

Contra Costa Times (California)

August 12, 2008 Tuesday

Drummond: Blessed to have known **Faith Fancher**

BYLINE: By Tammerlin Drummond Oakland Tribune

SECTION: MY TOWN; Alameda; News; Local

LENGTH: 788 words

When your world is rocked by a personal tragedy the sudden death of a child, say, or a deadly disease it takes a special person to find something positive in the situation.

I'm not talking about spouting Pollyannish platitudes, while secretly you seethe and curse God and all of humanity for your misfortune. I mean standing perfectly still in the midst of the storm. Knowing that despite the winds raging around you, threatening to rip your raft to shreds, somewhere, somehow, despite all appearances, there is something life-affirming.

I won't pretend to have reached that stage of enlightenment. Those who know me would immediately expose the fib. But I am blessed to have known someone who did possess that ability.

Her name was **Faith Fancher**. She was my stepmother and one of the bravest women I have ever known.

Many of you knew Faith, or felt like you did after watching her for so many years as a television reporter at KTVU in Oakland. In 1997, as many of you also know, Faith was diagnosed with breast cancer. After a valiant, very public battle with the disease, she died in October 2003.

I remember when Faith first learned she had breast cancer. She told me her grandmother had come to her in a dream and told her to stop stalling and get a mammogram. Faith had the doctor's slip sitting on her dresser for weeks but had done nothing about it.

She went to get the mammogram, which revealed a lump in one of her breasts. She would have to undergo a mastectomy. She was 46.

Before beginning her treatment, Faith insisted on coming out to visit me in Miami, where I lived at the time. She dragged along my reluctant father, who hates Florida. Despite the terrifying diagnosis she'd just received, you would have never known from Faith's upbeat demeanor that anything was wrong.

Years later, when she would become really sick from the rounds of chemotherapy, all of her hair fell out and the steroids made her gain weight, she still refused to let the "B-Goddess," as she called breast cancer, get her down. She'd be lying on the living room couch watching her favorite soap operas, drained from chemo. But let the phone ring. Faith would perk up and give whoever was calling her trademark greeting in her Tennessee drawl, "Hello, darling!"

The first time Faith told me she thought her cancer was a gift, I thought all the chemo drugs had gone to her mind. How could anyone believe that a disease that was probably going to kill them was a "gift"?

It was a terrible gift, she insisted, but a gift nonetheless. Because it made her realize what was important in life.

Faith saw her own cancer as an opportunity to bring more awareness to the deadly epidemic.

Drummond: Blessed to have known Faith Fancher Contra Costa Times (California)
August 12, 2008 Tuesday

In 1997, she and her close friend Elaine Corral, a former anchor at KTVU, teamed up to create Faith's Story, an extremely personal documentary about Faith's breast cancer battle. The cameras followed Faith into surgery and chronicled her initial road to recovery.

The series received tremendous response from viewers and won an Emmy.

The series encouraged many women to get mammograms, which meant the most to Faith. If the cancer was detected early enough, the test could save lives.

Faith would always say she was blessed. She had good insurance and was getting the best possible medical care. Being a local celebrity also didn't hurt.

But she felt for all the women with breast cancer who didn't have insurance. Women who were too ill to work and didn't have the money to pay for basic necessities like food and housing.

Faith convinced a group of her friends most of whom were other Bay Area television reporters to help her start an organization to help poor women with breast cancer. They decided to call the group Friends of Faith.

In the beginning, it was pretty much a one-woman show. Faith ran the organization out of her and my father's living room. I remember her lying on the couch, writing checks to nonprofit organizations that give financial assistance to breast cancer survivors.

After Faith's death in 2003, Friends of Faith went through a rough patch. Since Faith had pretty much done most of the administrative work, an executive director had to be hired, and the board reorganized into a "working board." Since 1997, Friends of Faith has given away \$700,000 to support breast cancer survivors.

I joined the board in 2003.

We decided to hold an annual breast cancer walk every August to celebrate Faith's birthday and to raise money for breast cancer survivors.

Saturday marks our fourth annual, and will be held at Lake Merritt.

Come join us to celebrate Faith's legacy and help women who continue to battle this terrible disease.

Tammerlin Drummond's column runs Wednesday in Metro and Sunday on the editorial page.

Reach her at tdrummond@bayareanewsgroup.com.

LOAD-DATE: August 15, 2008

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

GRAPHIC: In this 2008 file photo, Bill Drummond, husband of **Faith Fancher**, poses in front of Faith's Place at Alta Bates Summit Hospital in Oakland. (Alex Molloy/The OaklandTribune)

In this 2000 file photo, KTVU journalist **Faith Fancher** throws out the first pitch at an A's game.

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newspaper