

# REMEMBERING GARY FOWLER

By Nancy Fowler

**G**ary Fowler was born and raised in Austin. He graduated from Anderson High School in 1977 and from the University of Texas at Austin in 1981, where he received a bachelor's degree in finance. After graduation, he worked at First City Bank and later as a financial planner with Ronald Blue & Company.



But Gary's dream was to be a teacher and baseball coach, even if it meant taking a cut in pay. So he returned to UT and obtained his teaching certificate in 1989. He went to work immediately afterwards at Johnston High School, teaching math and coaching baseball until 1994. He became the head baseball coach at Hyde Park Baptist High School, where he also taught history and coached junior high football, from 1994 -1997. That fall, Gary moved to Bowie High School as a math teacher, baseball and football coach.

We were blessed with two amazing children, Mackenzie and Eric, and Gary loved his family deeply. There was never a doubt about our priority in his life. But he also loved every minute of coaching and teaching. It was his calling and passion. He loved baseball, but more importantly, he wanted to make a positive impact on the lives of kids. In addition to his professional responsibilities, we were very involved with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes at Bowie, hosting meetings in our home for several years. He also volunteered for 12 years with Young Life, and served on the Board of Directors at Austin Christian Fellowship, where he taught his children's Sunday school class.



Gary, Coach Sam Degelia, Coach Rudy Alvarez

On the morning of June 8, 2002, as he and the Bulldogs were preparing for the State Championship game at the Dell Diamond in Round Rock, Gary experienced his first neurological symptoms. His right leg had lost feeling and he couldn't stand. He was taken by ambulance to the hospital, where doctors later diagnosed him with a malignant brain tumor. Bowie lost the game to Fort Bend Elkins, the number one team in the nation. Gary was tragically unable to make it to the biggest game of his career, and instead was beginning the very literal game of his life.

Twelve days later, Gary had surgery to remove the tumor, and made a miraculous recovery, returning to his job at Bowie in the fall. The following March, though, the tumor began to grow back. He was devastated, yet determined to finish out the season - which he did. The team made it to a couple of rounds in the playoffs. On May 13, 2003, Gary



Mackenzie, Eric, Nancy and Gary

underwent a second surgery, but the outcome was less hopeful this time. Immediately following the surgery, his right side was paralyzed, and he was unable to speak.



Gary on the links

After several weeks of rehab at M.D. Anderson in Houston, his speech returned, and his mind was as sharp as ever. He worked hard and was eventually able to walk a little. He came back to Austin and continued his rehab. By August the tumor had spread to more of his brain and had taken over his body - but not his spirit! Another passion of Gary's was playing golf and, though he was confined to a wheelchair by then, he was only half joking when he told me that his goal in life was to play golf all day, every day!

On October 23, 2003, Gary Blaine Fowler, 45, died. His soul is still cherished and reflected by our family and by every student or athlete he taught. Although Gary loved life, and brought the joy of living to everyone around him, he was not in love with this world and always looked forward to living in his eternal home with Christ. Gary's life and death were a testament to his faith in God. His eternal optimism and humble, tender nature touched countless lives before his cancer diagnosis. After learning of his illness, he reached out to thousands more by traveling the state and speaking to school and church groups about the joy in overcoming adversity and the peace he felt living life one day at a time. Scores of people counted Gary as one of their closest friends.

Gary's legacy is the myriad of lives he touched through his leadership, his exceptional character, his committed relationships and the Christ-like manner in which he led his life. Coach Alvarez gave us a plaque with Gary's picture on it and an inscription that sums up Gary's attitude: "Live in such a way that those who know you, but don't know God, will come to know God, because they know you." Amen.



The Fowler men cheering on the Dawgs

