

HealthLink

N/O

INSIDE:

**Caregivers
Guide**

**NEW
ALZHEIMER'S
DRUG**

**Alleviate Lower
BACK PAIN**

**The Lowdown
on LONGEVITY**

**PAT
BENATAR**

Treat Them Right

Travis Shinn

PAT Benatar

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TREAT THEM RIGHT

Throughout the course of her head-banging career, quietly and behind the stage, rock legend Pat Benatar has cared for others – and been cared for. Some of these moments made headlines. During a 2015 canceled tour, Neil “Spyder” Giraldo, her decades-long musical partner and husband, underwent emergency surgery to save his eyesight. Then while home nursing Giraldo back to health, Benatar discovered that she had a cancerous tumor in her kidney, she reveals to HealthLink. Benatar and Giraldo did what they have always done throughout their Grammy Award-winning collaboration. They took care of each other. Benatar, 68, who grew up in Lindenhurst, has since been in remission. She recently spoke to HealthLink about what others might learn from her and Giraldo’s experiences.

Why Giraldo needed emergency eye surgery

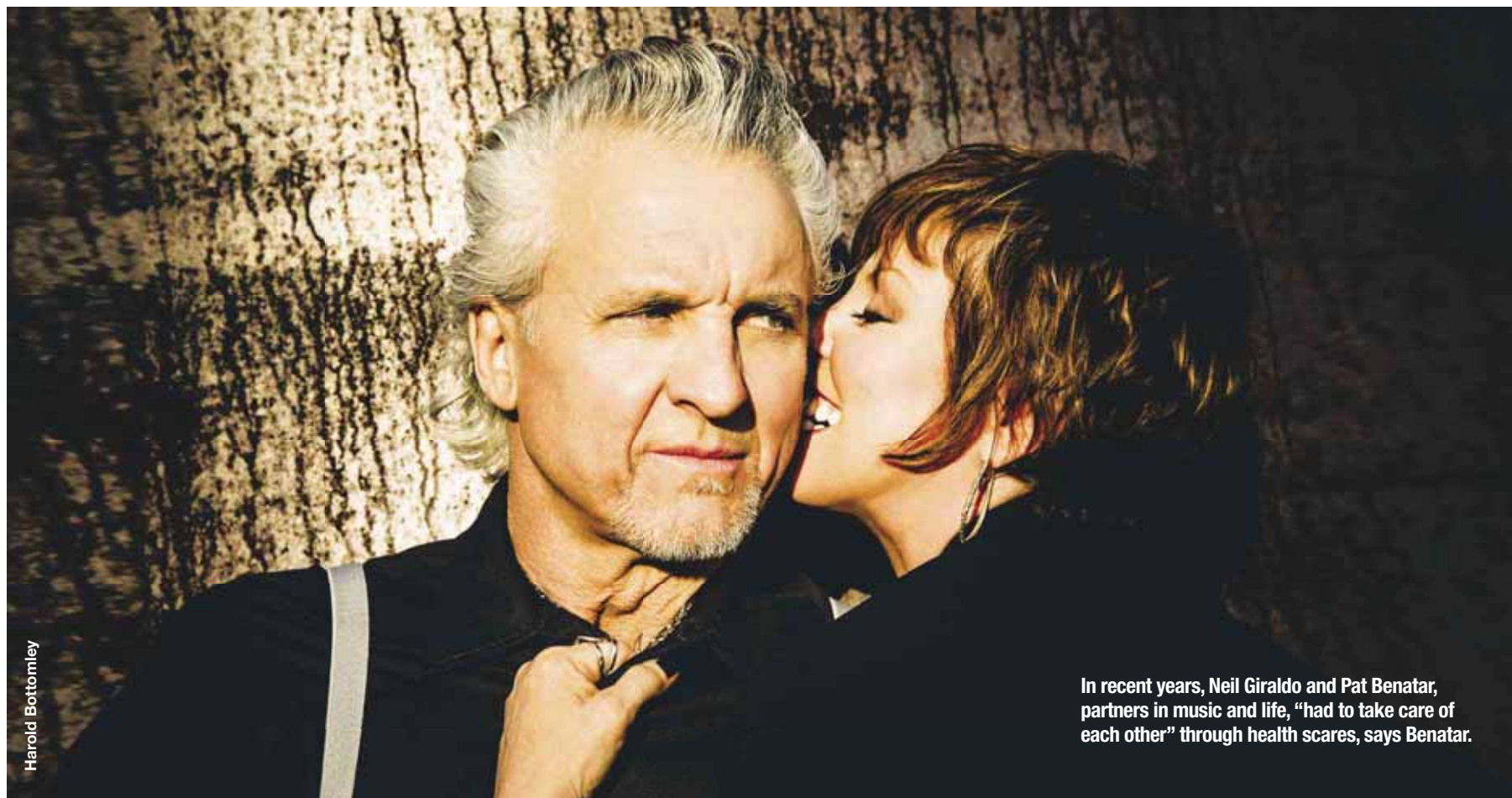
Actually, it was a one-two punch because we were on the road and he had gotten a cyst on his hand, on his finger. For him to play, it was uncomfortable and everything. The rock doc ... sent an associate ... [who] aspirated [the cyst] ... She wasn’t wearing gloves ... We did the show. And then literally, the next day, he started to get some kind of staph infection in his hand, and it instantly started traveling up his arm ... We saw a hand specialist immediately ... The doctor said ... I need to slice your finger. I need to put the medication in there. I can’t do that, because if I damage your nerves, it could affect your playing. So what he did instead is he gave him some gnarly, monstrous antibiotics ... The antibiotics acted as a blood thinner ... The blood vessels in his eyes kind of exploded ... He literally went blind in his one eye ... [The eye doctor] ... cauterized

his eye ... to stop all of that from happening to his other eye ... It was a nightmare. And it was really scary ... The sight came back pretty quickly ... And it all happened because somebody didn’t wear gloves when they were aspirating a finger.

How caring for Giraldo led to her cancer diagnosis

One of our really good friends is a gastroenterologist ... and I had been having intestinal issues for years and years. And I said to her, You know what? We’re home. We’re never home. I want you to do one more MRI ... When she did it, she found a residual that I had renal cell carcinoma in my kidney. Nine days later, I had my kidney removed ... I’m fine. I never had to do any treatment because miraculously, usually, kidney cancer is on the periphery of your kidney. But mine was buried in

...continued on page 6



Harold Bottomley

In recent years, Neil Giraldo and Pat Benatar, partners in music and life, “had to take care of each other” through health scares, says Benatar.



Giraldo and Benatar, now and in the past, have expressed what's happening in their lives by writing songs, says Benatar.

Benatar Giraldo

...continued from page 2



Benatar Giraldo

“ I TOOK CARE OF HIM FIRST. THEN HE TOOK CARE OF ME, AND WE JUST DID IT... IT COMES FROM LOVE. ”

the center. It was less than 1 centimeter. It was so early. It was less than stage one ... I'm six years in remission now.

How she prepared to become Giraldo's caregiver

It's one of those things where there's nothing to be done. You have to ... My mother was ill in the last parts of her life ... From November to February [2016], Spyder and I both were her caregiver ... She had bladder cancer with no symptoms until she was at stage, basically, the end of four. It was terminal when they discovered it ... She was home with us, and she had great care from St. John's Hospital in Los Angeles. And then we had hospice care ... My father passed in 2009. And I can't say enough about hospice. These people are angels on Earth. They are just so amazing. And what they do for the patient and the family of the patient, it's just incredible. There's not enough gratitude that can be said for how they do the things that they do. They make the passing from the stage of living to the next stage so beautiful and gentle and good.

I don't know that there's any plan [to become a caregiver]. I certainly wasn't prepared in any way ... You just do what you have to do. You figure it out. We buckled down, both of us, and we had to take care of each other, right? I took care of him first. Then he took care of me, and we just did it ... It comes from love. It comes from the care that you give each other every day ... We weren't prepared. We're pretty healthy, and we never had really any catastrophic illness ever. We kind of just got thrown into the situation like so many others are. People are not prepared for this. They're not ready to take on the responsibility. No one is unless you are in the [health-care] field. And so regular folks have to do what we do. We say that we're just ordinary people with an extraordinary job. We're just like everybody else. Maybe, thankfully, we're fortunate to have financial situations that make it easier for us. But the truth is that you still have to be in the trenches.

How she took care of herself

Music, for us, plays a role in everything that we do. It's

DNA. It's like breathing ... The cathartic thing for us is that when things are whatever they are – good, bad, crazy, fun, whatever it is – the way that we express what's happening to us is always by writing songs. That's what happened. So, for example, when my brother passed, it was sudden and no one was prepared. He was 46 ... It was devastating for the family. There's only two of us and my parents. And the day that he died, I sat down ... and wrote the song “Brave.”

How Benatar and Giraldo stay vital

We are naturopaths and homeopathic people. We don't really take any medication unless it's necessary ... Everything that we do is about clean eating and vitamins, amino acids and all that kind of stuff ... We're not smokers. We're not heavy drinkers. No drugs at all. And we're both physically conscious about everything. And for me, it's always about you get one body – that's all you get. And I've always been very vigilant and diligent about keeping my body in supreme condition because my voice is a human instrument.

Why she and Giraldo wrote the pandemic song “Together”

It was really a pure moment. It was right as lockdown was happening. And one of the great things about songwriting and about music is always that this is the way that we communicate ... And it was just what we were feeling ... [I was] seeing everybody just wearing those masks and their little cheeks [were] raw from wearing them all day. And it was so horrifying and scary. And so many of our family members are nurses and doctors ... It was just a humanitarian thing. It was just really responding to what was happening.

What project Benatar is most excited about

We have been working on a Broadway musical for five years. And [in October], we announced the title, which is called “Invincible,” and it's an adaptation of “Romeo and Juliet,” with all of our songs reorchestrated into theatrical pieces ... I'll give you one hint — “We Live For Love” is the balcony scene.