



The news that someone close has been stricken with a fatal illness is enough to render even the most eloquent among us unable to adequately express either concern or comfort. Dr. Robert L. Lynn found himself in that position when he learned that a dear friend had been diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Lynn did what is common for him at such times; he turned to poetry—not reading it, but writing it. Awaking in the middle of the night, he penned “Cancer Is So Limited”<sup>©</sup>, offering comfort to his friend and eventually to hundreds of millions of others around the world.

Had Lynn’s poem been written today, it would have immediately gone Internet-viral. But it was the 1970s, when information circulated from one individual to another, was reprinted in various publications and church bulletins, often anonymously, even without the author’s knowledge.

Lynn, who was born in Fox, Oklahoma, was president of Louisiana College at the time he wrote the poem, having previously served as interim president of Oklahoma Baptist University, where he had received his bachelor’s degree before earning graduate degrees from Columbia University, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a 1973 Ph.D. in higher education from the University of Oklahoma. While serving 22 years in his Louisiana post and later in retirement in Atlanta, he was a very active poet, winning more than 100 poetry prizes and publishing 10 books, a leader in the Georgia Poetry Society and member of the Poetry Society of Oklahoma.

While he and his wife, Bonnie—who also has a 1973 Ph.D. and a 1969 master’s in higher education from OU—were in Norman visiting their OU alumni daughter and son-in-law, Suzy and Steve Calonkey, they noticed in a local newspaper obituary a reprint of Lynn’s poem, credited to “Anonymous.” An Internet search revealed 167 million hits from around the globe in many languages. It was past time to claim ownership. With proper docu-

**CANCER IS SO LIMITED**  
 Author *RL* Robert L. Lynn

They’ve sentenced you with invisible cells that  
 secret themselves deep in body recesses and multiply:  
 lymphatic assault on vital functions.

Can cancer conquer you?  
 I doubt it, for the strengths I see in you have  
 nothing to do with cells and blood and muscle.

For cancer is so limited - - -

It cannot cripple love.  
 It cannot shatter hope.  
 It cannot corrode faith.  
 It cannot eat away peace.  
 It cannot destroy confidence.  
 It cannot kill friendship.  
 It cannot shut out memories.  
 It cannot silence courage.  
 It cannot invade the soul.  
 It cannot reduce eternal life.  
 It cannot quench the spirit.  
 It cannot cancel Resurrection.

Can cancer conquer you?  
 I doubt it, for the strengths I see in you have  
 nothing to do with cells and blood and muscle.

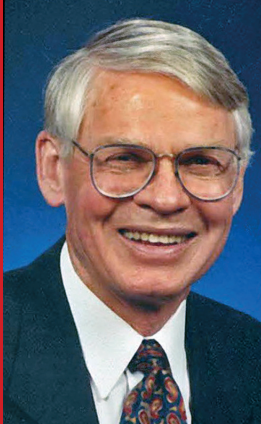


Photo Provided

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The impending death from cancer of a dear friend caused OU graduate Robert L. Lynn to write an internationally known poem that is made available to patients and their families at the Stephenson Cancer Center on the OUHSC campus in Oklahoma City.

mentation, Lynn was able to secure a copyright on his most popular work.

But cancer, which had been the catalyst for his poetry, seemed to dog Lynn’s family. Bonnie Lynn is a breast cancer survivor, and his twin sister, having been treated for cancer in Texas, recently had a reoccurrence and moved to Oklahoma for follow-up care at OUHSC’s Stephenson

Cancer Center in Oklahoma City.

The staff at Stephenson was aware of “Cancer Is So Limited” but had no idea of its origin until the Calonkeys offered to set up a fund to make it available at the center’s Patient Resources Center and in the new patient handbooks. This time, however, the author’s name is prominently displayed. —CJB