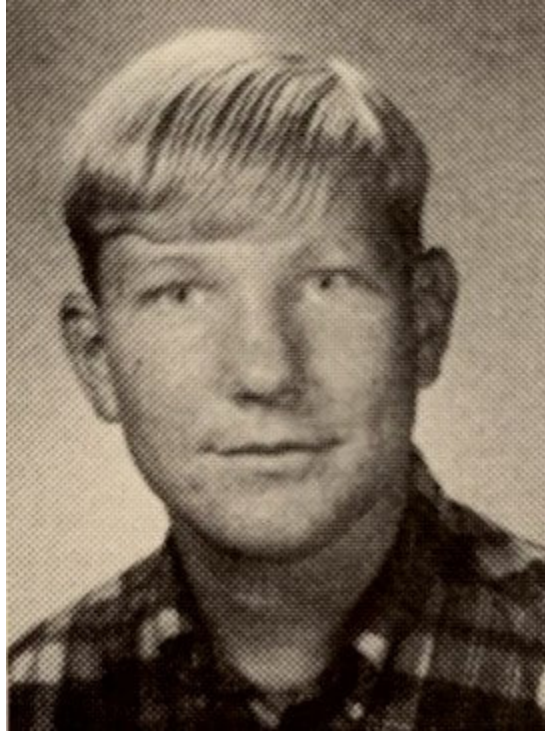


## The Path to Angel

Celebrating 20 years of Angel Foundation.

*A tribute to perseverance, passion, and one so loved,  
who was lost so many years ago.*



Jim Deming

### **The summer of '64 and Jim. A beginning.**

*All things were possible until that summer. After it, there was only one way, one path.* They'd known each other forever. Jim lived down the block from Mark. Margie was dating Jim.

They did everything together, all the time.

Jim was such a great guy. He was a star hockey and football player. He was engaging and had such a great personality.

"He was my best friend, but he was also my idol."

### **- Mark Sborov**

Life was normal, as it usually is when you're 16 and enjoying the summer with your friends; when your biggest concern is how late your parents will let you stay up.

Then Jim got sick.

He started getting weaker and weaker. Soon, he wasn't strong enough to do the things they usually did on a summer day. Mark and Margie started doing things that weren't

strenuous for Jim, just so they could all still 'hang out.'

Jim's parents took him to the University of Minnesota to find out what was wrong with their son. He was diagnosed with acute leukemia.

*Today, this condition could be treated - a stem cell transplant, chemotherapy, maybe radiation, and your chances are pretty good. But in the mid-60s, this was a death sentence.*

Jim's parents knew this. They decided not to tell their son that he was dying. Instead, they told him he was sick and was getting weaker because of a blood disorder. They told Mark and Margie and their parents the truth, though: that Jim had leukemia. Their parents understood that to mean that Jim would die; Mark and Margie, however, just understood that their friend was sick and assumed he'd get better.

***Nobody explained to them that Jim would die.***



"His parents didn't know how to tell him," Margie recalls. "They wanted him to live as long as he could and be comfortable. They just couldn't wrap themselves around their son's condition, so they did the best they could by *not* telling him. That was common in those days – not to talk about the dreaded 'C' word. So, there was this secret, and it was hard not to tell him, not to say something - for everybody.

"It was hard on our parents. My mom would say to me many years later, when I was an adult, that not telling Jim the truth was the most difficult thing she ever went through. She watched me knit a sweater for him that Christmas, and it broke her heart because she knew that he would never live to wear it.

"That whole episode - *all the secrecy* - was such a burden to her because Jim was over all the time. He was as white as a ghost, because the leukemia was killing his red blood cells. My mom knew what was happening to him, but I didn't see it . . . or I didn't understand it. I thought he would get better.

*"I was just a teenager and felt we were all invincible."*

### **Winter and Jim**

Summer turned into fall, then into winter, and Jim's condition worsened. He lived through Christmas, then into the New Year.

Towards the end of his life, as he weakened, his parents brought him to the University of Minnesota for end-of-life care. He lived there for the final 3 months of his life. Mark and Margie weren't allowed to visit their friend during this time and wouldn't understand until many years later why his parents didn't allow them to visit. They were never told about his terminal condition; even more heartbreaking, they were never able to say goodbye to their best friend before he died.

**Jim Deming died in February of 1965.**



"I'll never forget the day he died," Margie recalls. "I was lying in bed and something woke me up. I just knew something had happened. My mom walked into my bedroom and told me that Jim had passed away in the night. It's been over 50 years, but it still feels like it just happened yesterday.

"The trauma of that experience - the three of us had been so close. We did everything together. We were together every day! When Jim died, Mark and I had no one to talk to about his death, other than to each other. Back then, nobody talked about death or cancer - there was no way to cope with it. Our parents would tell us to just go to parties, see our friends, and not to dwell on *it*.

"Over time, Mark and I grew closer, through our grief, through the emotions we shared. Nobody else understood it – the grief of losing one so young, so loved. That sharing of emotions evolved into so much more.

"Mark was nominated homecoming king that fall of our senior year in high school, and he asked me to the dance."

From the experience - the loss, the grief - *something* stayed with them.  
*It never left. They were changed.*

They were on a path.



"I truly believe it was a seed planted by God," Margie says today. "I just can't help but believe in my heart that our lives were destined to do something related to cancer; something to honor Jim.

"Some people believe they have a grand purpose for their lives; something that is bigger than they are. I wanted people to talk about their cancer, to share their innermost thoughts and emotions, to get them to open up and share that burden."

We were never able to say goodbye to Jim, and nobody wanted to talk about his death after he died."

**- Mark Sborov**



"Losing Jim had such a great impact on our lives," recalls Mark. "It changed my life. Because of that experience, I decided to go into medicine. Margie felt the same. Part of the struggles she had was losing Jim and not being able to talk to him before he died; not being able to talk to anybody about Jim's cancer or his death.

"There wasn't any support for cancer at that time. It was sort of like: he's gone now, and we have to move on. I struggled with that and I still struggle with it today.

"We talked a lot about cancer and loss and our emotions, Margie and I. We became close.

*"And the rest is history."*

#### **Mark and Margie were married four years later**

Mark took experience - *that calling* - and found his purpose in medicine, in oncology - in healing people who had cancer. To Margie, it was always about sharing: communicating those deep feelings we all have.

Mark went to medical school. After graduation, he was still searching for the type of medicine to specialize in. Cancer had strong, difficult memories for him. He had a certain amount of fear of cancer because of his experience with Jim.

"I remember early on, when I was interning, when I was doing rotations in different disciplines, and I really didn't know what I wanted to specialize in. That first time I worked oncology was difficult for me. A patient was dying from colon cancer, and it was metastatic in the liver. He was deeply jaundiced. The only thing he could do was lie in bed and listen to the police band radio.

"That was my first introduction to cancer as a doctor. It was very emotional. It brought back so many memories of Jim and what he went through at the end of his life. I thought that maybe oncology wasn't for me; maybe I couldn't take it.

"But deep down, I knew I had this connection to cancer because of Jim."

When I was an oncology fellow, I found Jim's medical chart. He had something called sub-acute Myelogenous Leukemia. He lived nine months with it. He was treated with a steroid and another medication, and he went into remission for a short time. But then it came back.

"The three months before he died, when his parents wouldn't let us see him, he had been on high doses of Decadron. I'm sure at the end of his life he was not able to get out of bed. I know now why his parents didn't want us to see him. They were trying to save him. Trying to save us.

"But we didn't know that at the time, and nobody told us."

**- Mark Sborov**



"Now, as a physician, I know what Jim went through at the end of his life; I can guess what he felt like as he got weaker in the hospital. Dying. I thought a lot of Jim over the years.

"I know now what his parents might have been feeling, too.

"Oncology and cancer became a passion for me. It wasn't something I feared or hated anymore. To be able to talk to patients about their experiences: living with cancer, dying with cancer. To be able to sit down with patients and really connect with them, help them, be with them. That was the reason I chose oncology and did what I did."



"I didn't know what it was," Margie recalls. "I'd been volunteering at cancer support groups at the University of Minnesota when Mark was going through training. I just felt this happiness, fulfillment, listening to the stories and listening to the people - the patients talk. I was comfortable doing that, where so many people might not have been.

"When Mark started working at Minnesota Oncology years later, we talked about what was missing in the practice. We realized that while the doctors were serving the medical needs of their patients, nobody was serving the patients' non-medical needs. We realized that they needed someone who would listen to their stories, help them find education on their cancer and their treatments, someone who would lend an ear, someone who would help them work through their feelings.

"That was it! I created a patient advocacy program at Minnesota Oncology. Soon after, I was speaking to patients; I was being called into the exam room, just to talk, just to hear how they felt. I quickly found out that people were really struggling financially, when they were told they couldn't work for six months while they were on treatment; many patients were going without meals; cutting their medications in half to save money; going late on their rent payments so they could pay for other medical expenses that they couldn't live without.

***"What do you do when someone tells you they don't have money for food for dinner? It's heartbreaking!"***

Margie saw their financial struggles, but when she looked around the community for resources to fill those needs, she couldn't find anything.

"I was frustrated. It was so clear patients needed financial relief. I went door-to-door and collected \$20 from the doctors at the practice, to give to the patients. I had to do *something*."

For years, she kept looking for resources and continued to hear of patients' financial needs.

“Mark and I kept talking about what we could do to help,” Margie recalls. “He would see the frustration on his patients’ faces every day. The nurses and other doctors felt the same as we did, but there was nothing we could do. People were really struggling!”

**An idea that needed an advocate**



Margie's idea was to expand the services offered by the patient advocacy group and create a nonprofit organization that would help cancer patients pay for essential services and provide counseling for them.



I knew it was a good idea, and it wasn't a slam dunk with the Minnesota Oncology board.

**- Mark Sborov**





“I proposed the idea to the then director at Minnesota Oncology, Larry Gunderson, not really thinking it would happen. To my surprise, he said, ‘that’s a great idea – and you’re going to run it.’”

Margie had never run an organization. She’d never dealt with fundraisers or employees. Hers had been that of the loving counselor - the person who would talk to patients and help them with their day-to-day needs, help to bring their feelings and emotions out into the light.

“I’m just a person with a lot of passion.

“I knew it was a great idea, but somebody else had to do it. I didn’t have the experience, the training to build a nonprofit,” she laughs.

“That was 20 years ago!”



**It was daunting, intimidating. But she was ready!**

The ideas for the nonprofit had been ruminating for years. She'd discussed them with Mark so many times. They'd talked about so many things that the organization could offer cancer patients.

She'd been over the ideas with the doctors and nurses in the hallways of the growing Minnesota Oncology practice.

*But she'd always been in the background, talking to patients one-on-one, listening to their fears and hopes, and showing them there was so much more than their deadly diseases.*

But she also knew deep down that she was the one who had to do it - to take the helm.

She was ready to lead Angel Foundation.

**The founding of Angel**

*Help when cancer strikes*

**angel**  
foundation

Minnesota Oncology agreed to help launch Angel Foundation with the mission to ease the financial burden of cancer patients. They provided the new nonprofit with \$60,000, and Margie got to work.

"The excitement grew," Margie continues. "The doctors at the practice were telling me they had patients who could really use our services right away. This was going to be a reality!"

While she was leading Angel Foundation, Margie was also running a second support group whose function was to counsel children who had a parent with cancer. In 2004, she discovered that the group would run out of funding at the end of that year. She approached the Angel Foundation board of directors with the proposal to create a children's program. The board agreed and in 2005, Angel Foundation began the 'Facing Cancer Together' program.

*"Kids are the forgotten ones in the cancer experience," says Margie. "Especially early on, when mom and dad are learning about cancer and what's going to happen to them and their family. People worry about the patient and the caregiver - the adults - and the children's feelings are sometimes overlooked. There's not enough time and energy for people to worry about the kids."*

"Through programs offered by 'Facing Cancer Together,' we help the kids understand how important they are in the family and that sometimes other people will need to help them. All these kids really want is just a normal life. A lot of times, they don't know how to cope with all the trauma that cancer brings into their lives. Through our programs, we just try to help them understand it and provide the tools to cope."



*As part of the 'Facing Cancer Together' program, Angel Foundation also holds a yearly camp for children and teens called Camp Angel. At Camp Angel, kids are able to be kids, spending time with other kids their own age and sharing their cancer experiences.*

"One story from Camp Angel that always comes back to me is a story about a little girl who, when asked what she had learned at the camp, told us that she learned that she didn't cause her mommy's cancer. Our programs give these kids a chance to talk to other kids

who are the same age, and share similar stories, similar experiences, and with some guided learning, hopefully discover that maybe they're not alone."

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Tie Dye activity at Camp Angel



Child medical play activity through Facing Cancer Together



Angel Pack

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Angel Foundation hasn't slowed down over the years. They recently launched a program called Financial Cancer Care that assists families manage their finances during the stress of cancer, by teaming them with certified financial professionals.



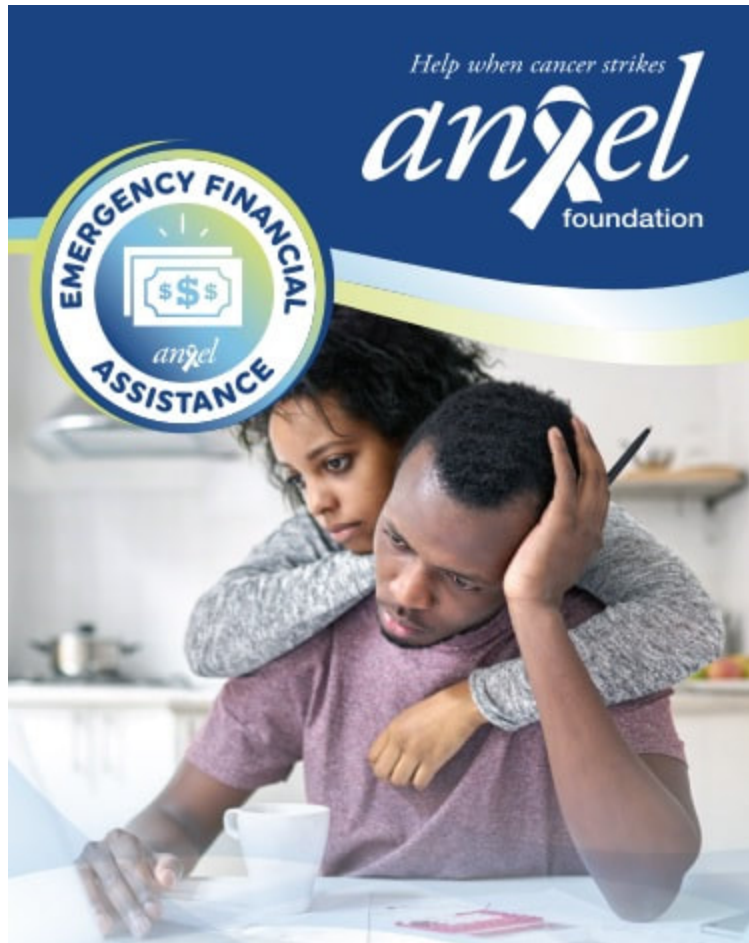
“First, you worry about the cancer: the treatments, the health aspects of it all. Then, you realize that someone in the house might not be able to work and you think about the financial aspects of it, like social security disability and paying bills. We started hearing from patients who were cashing out their IRAs or selling their homes, out of desperation. We hope that with this new program, we can help them all the way through the journey, for their financial, emotional, and social support,” says Margie.



Financial Cancer Care Program

"The Financial Cancer Care Program is a great complement to Angel's Emergency Financial Assistance Program, which Angel was founded on in 2001. While the Emergency Financial Assistance Program provides families with immediate financial assistance grants for basic non medical living expenses, Angel's Financial Cancer Care program offers families the opportunity to plan their financial future with the help of certified financial professionals."





The Emergency Financial Assistance Program

“Because of Jim, we’ve been on this path to help people with cancer. Margie accepted that our legacy to Jim was to build a foundation that helps people communicate, bringing their issues into the open. She has this overwhelming passion to build and create this organization for the right reasons.

"She just grew into her leadership position because of her dedication to cancer patients. She saw a clear path for what she wanted to accomplish in Jim’s name. Just like I accomplished what I’ve done in Jim’s name. So, it very much comes back to our dedication to our friend, Jim."

**- Mark Sborov**

**Margie, living her words**

In 2014, cancer struck Mark and Margie again.

On December 14, 2014, Margie was diagnosed with breast cancer.

“It started with a lump in my breast,” Margie begins. “Mark knew right away that I should have it looked at. I went in, the doctor didn’t think it was anything, but he also wanted a biopsy.



“Two days later, I was working in my home office and heard someone come in. It was strange because nobody was supposed to be home. Then Mark came in room, in the middle of the day, and told me I had breast cancer.”



“I was sitting in a board meeting with Minnesota Oncology, and I got a phone call from the surgeon who told me it was malignant,” recalls Mark. “I left the meeting without saying anything and drove home. Margie was downstairs in her office. I walked downstairs and I looked at her and said, ‘it’s malignant.’”



“We went upstairs and sat on the couch. I was crying. He wanted to call the kids and let them know. He wasn’t crying, so he made the call to our son in Utah, who was doing his medical residency. When Doug answered, Mark couldn’t talk – he was crying, so he handed the phone to me.

“Then we had to make that same call to all of our kids, sisters, brothers, grandkids, and so on,” Margie recalls.



“I talk to people about their cancer in my practice,” Mark begins. “I give them their diagnosis and prognosis. Suddenly, I’m looking at Margie and it wasn’t the same. I cried. We hugged each other. She was amazing. She was so strong. She took the news in stride. She was so strong. That’s how she has been throughout the whole thing.”

*It was a reality check, but it was also a chance to put her years of counseling others to be*

*open about their cancer into practice with her own tragedy.*

“It was a wakeup call for me,” Margie begins. “I told my family that I was going to talk openly about it, just like I encourage so many other people with cancer to do. I was going to be open, honest about everything I was going through.”

“December is still an emotional month,” Margie continues. “It’s always emotional when you’re diagnosed with cancer. You remember the moment, the day, you got the news. You remember how you felt. You remember where you were exactly. You remember everything. I still get chills down my back when I think about that moment when Mark came in and told me I had cancer.

“Telling my adult children was really difficult. I needed to tell my grandchildren as well. At Angel, we always tell parents to be open and honest with children about cancer. I wanted to be open with my grandchildren.

“They’re resilient, as long as you’re open and honest with them. They’ll bounce back.

“I remember I was driving in the car with them, and I told them that I had cancer. The first thing out of my 10-year-old granddaughter was: ‘grandma, are you going to die?’ I told her I wasn’t going to die right now, but if anything changes, I will be sure to tell them. Then she just went on to the next thing, asking me what time her soccer game was.

“It was that brief. That real. The trust was there, and the kids moved on. Of course, they were worried about me, but we were able to cope and talk about it as a family.”



“Just going through this experience, having cancer myself, living with the stress of treatment and surgery; not knowing how it is going to end up; not knowing, year after year, if it’s going to come back - it helps me put myself in the shoes of so many others who have

cancer. They have that constant worry and concern, always wondering what is going to happen with their bodies.

"It strengthens my resolve to do all I can to raise the money that will ease the financial and emotional stresses for families that come to us for help."



**Mark**

"It was so different for Mark as a caregiver, taking care of me, worrying about me; that was hard on him. As a doctor, he always had some control. As a caregiver, he had no control.

"Now, he needed to be emotional, because we were so connected. He wanted me to open up - to talk about it. He told me that we were going to sit down for 10 minutes a day and talk about this cancer. We both did that. We never wavered. We still do that.

"We'd talk. Sometimes we'd cry. I cried. He cried, or we would just talk about our feelings. That was really important for us."



"Occasionally, I would go off the deep end," Mark continues. "And I'd wonder: what if her cancer came back? What if her life was shortened? What would I do? I'd talk to her about it and she was ok with it, she was at peace with it.

"That provided a great deal of comfort to me."

**Her cancer hasn't returned.**

*"Jim is still very much with us today. Everything we've done is a result of our relationship with Jim, and everything he went through with cancer," says Margie.*



Mark and I are in awe of how this organization has grown from a dream into an entity that has accomplished so much and helped so many people. We are excited for Angel's future and all that is yet to come in the next 20 years."

**- Margie Sborov**



Later, when she actually started Angel Foundation and it became such a success, she would come to me and we would talk. She would tell me what Angel was doing, what they were accomplishing for so many cancer patients and families who were in such need, and I would simply say, 'amazing!'

"I would stand back and say, 'amazing.'"

**- Mark Sborov**



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All the people who have worked at Angel, who have made the Angel Foundation the success that it is today - these are the people who have made it a success! It has been the people who came along the way with the expertise, with what we needed, and their dedication."

**- Margie Sborov**

**Adapting, changing, still on the path**

It's been 56 years since the summer of '64, when Jim started getting sick, when he was diagnosed with leukemia, and when he died, without his friends by his side.

56 years since Mark and Margie were told *not* to talk about Jim's condition.

A lot has happened since that time. A lot has changed.

Cancer is no longer the stigma it once was. People who have cancer and their loved ones are able - and even encouraged - to talk about it openly.



*Things have changed for Mark and Margie personally, too: they were married 52 years ago and have two kids, Doug and Tara, and three grandchildren, Madison, Samantha, and Andrew.*



Sborov Family, Christmas 2020.

***And that 'grand purpose' that Margie spoke of was realized when she and Mark co-founded Angel Foundation in 2001, an organization that has helped to ease the financial burdens of so many cancer patients and their families.***



Even after 20 years, I still find it hard to believe sometimes - realizing all the people that Angel has helped and the success that this organization has had in helping people and families in need!"

**- Margie Sborov**

*Angel Foundation has thrived over those 20 years, granting more than \$10 million and helping over 30,000 people and their families with the trauma of cancer - still living the mission that Mark and Margie founded Angel on so many years ago.*

*The same one they had when they started on this path.*



Co-founders Mark & Margie Sborov celebrating 20 years of Angel.