



CANCER SCREENING

It's been just over nine years now that my good friend Captain Andy Troncale of the Arcadia (Calif.) Fire Department passed away. Andy and I grew up together and played Little League in West Covina, Calif. We joined the Los Angeles County Fire Department as Explorers at age 15. We would ditch school and ride along at every fire station we could. We fell in love with the fire service immediately. We never looked back and started our fire dept. careers right out of high school.

I always liked to say I was Andy's training captain because as young boys, we would set fires in my parents' backyard and play "firefighter." Andy was the smart one: I provided the training center (my parents' backyard), which meant I was stuck with the evidence while Andy rode his bike home, another successful "training" session complete.

Though my dad was in the refrigeration business, I swear he was a fire investigator in a past life. Andy and I always took pains to cover our tracks from the fires we set, but my dad managed to find the burn patterns, the point of origin and the Ohio blue tips used for ignition along with burned wood, debris and weeds. I'd get the belt, and Andy—well, he was always "such a good boy."

Andy succumbed to colorectal cancer on Jan. 23, 2012, at a young age. It was a tough battle; anyone who knew Andy knew he was tough. But not tough enough to win this time.

Not an easy or fun subject to write about, but certainly important. Excluding skin cancers, colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer diagnosed in men and women in the United States. Of cancers that kill both men and women, colorectal cancer is the second most fatal cancer.

Colorectal cancer affects people in all racial and ethnic groups. It's most often found in people age 50 and older, but recent research suggests that risk may be shifting. A report published Feb. 28, 2017, found that someone born in 1990 would have twice the risk of colon cancer and four times the risk of rectal cancer at the same age had they been born in 1950.

So, the risk appears to be increasing, and if not detected early, colorectal cancer survival rates are low. I don't know about you, but to me, that's a clarion call to take action:

- If you're over 50, get a regular colonoscopy or other screening test your doctor recommends.
- No matter your age, watch for symptoms: blood in or on your stool, stomach pain or cramps that don't go away, and/or unexplained weight loss.
- Maintain a healthy weight, or try to lose weight if you're obese or overweight.
- Eat a diet high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and low in animal fat.

March is the month dedicated to raise awareness about colorectal cancer. Ask your doctor about a checkup and spread the word – and maybe save the life of someone a lot like my good friend Andy.