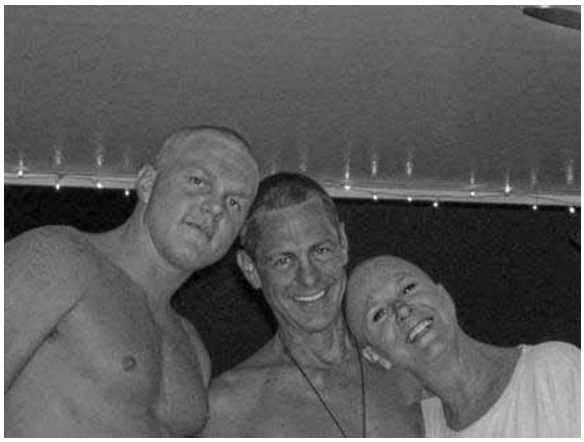
Susan Wells
Fort Worth, Texas #2

As Senior Marketing Coordinator for the Carter Blood Center in Fort Worth, Texas, Susan knows what blood donations are all about. As both blood donor and blood recipient Susan has a respect for the need and the process that is beyond what most of us can understand.

Susan loves her job
"every day I got to see the difference blood donations made to people's lives. I got to see and meet survivors who I think are the strongest soldiers in the world. They are the ones who are making a difference."

Susan began donating blood when she was a teenager. When Susan's only child was born, she hemorrhaged and needed blood. Several years later, she had a hysterectomy; she again hemorrhaged and need blood.

In 2001, Susan found a knot behind her ear. What was initially diagnosed as Hodgkin's lymphoma, with a prognosis of six months to live, was later determined to be benign tumors that needed to be removed. Following surgery, she returned to the blood center and worked sixty hour weeks. She was passionate and driven. But it seemed to be taking a toll on her. She again had severe headaches and she knew she needed care. The tumors had recurred, with a vengeance. When she made the decision to have the surgery she began to make preparations. She did not want her husband or son, or anyone, she said, "*to be scared*." So, she tried not to be herself and made every effort to be positive. Susan, her husband and son all shaved their heads. Humor was her constant companion.



There was good news! Susan survived radical surgery and the tumors were benign. But what was first diagnosed as four tumors turned out to be twelve. Nerve damage was extensive and a major nerve was transplanted from her ankle and foot into her head. She had lost a lot of blood.

She said that the third day in ICU she had a moment of "*clarity*." She was weak and thought she was going to die. "*I was going down hill fast*," she recalled. "*I felt worse that I had ever felt in my entire life, but it wasn't pain, because I had plenty of pain meds. I just felt hopeless*."

She heard the voice of her nurse say "*it was her lucky day; he was giving her a blood transfusion*."

According to Susan, the transfusion made all the difference.

> "*It was an incredible feeling. When you are so in the darkness and get blood, it was the strength coming back. It gave me hope. Imagine the best feeling you ever had in your life. That's what it felt like when I got the blood. I felt like superwoman. At that point I thought I could do anything.*"

She was then on the road to long difficult recovery.

Her message is simple but coming in the context of what she has survived it is even more powerful.

> *"It is not just about giving blood, it is about living our lives. It is about not taking anything for granted. It is about not putting stuff off until later. I often ask people to focus on one person in their life they love. When they think of that one person, I tell them to go out and do something special for that one person, something meaningful – like giving blood! Actually that is probably one of the greatest things you can do for someone you love. That's what life is about. Don't wait until it is a personal issue"*