

BRIDES



AGAINST BREAST CANCER

How one woman's vision and ingenuity is
changing the lives of cancer victims
... AND HOW YOU CAN HELP.

Chances are that someone you know and love has been or will be affected by breast cancer. The disease has reached near-epidemic proportions with over 2.8 million (one in seven) women in America being diagnosed. While research continues to ramp up in the search for a cure, that goal has unfortunately not yet been reached.

Making Memories Breast Cancer Foundation, headquartered in Portland, Oregon, has found a unique approach to bring joy to terminal breast cancer patients, for whom the research is too late, by granting memory-making wishes.

“Brides Against Breast Cancer” is the brainchild of Fran Hansen, the foundation’s Executive Director, who received a “false positive” diagnosis of breast cancer in 1997. Before she learned her diagnosis was benign, she was frantically researching the internet and happened upon a “list serve” where over 600 women in 30 countries were writing one another, seeking information and offering comfort and friendship. Hansen was deeply touched by the kindness and compassion and their desire to share personal treatment options in the hope of possibly helping each other.

Then she saw the letter that changed her life. It was Christmastime, and one young woman told of losing the battle against metastatic breast cancer and said her husband had just lost his job. She was overcome at the prospect of not being able to provide her two small children with one last memorable holiday because their resources were exhausted. In despair, the woman wrote, “I just wish this were over, so that my family could get on with their lives.”

The story broke Hansen’s heart and she recalled she would have given anything to help the young woman, but couldn’t at that time. However, the image haunted her and one night shortly after, she awakened with the whole idea upon which Making Memories is built.

Having spent many years in the bridal industry, Hansen caught a very unique vision of brides-to-be finding their dream gowns, while at the same time helping grant wishes. She imagined women around the country donating their most treasured possession, their wedding dresses, selling them on a “gown tour” and using the funds to create joyful memories for those dying of breast cancer. Hansen’s daughter, Anna Nelson, wholeheartedly agreed and became the co-founder and Wish Director of the foundation.

The first wish was granted in 1998 to Nancy White-Kelly of Georgia. Nancy dreamed of a day when her entire 31 member family could come together for a reunion, providing her an opportunity to say goodbye and to tell each of her loved ones face-to-face how much they meant to her. Nancy wrote to Hansen afterwards and said, “Words cannot express my appreciation for the wonderful family reunion...I truly hope that

Gowns valued up to
\$4,000 are available
at prices ranging from
\$49 to \$599.



others will benefit from my being the first wish granted. Much publicity has been generated in the media, which I believe, in time, will bring donations.”

Then, in May of 2000, Nancy returned Hansen’s kindness in an unusual turn of events. She wrote a letter to Oprah Winfrey and Hansen was lured to the show under the guise of discussing breast cancer. There, she was surprised on air and named one of Oprah’s Angels. As an additional gift, Hansen received one quarter of a million dollars worth of gowns from the famous New York designer, Demetrios. Oprah also asked viewers to send their wedding gowns.

Hansen returned to her Oregon home. Before appearing on Oprah, she had managed to collect nearly 2,000 gowns in two years. Four days after her on-air surprise and Oprah’s appeal, two huge UPS trucks pulled up filled with hundreds upon hundreds of gowns, each given by one of the most generous women in the world, to be sold to grant wishes.

Some of the stories attached to the gown donations bring tears to the eyes. One elderly gentleman donated his deceased wife’s gown in her memory, telling of their lifetime of friendship and love. Still another came from a young bride who sent her gown, explaining she was riding in a limo to her wedding when she received a summons to the hospital. Her groom had suffered a massive heart attack and died. She spent the hour she was to have wed holding her groom’s hand, he “dressed so handsomely in his tuxedo and me, dressed in my wedding gown.” The letters that accompany these treasured possessions often give a glimpse into the owner’s personal experience with the loss or survival of a sister, mother, grandmother or friend.

Today, the Portland warehouse is brimming with an amazing 22,000+ brand name and designer gowns as well as beautiful dresses that continue to be gifted to the foundation. Manufacturers and bridal shops around the country have also generously donated to Making Memories.

Many wishes have been granted over the past five years, including one woman’s young son meeting Bill Gates of Microsoft; a mother’s dream for her three girls being fulfilled when they were able to attend a Backstreet Boys concert and be delivered home in a dreamy limo, and another woman’s heart’s desire for great seats to a Lakers game. Many families have asked for and received trips to Disneyland and Disneyworld where dreams are very familiar. Trips to say farewell to loved ones, second honeymoons, camcorders, computers, trips to the coast to see lighthouses and many other dreams have come true through Making Memories. Overall, more than 1,000 lives have been touched to date by the foundation’s wish granting.

In late 2001, Dee Appel of Portland, Oregon, an author and breast cancer survivor, began volunteering for the organization. At that time she had been in remission for over five years. Appel loved Making Memories’ mission and felt very blessed to have reached what seemed to be the magic five-year marker in beating the disease. She wanted to help others who were not as fortunate and for whom the cancer had metastasized.

Appel’s daughter, one son and several grandchildren had moved to southeast Texas. In their absence in Oregon, Appel poured her energies into the Portland-based foundation. She and Hansen became close friends and it was apparent that Appel wanted to be more involved than at the volunteer level. Unfortunately, very shortly after she began volunteering, Appel’s cancer resurfaced and she underwent a mastectomy. Although things looked good after the surgery, her children wanted her to move close to them in Texas. Later that year, another lump appeared under her arm. Appel told her family that the beast that lurked within her had spread, and further testing revealed metastasis to the liver. She underwent additional chemotherapy and left Oregon to move to Texas.

A Stage IV diagnosis has not deterred Appel and her daughter, Jennifer, from opening a Southern Division of Making Memories near Beaumont, Texas. Appel’s most recent testing has

found her in remission and Making Memories South launched its first “Brides Against Breast Cancer” sale in Houston at Shirley Acres in early February. The sisterhood of breast cancer has once again found its heart’s connections in the south. Volunteers, whom Hansen and Appel declare to be the backbone of Making Memories, generously give of their time and energies at every sale across the United States. “It is an amazing phenomena how women will rise up to help perfect strangers, and in the process become wonderful friends,” stated Appel.

Founders Fran Hansen and Anna Nelson have been featured on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” and were honored in 2005 as “Trendsetters of the Year” by Modern Bride magazine. Making Memories has received incredible media attention, including MSNBC, Ananda Lewis, over 100 television interviews and over 200 newspaper and magazine articles. The Making Memories story has been mentioned in Redbook Magazine, Family Circle, Martha Stewart’s Winter Wedding Magazine and Newsweek.

The foundation’s mission is being perpetuated by other chapters that have opened in Charleston, South Carolina, where a warehouse outlet is open to brides on weekends when road shows are not scheduled. That chapter is headed by Barbara Raskin, formerly Marketing Director of Brides Magazine in New York. In addition, an antique and retro division has begun in Snohomish, Washington, operated by Brenda Chovanak.

If you know of someone who may qualify for a wish or would like to donate a gown, please see the Making Memories website at www.makingmemories.org for further information. You may contact Dee Appel if you have questions for the Southern chapter, at dappel@gt.rr.com. If you are or know of a bride-to-be, watch for a “Brides Against Breast Cancer” sale in your area. Gowns valued up to \$4,000 are available at prices ranging from \$49 to \$599. Find your dream gown and help make someone’s last wish come true. ♦