

# A GOLDEN GIFT



BILL GORGAS, THE FOUNDER OF CLANCYSCURE, AND HIS WIFE BARBARA DAVIS WITH THEIR GOLDEN RETRIEVERS, CHASE AND CLANCY.

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I WANT TO DEVOTE MY ENERGY AND  
RESOURCES TO CURING CANCER.”**

—BILL GORGAS

**G**rief is never easy. However, as the poet Rumi said: “Grief can be the garden of compassion. If you keep your heart open through everything, your pain can become your greatest ally in your life’s search for love and wisdom.” This affirmation seems proven true by Bill Gorgas, the founder of ClancysCure, a foundation dedicated to support and advance the fight against cancer in both dogs and humans. He and his wife Barbara Davis were the loving pet-parents to two Golden Retrievers, Chase and Clancy. In just two short years, the two dogs forever changed Gorgas and Davis’s lives—taking them through the depths of love and grief, and inspiring them to champion a cause that aims to touch the lives of countless others.



#### **CANINE CELEBRITIES**

Even before they became the faces of a foundation, Chase and Clancy were local celebrities in the close-knit community of Greenwich, Conn.

The canine brothers had belonged to the Monsignor at the local church, and were an iconic fixture on the St. Mary’s front lawn on the village’s main avenue. When the elderly Monsignor had to retire to a nursing home, the dogs were in need of a new family—that’s when Gorgas and Davis stepped in. The couple did not have children and had not owned pets since childhood, and the sudden addition of goofy, furry, unconditional love into their world was something Gorgas will never forget. “Before we had them, we were set in our ways,” he says. “But then we got these dogs, and they just taught us to truly live in the moment. They taught us patience. It was life-changing.”

#### **GONE TOO SOON**

Just a little over a year after he was adopted, Clancy started breathing heavily and became noticeably lethargic. When Gorgas and Davis took him to the veterinarian the next day, they were given the devastating news: Clancy had hemangiosarcoma, an aggressive kind of cancer that typically originates in the heart, liver or spleen and then spreads rapidly through the blood vessels. There was nothing that could be done to save their beloved friend, and Clancy was put to sleep the same day he was diagnosed. Tragically, Chase was diagnosed with the same disease roughly a year later, and passed away in March 2016. “I can’t even tell you what those dogs meant to us,” says Gorgas, who still grieves for both pets.

#### **FROM PAIN TO PURPOSE**

The first blow of losing Clancy was transformative, however. “Literally within two days of Clancy passing away, I came up with the idea of ClancysCure,” says Gorgas. “The more I thought about it the more passionate I became.” His passion transformed to action, and a few short months later, ClancysCure was created; an endowment with 100% of proceeds going directly to the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine’s cancer research. With Chase’s recent passing, Gorgas and Davis are more committed than ever to making a difference through ClancysCure. “I want to fight this head on,” says Gorgas. “I want to devote my energy and resources to curing cancer.”

#### **CORNELL’S ANTI-CANCER CRUSADE**

Originally, canine cancer was Gorgas’ main focus. But, he soon realized the mission could, and should, expand to include the human angle of the disease as well. Fortunately, through supporting the College’s research, ClancysCure will do both; the discoveries made here frequently are leveraged to impact dogs, people and other species.

Numerous researchers across departments are tackling cancer using different genomic, epigenomic, molecular, and cellular approaches. The College also hosts the Cornell Comparative Cancer Biology Program, which supports basic, translational, and clinical cancer research. The program also serves as a hub for several new cancer-related initiatives undertaken in conjunction with Weill Cornell Medicine and Cornell’s new Meyer Cancer Center. An example of this is the cross-campus Cornell Lymphoma Program and its associated Progressive Assessment of Therapeutics (PATH) Program, run by Professor of Biomedical Sciences Dr. Kristy Richards, to develop a multi-species and multi-platform approach to the development of effective new drugs for cancer treatment.

#### **BUILDING MOMENTUM FROM A MEMORIAL**

Having only been launched on September 10, 2015, ClancysCure has grown into a full-fledged cause with plenty of local publicity and momentum. One of Gorgas’ recent successes has included piquing the interest of renowned journalist Katie Couric, who sent one of her producers to a seminar sponsored by ClancysCure. The talk featured Cornell’s Dr. Robert Weiss, professor of molecular genetics and leader of several cancer research initiatives at the College, who spoke about the latest efforts on curing cancer in canines and humans. Additionally, ClancysCure now has a partnership with Wooftrax, a free app that converts dog walks into donations for selected charities, making it easy for anyone to contribute to canine cancer research at Cornell.

Gorgas wants it to see it expand further. “My goal is to make this as national as we can. It’s an endowment, so it will live forever—but that takes time to build,” says Gorgas. “It’s one dollar at a time, that’s how I think about it.” Of course, there are times when the grief will still make Gorgas pause. “At one point, I asked my wife, ‘why did we get them, only to have them be taken away?’ and she responded, ‘the question we should be asking instead is, ‘why were they given to us?’” Gorgas recalls. “We both have since come to believe that the answer is ClancysCure.”