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Laura Ziskin (AP Photo)

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Laura Ziskin was a "Spider-Man" novice when she first met with her future producing partner on the blockbuster film franchise.

She quickly became an expert on the Marvel Comics superhero and his alter-ego Peter Parker, applying the same tenacity that took her from humble beginnings as a game-show writer to Hollywood's top echelons in a career of nearly 40 years.



"She became a geek," said Avi Arad, producer on the "Spider-Man" films with Ziskin, 61, who died Sunday at her Santa Monica home after a seven-year battle with [breast cancer](#). "The biggest thing to know and remember about her is her passion. I remember her coming into 'Spider-Man' and how fast she learned everything there is to learn. ...

"She became a bonafide geek," said Arad, who was head of Marvel Comics' film division when he and Ziskin first met. "Her office now looks more like my office than a normal Hollywood producer's office. A lot of Spidey stuff. She fell in love with Peter Parker, and we had this great fortune that she fell in love with him. It was a great team. She was the best partner I ever had. We couldn't have made these movies without her."

With \$2.5 billion at the box office worldwide, the three "Spider-Man" films were the peak of Ziskin's professional career, which included shepherding such films as "Fight Club," "Pretty Woman" "No Way Out" and "As Good as It Gets" as producer, executive producer or studio executive.

Yet friends and colleagues mark among her greatest achievements the fund-raising and research organization she co-founded in 2008, Stand Up To Cancer.

Ziskin joined with other women in the entertainment industry, including [TV](#) newswoman Katie Couric and former Paramount Pictures studio boss Sherry Lansing, to form the group that has raised nearly \$200 million for cancer research.

"Laura was the heart and soul of Stand Up To Cancer," Lansing said. "She dreamed big and attacked every challenge with creativity, passion, perseverance and intelligence."

Ziskin was executive producer for two "Stand Up To Cancer" fund-raising specials that aired simultaneously on major TV networks in 2008 and 2010, featuring such stars as Denzel Washington, Gwyneth Paltrow, Reese Witherspoon, George Clooney, Halle Berry, Jennifer Aniston and Stevie Wonder.

Despite her disease, Ziskin worked until the end. She was busy on a fourth installment

of Spidey's adventures, next year's "The Amazing Spider-Man," Marvel Comics and Sony Pictures' reboot of the franchise, with Andrew Garfield taking over from Tobey Maguire as Peter Parker.

"She never wanted anyone to use the words, she never wanted anyone to say she was fighting cancer. She had survived so many impossible situations that up until the end, we were all expecting her to sit up and go, 'What are you all doing here?'" said Sony Pictures Co-Chairman Amy Pascal, who called Ziskin her closest friend. "She will always be with us in spirit. She will always be our girl."

Ziskin remained tireless in her support of cancer research, posting a feisty Web blog earlier this month to mark National Cancer Survivors Day.

"Cancer sucks, and each and every day I have moments of telling it where to go. And today, on National Cancer Survivors Day, I can shout it from the rooftops!" Ziskin wrote. "While somewhat more crass assertions also readily come to mind, what I really want to say is: 'Cancer, you can't survive ME!'"

When Ziskin was feeling well, she was the same unflagging producer she always had been, "Spider-Man" colleague Arad said.

And "when she was in treatment, she was always a phone call away. She was really big on emails, so there was no escape," Arad said. "Being in some very, very difficult, experimental treatments, she was in touch. You felt her everywhere, if she was in the hospital or if she was in the office. She's one of those people, I don't know where they get this energy. I thought I was an energetic person, but next to her, I was too calm."

Born in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles, Ziskin studied filmmaking at the University of Southern California, wrote for game shows after graduating in 1973 then moved into producing.

Her other credits include "Murphy's Romance," "Hero," "What About Bob?" and Clooney's live TV movie "Fail Safe."

In 2002, Ziskin became the first woman to work as solo producer of Hollywood's biggest show, the Academy Awards, and she produced the ceremony again five years later amid her cancer fight.

In the 1990s, Ziskin was president for five years of Fox 2000 Pictures, a 20th Century Fox subsidiary that released "Fight Club," "Never Been Kissed," "Courage Under Fire" and Terrence Malick's "The Thin Red Line."

Ziskin is survived by her husband, Alvin Sargent, screenwriter on the second and third "Spider-Man" films, and her daughter, Julia Barry.

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"The gift that she possessed will not be forgotten. One day soon your family will be able to enjoy her company, right here on earth by means of the gift that god gives, which is everlasting life. Romans 6:23. My Sympathy, ..."

- Charise morgan (roselle, NJ)

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