



How Making Memories Came About

Fran Hansen's Personal Story

In 1997, I had a personal scare with breast cancer. During a regularly scheduled mammogram, my doctor discovered a suspicious lump that immediately brought additional tests and a false positive report that I may have breast cancer. Additional tests revealed that I was perfectly fine, but not until several days later. However, six months later, during a precautionary follow-up, the same thing occurred again.

Fortunately, I was found to be cancer free, but in the ensuing days, I poured over the internet and every book I could find about breast cancer. I wanted to be totally informed and have all the right questions if I faced a diagnosis of breast cancer. During these days, I found on the internet a "list serve" where over 600 women in 30 countries around the world were writing one another, seeking information, comfort and friendship, all the while dealing with their own diagnosis of breast cancer. Some of the women were just being diagnosed, while others were dealing with end of life issues. The letters were simply incredible. The kindness they showed towards one another, the concern and their desire to share personal treatment options in hopes that it might help someone else.

During these days of quietly reading their letters, I couldn't help but cry as I read of their struggles and heartbreaks. They were all so brave amidst their fear. They all expressed the same desires and hopes that were mine and those of my healthy friends, but so many of them wrote of their knowledge that time was drawing near and they would soon leave their husbands, children, grandchildren, and loved ones. Their heartache was overwhelming.

Then one day, I read the letter that changed my life. *"Please pray for my family. Christmas is almost here and my husband just lost his job. We have no money to buy gifts for our children. I just wish this were over, so that my family could get on with their lives."* I was overcome with tears. "If only I had the means and the ability to help this woman. If only I had \$500 or \$1,000 to send to her, what a difference that would have made in her life that last Christmas with her family.



Making Memories Founders, Fran Hansen and Anna Orr

Just a few nights later, December 11, 1997, I awoke in the middle of the night, my mind spinning with visions of how I could make a difference in their lives. I literally SAW three things in that moment I awoke. I saw Oprah Winfrey, 10,000 wedding gowns, and a truck and trailer with big logos on it. In that instant I knew women across this nation would literally donate one of their most treasured and prized possessions IF they knew it would "Make a Difference" for someone facing a diagnosis of terminal breast cancer. I just KNEW IT!!!

My next thought was, "There is NO way I am going to do that!!" I had owned bridal shops and a catering business in the Northwest years earlier and had promised myself when I left that there was no way I would ever go back. I was perfectly happy in a new career as a Financial Aid Officer at a local college. However, I could not get the thought out of my mind — I could not sleep, my heart would race when I lay down and my mind would swirl with thoughts of HOW it could work. I simply said, "NO.... I have no earthly idea where to begin to form a foundation where wishes could be granted...and I just KNEW there had to be someone else granting wishes and helping women who had been diagnosed with breast cancer. But there was not! Still, I could not sleep. Finally, I shared my vision with my daughter, Anna Orr, who immediately said, "MOM, you MUST to do that! You didn't come up with this idea on your own!! God had to have inspired that vision and HE will help us." Anna became the Co-Founder of Making Memories that very moment! She may have only been 19 years old, but her wisdom and understanding went far beyond mine!

Together, Anna and I slowly began to put the details together that would someday become the Making Memories Breast Cancer Foundation. My vision of December 11th, 1997 was fulfilled in its entirety in October of 2002, when after having been surprised as one of Oprah's Angels in May of 2000 and given \$250,000 worth of new, designer wedding gowns from the famous New York Designer, Demetrios. Oprah also asked her viewers to send their wedding gowns. Up until that time, we had collected nearly 2,000 gowns in two years. Three days later, at my home in Portland, OR we received our first gown in response to Oprah's request. The next day, two UPS trucks pulled up, filled with hundreds and hundreds of gowns to be sold to grant wishes. To date, bridal shops, manufacturers and individuals from across the nation have donated tens of thousands of wedding gowns, and with more arriving every day.

Anna and I continue to be blessed by the kindness and generosity of donors, volunteers and coordinators across the nation, who truly made our dream come true! Anna became America's youngest Fairy Godmother and made dreams and wishes come true for terminal breast cancer patients that included nearly one thousand loved ones and family members participating in those wish requests during her years at Making Memories. In 2005, together, we were honored in New York City as two of Modern Bride Magazine's "Trendsetters of the Year", alongside other notables such as Vera Wang and Wolfgang Puck, and Family Circle magazine featured our story in their June 15, 2005 issue as "Women Who Make A Difference." It has been an incredible journey!

A journey for which Anna and I will always be grateful to have been a part of. As our passage leads us to pursue exciting new family and career opportunities, and our years with Making Memories comes to a bittersweet end, we proudly look back on and remember each of those whose lives were touched and enriched by the kindness and generosity of women across this nation who helped make "our dream" come true! Our prayer is for each of those who follow, that they be blessed with strength and compassion to fulfill the mission of granting wishes and touching lives, and for making a difference for those for whom the cure is too late. May God richly bless each volunteer, donor, coordinator and employee of this amazing Foundation!