

Faith Fancher's story is one of love, hope The Oakland Tribune (Oakland, CA)
October 27, 2003 Monday

The Oakland Tribune (Oakland, CA)

October 27, 2003 Monday

Faith Fancher's story is one of love, hope

SECTION: BRENDA PAYTON

LENGTH: 764 words

The hundreds of people attending **Faith Fancher's** funeral at Oakland's St. Leo the Great Catholic Church Wednesday were trying to be strong and courageous like Faith would have wanted. Like Faith was. We were trying not to cry.

The resolve began to break when her husband, William Drummond, spoke. He described how he didn't have a vocabulary for love before he met Faith; saying "I love you" caught in his throat. He was a journalist and believed in remaining emotionally remote.

"Faith never really accepted that," he said in an understatement of her contagious passion for life. "There was not a day that went by without her saying 'I love you.' I never had a conversation on the phone or before she left the house without her saying 'I love you.' By the simple force of repetition, I responded."

The handkerchiefs and tissues started to appear right about then.

"She was not only a love, a companion and a colleague, she was my hero," Drummond said, his voice breaking.

The audience applauded. That was everyone's sentiment. That's why we had crowded in, filling the large church beyond capacity, spilling from the sanctuary into the vestibule.

"She was a beautiful woman, a beautiful woman," he continued. "She was never more beautiful than during the time her body was ravaged by disease. When she died she was a truly evolved human being. She opened my eyes and softened my heart."

After that, the tears would not be denied.

Faith's former KTVU-TV colleague and good friend Elaine Corral put it simply. This was not the way Faith's story was supposed to end, incorporating the title of the television news feature that documented her diagnosis and 6-year battle against breast cancer. She was supposed to beat it. Even after the cancer returned. Even after she learned it had metastasized to her liver.

That was what she made you believe. If you approached her with pity, thinking she was sick and dying, she blasted the thought from your mind. You came away convinced there must have been a mistake. Such a vivacious, strong woman could not be dying.

And she wasn't. Her body may have been succumbing to the disease, but she continued to live fully with her characteristic verve. After every difficult medical treatment she rewarded herself with a trip, to Mexico or to New York City for a shopping spree. In her last days, she insisted on doing her makeup herself, trembling hands notwithstanding.

She was radiant, her voice was strong, her spirit undaunted, even after a treatment. There was just no way she was going to let the disease beat her.

Faith Fancher's story is one of love, hope The Oakland Tribune (Oakland, CA)
October 27, 2003 Monday

Her decision to share her illness with the public heightened awareness about breast cancer. She frequently spoke at conferences and seminars on breast cancer. Women approached her on the street and told her they had gotten a mammogram because of her, that their cancer had been detected early. Because of her.

She called cancer a terrible gift, but a gift nonetheless. She used her terminal illness to save the lives of other women.

Two years ago, I interviewed her about the KTOP-TV documentary, "The Transformative Power of **Faith Fancher**." I asked her where she found her seeming endless reserve of strength. She credited her family, her upbringing and her husband. But like most remarkable people, she didn't really have an explanation.

Just days before she died, she told Corral "for a minute there I thought this bastard was going to get me. But I think I'm past the crisis."

If positive thinking could have saved Faith, she would have lived another 53 years.

Her attitude couldn't have been more positive. In addition to the loss of Faith, mourners grieved the loss of the hope she offered. No matter how grim the prognosis, she never gave up, embodying the fight and the will to survive. As long as she waged her battle, we were heartened, confident we could face and overcome our challenges. Faith's story was not supposed to end like that.

At the funeral, a striking portrait of Faith was placed behind a vase of pink roses, perky and vibrant. She looks over her shoulder, her hand gesturing toward the viewer. Her face is lit up by her irresistible, dimpled smile. Up close, the eyes sparkle. For a second, it almost seems she hasn't gone, she is there, captured in those eyes. Her spirit lives and Faith's story does not end.

The family requests memorial contributions be sent to Friends of Faith, 6114 LaSalle St., Box 324, Oakland 94611, to help women with breast cancer.

Brenda Payton's column appears in the local section on Tuesdays and Fridays and on the opinion page on Sundays.

LOAD-DATE: November 11, 2003

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

Copyright 2003 MediaNews Group, Inc. and ANG Newspapers