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Cover photo by Abbie Burgess



Laird and Sherry Cagan: Standing Up for Lyme Disease Research

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Sherry and Laird Cagan:

Taking a Stand for Lyme Disease Research

By Abbie Burgess

Laird and Sherry Cagan of Portola Valley have spent almost a decade championing research for the disease that has forever changed their family. “We lived a charmed life, until we started camping on the property we purchased in Portola Valley when the girls were young,” Sherry says. “I and our two daughters contracted Lyme disease—this illness devastated our family.”

Sherry went from being a World Champion Equestrian riding high-powered horses to not being able to walk up stairs. Her daughters became too ill to attend school. “There is no agony like bearing witness to a sick child. After nearly losing my life to Lyme disease and witnessing my children lose their childhoods to this chronic illness, it was a rude awakening to learn we had few medical options and that there is currently no curable treatment. We have been through years of IV treatments, while they were helpful, we continued to relapse.”

While someone infected with severe Lyme may look fine on the outside, the effects run deep. Invisible, yet debilitating symptoms may include episodes of paralysis, extreme fatigue, neurological impairment,

cognitive deficit, arthritic condition and immune impairment. “Lyme is much like cancer, chronic inflammation, pain and body systems dysfunction and in some cases, death,” Sherry explains. “The Lyme bacterium can migrate to the heart causing Lyme carditis, shortening one’s life. There is also a tremendous number of suicides among Lyme patients due to the debilitating constant pain and the deterioration of the quality of life for many.”

The County Board of Health initially told the Cagans there was no Lyme disease in California. Unfortunately, that was simply not true. While historically it was an infection associated with the Northeast US, now

Laird, Kyla and Sherry Cagan speaking at a Stand4Lyme Foundation event. Photo provided by Sherry Cagan.



On the cover: Laird and Sherry Cagan with a sculpture on their property.

Lyme is diagnosed in all 50 states. The Lyme bacterium, *Borrelia*, is known as a “stealth pathogen.” Antibiotics are not fully effective at clearing it once it has established in the body. \$1 billion per year is spent to treat individuals with Lyme disease, estimates John Hopkins/Bloomberg School of Public Health. The CDC says there are over 300,000 new Lyme cases per year in the US.

Stand4Lyme Foundation

In the face of these sobering facts, the Cagans launched the nonprofit Stand4Lyme Foundation, of which Sherry is President/Founder and Laird is Co-Founder. The Foundation's mission is to pave a medical path to wellness for Lyme disease patients — with the goal of ending the prolonged suffering of millions. “Out of necessity, I utilized all my influence to accelerate Lyme disease research for a cure and reliable diagnostics,” Sherry says, adding that the current research models are insufficient and siloed. But there is hope. “With tremendous effort and a network of generous and caring long term relationships, champions taking a stand for Lyme alongside us, we have been able to bring together Stanford heads of departments addressing the serious consequences of Lyme and other tick-borne diseases.” The Cagans initiated The Stanford Lyme Disease Working Group at the Stanford Medical School, with over two dozen esteemed and dedicated scientists who are committed to relieving the lifelong burden of Lyme disease.

Philanthropy has always been important to the Cagans — they just never thought they would be fundraising out of necessity for something



The Cagans at a fundraiser for Stand4Lyme Foundation. Photo provided by Sherry Cagan.

so personal. The Cagans have hosted a number of fundraisers for Lyme disease research raising millions of dollars at the estate they built in Portola Valley, complete with stables and a breathtaking valley view and designed with philanthropic entertaining in mind. Aside from Lyme research, they have hosted many events and concerts throughout the years for community, school, Stanford, sports and the arts. They have had headliner bands such as Daryl Hall, Huey Lewis and the News, KC and the Sunshine Band and the English Beat, among others, with the help of Kelli Richards, The All Access Group.

“While we have facilitated large resource funding for research, both in the private sector and government, our most valued contribution to

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making a difference has been the volunteering of our efforts," Sherry says. She has worked tirelessly for years to accelerate a cure. Impact requires more than philanthropic giving, Sherry explains. It also requires hard work!

Though Sherry and her daughters are currently managing the effects of the disease, they have great concern for the millions still debilitated by Lyme and other tick-borne diseases. "We remain committed to expediting solutions," she says. The Cagans believe that research is now at a pivotal point and they are hopeful answers are near.



Emerging Research, Diagnosis and Treatment of Lyme Disease and Tick-Borne Illness

Stand4Lyme Foundation has leveraged Stanford's strengths to develop solutions for complex disease by facilitating funding for Lyme research at the university. The hope is that new discoveries and understanding of the bacteria will lead to better diagnostics and therapeutics. The foundation has also been diligently advocating for a Lyme disease conference at Stanford University and continuing medical education for physicians. This fall, that will become a reality. The Emerging Research, Diagnosis and Treatment of Lyme Disease and Tick-Borne Illness conference will bring together physicians and leading scientists from around the world September 14-15. "This is a pivotal point for millions of current and future Lyme patients as physicians and students will be informed of the new emerging Lyme research discoveries," Sherry says.

For more information, visit Stand4Lyme.org and stanford.cloud-cme.com.



Be the change

After a rough decade of health crises, many ER visits and years of IV treatment, the Cagans are happy to report they are currently out of the critical stage, they have learned to manage the negative health effects of Lyme with antibiotics, a number of anti-inflammatory treatments, lifestyle changes, exercise and disciplined healthy eating habits. "Critical and chronic illness has taught our daughters to have an amazing inner strength and perseverance," Sherry says. "Through their personal experience with the devastating and debilitating effects of Lyme disease, they have developed a deep understanding and compassion for those with challenges." Their parents observe that they care deeply about people and the planet. "The younger generation knows that you don't need a fortune to give back. You can give of yourself every day." A favorite saying of Sherry's is "Be the change you wish to see in this world!"

Twenty-year-old Kyla, who will be a junior this year at Stanford University, is following in the footsteps of her Great-Grandfather, Sewall Wright, who was the 12th National Medal of Science winner and is known as the father of population genetics as she is doing genetics and immunology research at Stanford this summer.

Nineteen-year-old Kiana is moving to Los Angeles to attend Santa Monica College and pursue her love of acting. She has a small role in an Adam Sandler movie this summer. During her gap year she learned how to brand and build a startup, as she created an active swimwear line.

And Sherry is going back in the saddle again to compete as an equestrian later this year at the National Cutting Horse Futurity in Fort Worth, Texas. "I am very close to qualifying to be inducted into the NCHA Hall of Fame." She also looks forward to continuing her bronze sculpture work

to add to life-size pieces on display at Portola Valley Town Center and the Stanford University Equestrian Facility. "My dear husband, my rock, lifts and loves his family," Sherry says. Laird played soccer at Stanford and is proud to have the Laird Q. Cagan Stadium named after him. He continues to enjoy his passion for playing in the Portola Valley Adult Soccer League when he can make time from his other passion of impact investing.

"When Sherry was finally diagnosed with Lyme disease, we made it a family mission to find solutions for Lyme disease," Laird says. "I have invested in many companies over the years with a triple bottom line (People, Planet, Profit). I brought the same venture capital approach to solving this problem by bringing together the best in the industry to collaborate and accelerate solutions." Since then, Laird has increasingly focused on the area of impact investing with an interest in healthcare and the environment.

Sherry Cagan has been chronically ill for over a decade from Lyme Disease. Photo provided by Sherry Cagan.



Kiana, Sherry, Laird and Kyla Cagan. Photo provided by Sherry Cagan.