

Musician Ron Young facing cancer battle like most mortal men

By Sam Kindrick

This is the up-close and personal account of a San Antonio musician dealing with what he calls *The Big C*.

The *Big C*, of course, is cancer, and the uncertain prognosis for Ron Young is more than daunting.

Young has melanoma, a potentially deadly form of cancer that can break out anywhere in the body.

It's the malignant kind, the type of cancer that spreads and kills people.

His cancer is in the fourth and most advanced stage of the disease.

There is a golf ball-sized tumor in Young's abdomen, and the cancer has spread to both of his lungs.

Young will soon undergo chemotherapy treatments, and it will probably be the roughest ride of his entire life. The treatments will be administered in a local hospital.

He is frightened, angry, and sometimes sick at heart, intermittently crying, cussing, and praying hard for the miracle which faith in God promises for a chosen few.

A talented songwriter and performer, Young was planning more release parties for his new cd *Under The Texas Radar* when he got the stunning news.

Melanoma? Fourth stage?

"What in hell happened to stages one, two, and three?" Young implores. "I wasn't ready for anything like this. It's the W.T.F. reaction. What the fuck? And why me?"

The 63-year-old Young said he was in the shower when he noticed a knot in his side. That was September 21.

"Doctors first thought it was a hernia," Young said. "Then, after initial tests, they thought it might be a cyst. Finally, after still more scans, they determined that it was a tumor. And even more testing resulted in the diagnosis, malignant melanoma."

This wasn't young's first brush with cancer, but it had been seven years since he was treated for external melanoma on his thumb while working in Nashville.

A former music columnist for the now-defunct San Antonio Light, Young was song writing and working in a Nashville pawn shop to make ends meet when he injured his thumb.

"I was helping the shop manager lift a TV when it fell, landing on my thumb," Young recalls. "It was just a little skinned place, but it never did heal. I finally went to a doctor and got the first melanoma diagnosis. They amputated the end of my left thumb, pulled out all of the lymph nodes, and that seemed to be it. I went about my business, getting regular checkups for the recommended five years after the treatment. I thought I was in the clear, but here I am seven years later with fourth stage melanoma."

Young says his oncologist was unable to determine if he had cancer cells in his blood from his first encounter with the disease.

"No way to really know," said Young, who related that he cried when first diagnosed with cancer by the doctor in Nashville. "When I got the current diagnosis, I was both pissed and frightened, and I cried again when told that the cancer was in stage four. I had no insurance, and all of the cancer testing had wiped me out financially.

"I guess I panicked right there at first. Started giving away all my stuff. Some days I'd feel guilty. Maybe I could have done something different. Then I qualified for the CareLink System, giving me the medical care I could never afford, and I started calming down some. It's different now than it was when I was first diagnosed with cancer in 2004. I was in Nashville then, away from family and hometown friends, and I really felt abandoned and alone. And I was angry at God."

Young says he is calmer now, more accepting of life's twists and turns, and more in tune with his Creator.

"Now I feel God's calming presence more in my life," Young says. "I feel that he brought me back to San Antonio to be with family and friends and more in His care. I feel comfortable and safe in the hands of the medical team that will be treating him."

Ron Young wrote a music column for the San Antonio Light from 1980 until the Hearst-owned Light shut down in 1992 when Hearst bought out the San Antonio Express and News. At about this time, Young's wife divorced him, and so he packed up and headed for Nashville where he signed with Buckhorn Music, whose first big writer was Kris Kristofferson. Ron wrote more than 400 songs for Buckhorn, getting a few published, but no hits.

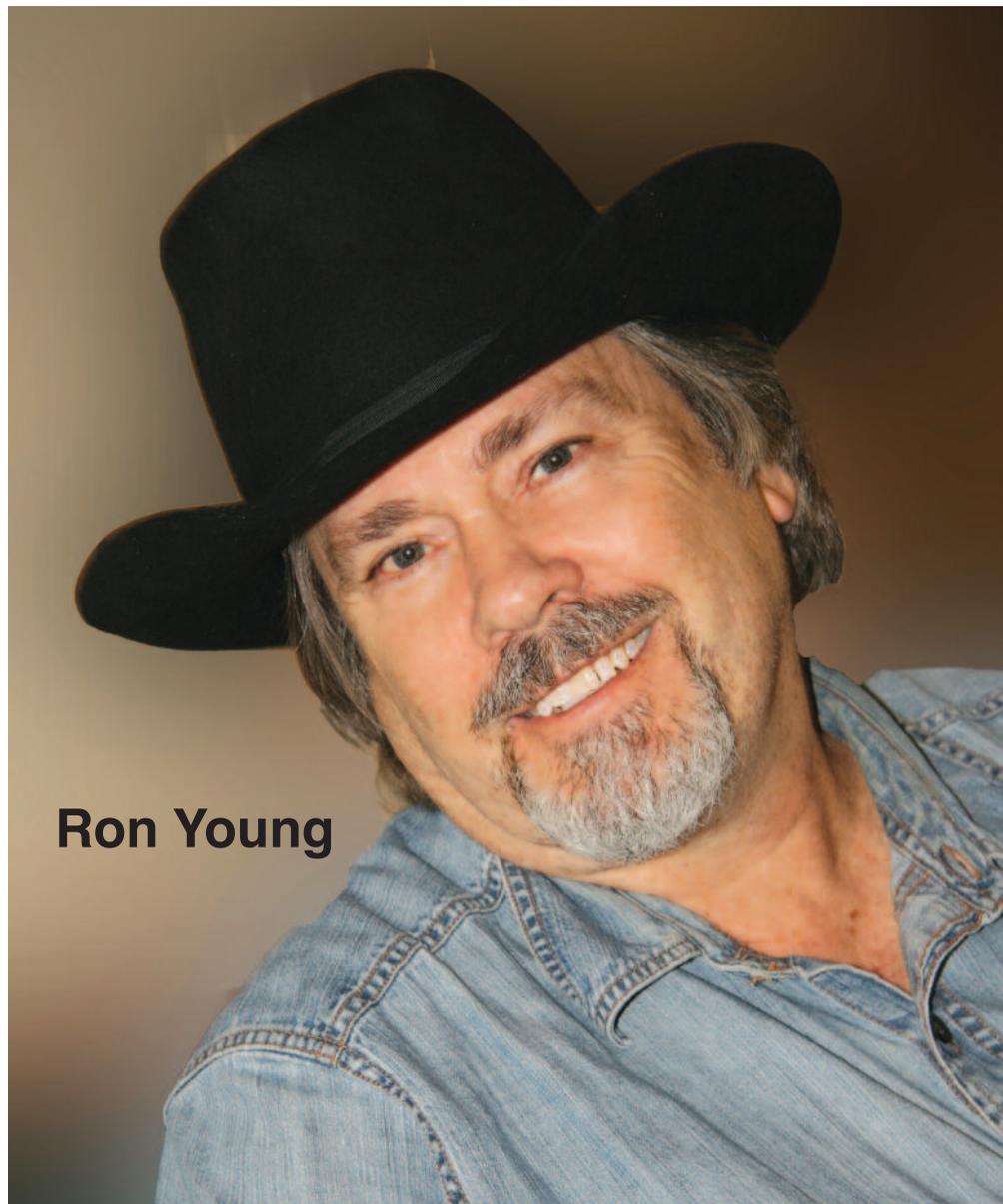
Young has also written for Current Magazine here, and he wrote for Music Row Magazine in Nashville. In addition to supplementing his income by working at Nashville pawn shops, Young managed the legendary Ernest Tubbs Record Shop in Music City.

He is a truly humble guy with a truly refreshing perspective on both life and the music business in general.

"Obviously," Young says, "I would rather play music than write about it, and I have literally written hundreds of songs without anyone ever recording one and turning it into a hit. I'm not trying to be a star; I just want to get the music out there, to do what I feel I was meant to do."

His return to San Antonio after slogging for 14 years in the Nashville music trenches followed the end of still another relationship with a female.

When he returned home, Young recalls,



Ron Young

his old buddies started hanging out with him, and he was finally egged into loading his best tunes onto the *Under the Texas Radar* CD by fellow pickers Hank Harrison and Mary Ann Cornelius. Tunes like *I've Got Memories Older Than You*, *Waitin' On Willie*, and *A Long Ride*, his bluegrass ode to the Nashville days.

"I was playing some covers with Hank and Mary Ann," Young said. "Hank really started to egg me on, saying that I had some really good songs that needed to be recorded."

With humility in Ron Young there is honesty. He is admittedly scared shitless, as any human would be, but his faith gives him the courage to face his fears and the rough spots ahead of him.

"I know I will probably lose my hair," Young said just days before he was to start an exhausting regimen of intravenous chemo treatments. "But what the hell...I have already lost all of my money to this cancer business, and there is nothing left to do but kick the cancer's ass. So what do I have to lose?"

This interview was conducted in a Jim's Coffee Shop with Kevin Lewis and C.J. Troilo both present. Lewis plays bass and Troilo plays guitar in the Ron Young Trio. Troilo was once Barbara Fairchild's lead guitarist.

Both of these guys are spiritual tub-thumpers in the Ron Young anti-cancer campaign, and Troilo is himself a colon cancer survivor who gives all the credit to God.

Young claims a spiritual contact with his Maker, while both Troilo and Lewis are both members of Rudolph (Rudi) Harst's Celebration Circle which meets in the Jump Start Theater.

With no children and no wife or current relationship, Ron Young now lives with truck driver brother David and sister-in-law Ana.

While Ron is now in the CareLink System for medical financial help, he is still trying to recover some of his savings which were wiped out by initial medical costs.

"We had a yard sale at my niece Nikki's house," Young said. "Nikki and her crew helped raise \$330, and I sold 12 cds, adding another \$140 to the pot."

A medical benefit concert is now in the planning stages for February 17 at Sam's Burger Joint, featuring Augie Meyers, The Infidels, Freddie Krc, and a huge lineup of San Antonio and Austin musicians.

For full details on the benefit, see Scatter Shots in this issue of Action Magazine.

In the meanwhile, Ron Young tries to keep a positive attitude in place with as much levity as his condition will allow.

He said, "I would like to live long enough to see the Spurs win another NBA championship. And would you please relate this to Jacques E. Strap."

There will be a follow up article in next month's issue of Action, detailing Ron's progress, and with heavy emphasis on the benefit concert which, hopefully, will draw a big crowd.