

**Save One Life**  
In Honor Of Ray Jardine  
By  
Bob Elder

When I was a young boy, I was confronted with an awful truth. My mother informed me that my aunt was going to die. This was not the first loss that I had experienced in life but it was the first time that I had ever been informed that someone close to me who seemed healthy was going to die. In my conversation with my mother, I was informed that my Aunt Doris had Breast Cancer and, while her survivability may have been possible, that she had waited too long for it to be an option.

I have always been prone to logical thought and consequently had many questions of my mother in the hope of gaining some understanding of the inconceivable circumstance. Even in my youth, my parents were always extremely honest and forthright. My quest for information and their willingness to provide it proved difficult to handle. I remember in detail some of the things that I was told in their attempt to explain a loss that had not yet occurred but that was going to occur and the reasons why nothing could be done. I recall straining to comprehend the situation and struggling with the inequity and injustice that I was being confronted with. At the end, I could only accept the reality as my aunt's life began to fade and gave up on understanding why there were no options but to let her life slip away. My last memory of my Aunt Doris was of her standing in the living room of my grandparents' home on Christmas.

As might well be expected, the experience of losing my aunt was not forgotten, but was placed aside and overpowered by the whimsical resilience of my youth. Over the years, I have never forgotten my Aunt Doris, reflecting at times upon childhood memories and wondering what type of relationship that we may have had in my adult years. As time passed, I moved on into adulthood and in pursuit of successes in life. The memories and imaginings of Aunt Doris has stayed with me always, on the sidelines, but there throughout my life.

For whatever reason, after traveling through the various roads of life, I found myself in Saint James City, Florida at the Island Hardware for a fundraising benefit organized by Ray and Mary Jardine to raise \$400 which Marci Perry needed to complete her pledge for a Breast Cancer walk to benefit Breast Cancer research. In the midst of the fundraising efforts, Babby Johnson, a local lady who was at the time recovering from her second bout with Breast Cancer, took the stage. There we were; all listening silently to Babby in a remarkable display of stamina standing before the crowd and unveiling her innermost feelings of her struggle with Breast Cancer. I will never forget her courage. For me, her words acted as a catalyst, bringing back vivid memories of a loss long since placed aside.

At the time, I was in the process of building my parents' new home and, as the project was a sizeable undertaking, I again retreated into the comfortable solace of my work. While working one day, Ray Jardine stopped by and asked for my help with the second annual Breast Cancer Benefit that had been relocated to the Saint James Civic Center to facilitate a larger crowd. Even as I agreed to help, I envisioned my involvement to be a casual role supporting the annual event with my labor. It was at about this time that I began feeling a change of attitude taking place in my consciousness. A force that was spurring my involvement in the effort in a serious way was working on me. Almost as if it were a scheduled event, I called Tonya one day at our Day Spa and asked how she felt about getting involved. Upon her agreement, I drove straight to the bank where Marci Perry worked and asked if she wanted Tonya and me involved. Without hesitation, Marci replied; "Absolutely!" This occurred to be particularly amazing to me later since, at the time, we hardly knew each other.

The second annual Pine Island Breast Cancer Benefit was a success generating approximately

\$10,000, a sizeable increase over the \$3,500 raised the first year. This all began to seem surreal since the original expectation was to raise \$400 the first year. The monies raised at the first two benefits were donated to the Avon Foundation and the Susan G. Komen Foundation respectfully. These are both well-known charities that primarily focus their efforts on research in pursuit of a cure for Breast Cancer.

There were those who were overwhelmed with our success and had aspirations to match the success of the second year in years following. I disagreed vigorously and took the position that we needed to move forward and become all that we could become. I suppose that this is the time that all must recognize that I had completely mutated from silent bystander to vocal activist. Undeniably, we were hooked and so began the arduous task of incorporating From Our Hearts, Inc., a 501 (c) 3 corporation so that we could operate officially and better control the distribution of the funds that were raised.

As we began planning the third annual Breast Cancer Benefit, we were concerned about public awareness and the sensitivities that surround Breast Cancer. Breast Cancer is a deadly disease that needs to be dragged out of the closet and eradicated. We decided not to skirt the subject by speaking in soft reverent tones. Personally speaking, if ego and a fear of diminished self esteem contributed to the loss of my Aunt Doris, then those society driven traits become my enemies. We took a radical new “in your face” approach. We decided to call the event “Breast Fest”. If any find this name offensive, we apologize, however, understand that is our intention to save lives and to do so we need those suffering in obscurity to lose their inhibitions and come forward so that they can receive much needed help.

We moved forward with our planning for the 2003 event adding a morning walk to the activities at the suggestion of Earl Scott. As we were preparing for the event, tragedy struck with the untimely death of our good friend and founding member, Ray Jardine. I recall Marci’s question after Ray’s death; “What do we do about the Breast Cancer Benefit?” My answer was almost automatic; “We’re going to do it bigger and better!” and so we did, raising over \$17,000. In a two-month period in early 2004, we lost Ray, organized Ray Day to celebrate Ray’s life, hospitalized Mary after nearly losing her to self-neglect in her grief and somehow managed to pull off the Breast Cancer Benefit successfully. We were exhausted.

During the period of reorganization prior to our third Breast Cancer Benefit, we had begun discussions of our desire to provide direct assistance to those afflicted with Breast Cancer within our community and now that we had suffered the loss of Ray Jardine to a massive heart attack, we started thinking of other causes that may be deserving of our efforts. We began thinking of ways that we could channel our fund raising activities in the direction of actually saving lives. We felt that if we could save just one life then all of our efforts would be worthwhile.

We became aware of Partners In Breast Cancer Care, a local organization providing exactly the type of direct assistance that we wanted to provide. Amazingly, we found ourselves in the company of another organization that was already fulfilling our mission. We were immediately reassured in our mission and began a prudent investigation of Partners. What we learned was astounding. This little band of warriors was not only raising monies to be used for procedures from diagnosis to cure for individuals suffering with Breast Cancer, but they were actively negotiating special pricing from the professional providers of services. In some cases, they were actually getting services donated. This information coupled with our first hand knowledge of the extent of their assistance that had been provided to our good friend and member Julie Mathews left me somewhat at a loss for words. As they say; “If you can’t beat them, join them”. After consultation with our executive committee, Marci Perry and I promptly delivered a donation check of \$10,000 and pledged our continued support of Partners’ efforts in the future.

As we began planning our fourth benefit, we found ourselves stricken by hurricane Charley and just as we were considering our own limitations, an amazing thing happened. The community rallied to our aid taking on many of the event responsibilities including set up, tear down, clean up and the

astoundingly successful 5 K Walk. Since Earl Scott had originated the idea and handled the walk in 2004, he took on the task of coordinating a group of ladies from Bokeelia that had volunteered to serve on the walk committee. After the first meeting, Earl felt as Henry Ford would have felt if the Ford Motor Company engineers had designed the Mustang to immediately follow the Model "T". Earl stepped out of the proverbial driver's seat, took a position to the rear and held on for the ride. How can we give enough credit to our Bokeelia walk committee for their efforts? Mary Welch, Dot Mahan, Christine Strom, Sharon Gilmore and Patsy Allen; you are angels; you have our admiration and appreciation. The 2005, fourth annual Pine Island Breast Cancer Benefit produced over \$40,000 in an amazing showing of community support. Following the event, we were proud to present Partners In Breast Cancer Care with a check for \$35,000.

At some time during 2004, Sue Trimble suggested that we put on a ladies' fashion show. In the wake of Hurricane Charley, the idea was slow to develop and was eventually scheduled and ready to go in 2005 with a complete line of ladies' fashions provided by Anthony's in Fort Myers on October 24<sup>th</sup>, only to be postponed due to the arrival of Hurricane Wilma. On October 31<sup>st</sup>, our first Ladies Fashion Show and Luncheon became a reality at the Sandy Hook Restaurant in Matlacha taking in approximately \$5,500.

With our preparedness in full swing for our first children's "Jump-A-Thon" to benefit Lee Memorial Foundation Children's Cancer Fund scheduled in February and our fifth annual Breast Cancer Benefit scheduled in March, our good friend and poster girl, Babby Johnson finally succumbed to her long battle with cancer. Babby defeated her cancer twice and battled it for the third time with every ounce of her spirit until she had no more strength. It was Babby's courage that had largely inspired us to continue our quest in our earliest days. It was Babby's courage that awoke the sleeping emotion within me that has sustained my efforts. Babby led our Breast Cancer Walk in 2005 in a golf cart having been in the hospital only a few days before. She loved a good party and simply would not be denied staying for the entire event as always. The board of From Our Hearts unanimously passed a resolution dedicating our 2006 Pine Island Breast Cancer Benefit to Babby Johnson. We will not mourn her passing. We will remember and honor her courage.

When Babby was diagnosed this final time, she had come to us asking if we would help if she chose to pursue holistic medicine not covered by insurance. Marci Perry and I met with Babby and explained how this type of direct assistance would not meet the criteria of From Our Hearts but that we would personally put on a benefit for her and set up a medical trust to assist her in her battle. On April 17, 2005, Tonya & I along with Marci & Dennis Perry hosted a benefit for Babby at the Island Hardware in Saint James City.

The posters read "Come Party With Babby" and it was a terrific success. You see, our mission will never be about mourning death but will forever be about celebrating life and Babby lived our mission to the very end.

In February 2006, the following was published in the Pine Island Eagle and in the bulletin at Grace United Methodist Church.

*Following the passing of Babby Johnson in January, and in keeping with her wishes from the time that her medical trust was set up, we would like to make public the final disposition of funds that were remaining in the trust.*

*After all payments, there was a remaining balance of \$9,751. These funds were contributed half each to Hope Hospice and Partners In Breast Cancer Care and done so in Babby's name. These contributions have been made with the blessing of Lowell and Alex.*

*Even in passing, Babby has continued to help others. We thank all who contributed.*

The 2005 holiday season and the beginning of 2006 was particularly difficult as we lost Tonya's grandfather and nearly her brother and father simultaneously, then we lost Babby and, if that were not enough, I found myself embroiled in a hometown struggle over issues that I hold dear and that affect the safety and security of our community. I have included this information, not to draw attention to myself or my battles, but rather to demonstrate that there is indeed a greater good at work, that I truly believe all things happen for a reason and that reassurance can come in the strangest forms.

The morning of February 11<sup>th</sup>, I found myself coming down and feeling the pressures of life weighing heavy. I have always been a determined optimist and as such will never allow bending to any forces of depression. This time seemed different and I found myself questioning all that I was involved in and if the results were worth all the personal sacrifice. To make things worse, the country was experiencing some rather extreme winter weather. I willed myself forward but I had difficulty shaking the forces of life that were bearing down upon me. The pattern continued through the 12<sup>th</sup> and into the 13<sup>th</sup> when I went to speak with Reverend Ann McLemore of Saint Johns Episcopal Church. Unbelievably, when I arrived at the church, I found Reverend Ann dealing with the aftermath of the church being broken into and vandalized. In spite of her own immediate problems, I found her with a smile and, true to her education, she offered reassurance that my pursuits were honorable. She advised me to take some time for myself and find forgiveness in my heart. None of our conversation that lasted nearly an hour and a half came as any surprise, but it was a good and reassuring conversation.

I have always been a rational man and as such, I was driven by logic and continued to digest and revisit recent events in search of my proper course. Tuesday, February 14<sup>th</sup> dawned a cold but bright sunny day and I found myself at our kitchen sink for a fresh glass of water. For reasons that escape logic, I noticed an unopened fortune cookie that had been left in the basket next to our telephone where any number of various items call temporary home prior to final disposition. As I listened to the messages on the answering machine, I casually opened the cookie to see what was inside. The message read as follows; "It is by those who have suffered that the world is most advanced." For the previous days I had struggled in search of the cement to bind my spirit only to find my keystone by chance in a previously discarded fortune cookie. I found myself renewed and realizing that discovering the fortune cookie was not by chance at all.

### **Postscript**

It is a mystery why our little group has come together. I can only say that I firmly believe that as long as we stay focused and maintain a purity of purpose, our successes will continue. Our purpose has become solidified and hardened by our experiences. The community is helping and our numbers are growing. Our work is difficult and we receive no pay. Our reward is in the solemn knowledge that our efforts are making our world a little better place. Our endeavors are as our name says; "From Our Hearts". I don't know how we gather the strength to do the things we do. What we do has nothing to do with us and we want no credit for our deeds. All of our efforts are expended in the names of those who have the courage to stand up to their suffering.

If we have learned anything, it must be that few things are certain in this life and that none are guaranteed. At times, I feel that there are forces beyond our comprehension at work assuring our successes. Just in case Ray Jardine, my Aunt Doris, Babby Johnson and others are out there helping, I have a message. Rest well, good friends, we have much more work ahead.

This is not where this story ends. I will continue the story as long as there is a story to tell and I hope it will become a long and happy tale about how one little group of people who came together quite by accident,

worked hard and through their efforts saved one life.