CHAPTER 1

Cancer is the *Most Important Disease of the 21st Century: A Reality Most Fail to Comprehend*

*That Reality is Why I Wrote This Book*

The loss of a loved one—a child, spouse or a parent—is a bereavement that is beyond description using ordinary words. That loss is neither greater nor less depending upon *how* the death occurs. A child’s death that results from being hit by a drunk driver is no more or less heartbreaking than the demise of a child due to a disease. However, the manner of loss may lead survivors to focus on the cause(s) of mortality with the hope of preventing future deaths.1

As informed citizens, we all think that heart disease is the number one killer in the United States—certainly many publications affirm this notion.2 However, the ranking of the numbers of individuals who die of a particular condition, in this instance heart disease, is not necessarily a salient mode for determining significance. Consider the following: compare the loss of life due to cancer of a 5 year old child versus the heart attack death of an 89 year old man. The child has been deprived of approximately 80 years of life expectancy whereas the elderly man has been deprived of essentially no years of life—because he has already exceeded the life expectancy he had at birth.3

**Person Years of Life Lost**

The United States National Cancer Institute has published these starkly compelling words: “Cancer is responsible for more person years of life lost than all

1 The fewer losses referred to here would hopefully ensue from enhanced understanding, prevention and control of the cause of death.


3 Actually, as long as an individual remains alive, there is life expectancy as yet unfilled. For an 89 year old male citizen of the United States, there are yet about 4 years of life expectancy. These years added to the initial life expectancy ensue because the elderly individual did not die of the multiple causes of death that claimed his compatriots.
other causes of death…” (Italics added). Figure 1.1 reveals that 8,756,000 person-years of life were lost by Americans in the year 2008 (the most recent data available). Person-years of life lost for other causes of death was less in that same year. These other causes include the person-years of life lost due to heart