.embracetheangel.com>

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( Carolyn Kaster / Associated Press ) - Patti DiMiceli of Annapolis, Md., walks with a sign in front of the White House early, Friday, Dec. 23, 2011, in Washington, to honor the 22 million people who have died of cancer forty years after President Nixon declared war on the disease.