

FRAN: Turns cancer diagnosis into a cause

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DO YOU FOLLOW A SPECIFIC HEALTH REGIMEN?

I eat lots of vegetables, fruits and whole foods, complex carbs that are slower to digest. A lot of organic chicken and fish and occasionally red meat. My food choices increase the natural alkaline and decrease the acidity in my system. Cancer can only thrive when your body's acidic.

JOHANNA'S LAW TO FUND A NATIONAL GYNECOLOGICAL CANCER-AWARENESS CAMPAIGN WAS SIGNED INTO LAW BY PRESIDENT BUSH IN JANUARY 2007—WHAT'S HAPPENED SINCE THEN?

We've jumped through several hoops, but the first \$6½ million for the campaign has been funded for 2008. Now we've introduced an initiative to the state of California legislature that mandates more diagnostic screenings [such as vaginal ultrasound and breast MRI testing] for women. . . .

At Mrs. [Coretta Scott] King's memorial, [I thought] what a shame that a woman like this should perish from ovarian cancer in the 21st century.

Our tag line for Cancer Schmancer is 'Stage 1 IS the cure,' meaning early detection is the cure for the three kinds of gynecological cancer — ovarian, cervical and uterine.

The woman is the caregiver in most American families, the very glue that holds the family together. We want every woman to take control of her body by becoming a medical consumer and knowing what tests are available. Become an advocate for your own health. I don't give away power of attorney over my money, why should I give away power over my body?

I hope to see in my lifetime that every woman with gynecological cancer is diagnosed at Stage 1, when it's curable.

WHERE DOES YOUR DRIVE AND DETERMINATION COME FROM?

It's something that gets developed in childhood because of a family dynamic. I got attention, approval and love from my parents while growing up when I was achieving, being strong and self-sufficient.

WHEN DID YOU DECIDE ON A COMEDY CAREER?

During high school, I evaluated all the things I could see myself doing — hairdressing, acting, writing, being an entrepreneur (all of which, by the way I've accomplished) — and acting came easily and I felt good doing it. I have a funny family. My parents have a good sense of humor, so it's part heredity, part environment.

WHY DO YOU THINK 'THE NANNY' WAS WARMLY EMBRACED BY VIEWERS?

One of the things I'm very proud of is that people are always telling me they laugh out loud when they watch the episodes, and that kind of humor is very healing. But it's also very hard to achieve that — you know, the situation may be funny, but where's the laugh? We were lucky that we managed to surround ourselves with writers who could find that laugh.

IS IT TRUE YOU PITCHED THE IDEA FOR 'THE NANNY' TO THE PRESIDENT OF CBS ENTERTAINMENT BECAUSE YOU WERE ON THE SAME PLANE?

I was on a plane going to visit a girlfriend in southwestern France, and the president Jeff Sagansky was on the same flight to Paris. We exchanged hellos, and I kept thinking "carpe diem, carpe diem," so I ran to the bathroom to put on some makeup, came out and sat down next to him. He told me the kind of series he thought would be right for me, and I told him that nothing is going to fit me hand in glove because I'm too original.

Nine and a half hours later,

I'm at my girlfriend's house with her two children and thought I would lose my mind. I had never traveled so far alone without my husband and was so miserable with her two screaming kids that I rerouted my trip and went to visit Twiggy [a friend from previous work projects] in London.

I started schlepping around with her very proper English schoolgirl daughter who was kvetching that her new shoes were hurting her [which resulted in thoughts about nannies and kids]. I couldn't sleep that night and called [her then-husband] Peter [Jacobson] from London and told him I felt I had finally found the right vehicle to pitch to CBS: a spin on the 'Sound of Music,' but instead of Julie Andrews, I come to the door.

We gave that one-liner to the development person — 'Fran Drescher is the nanny from hell' — and the rest is television history.

WHAT PROJECTS ARE YOU CURRENTLY INVOLVED IN?

I just produced a powerful 'Cancer Schmancer Tea Party' DVD filmed at my home in Malibu. It features all ages and races of women, thin to fat, to educate women about gynecological cancer and treatment. I'm developing a TV series for me and Rosie O'Donnell. And I'm writing a children's book.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT FOR YOU IN 2008?

No new romance yet — but this is my year. I've just decided to achieve greater balance and am encouraging more of a lightness in myself. I want to enjoy romantic love again.

I have Esther, an amazing brown Pomeranian dog who taught me about loving after loss. She's so sweet, giving and loving, perfect for me at this stage of my life.

Dee Long is a freelance journalist based in Van Nuys.



Photo by LEO HETZEL

Fran Drescher, shown at her Malibu home with Esther, says her Pomeranian has "taught me about loving."



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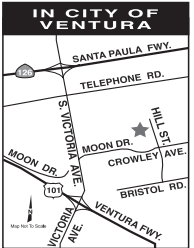
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Preventive measures

Cancer Schmancer (www.CancerSchmancer.org) offers health tips for women. Lifestyle choices that decrease cancer risk are:

- a diet rich in whole foods, fruits and vegetables;
 - using condoms during sexual intercourse;
 - limiting the number of sexual partners;
 - regular exercise.
- According to Cancer Schmancer, these are the eight known risk factors for gynecological cancers:
- smoking;
 - being overweight;
 - failing to get annual Pap smear tests;
 - having a high-fat diet;
 - family history of cancer;

- being 60 years of age or older;
- long-term hormone replacement (HRT) drug use;
- starting menstruation at an early age.

These are some of the warning signs of gynecological cancer:

- backache;
 - pelvic pain or cramping;
 - bloating even after eating small meals;
 - abdominal swelling;
 - loss of appetite or rapid weight gain;
 - pain during intercourse or urination;
 - unusual vaginal bleeding.
- If any symptoms last longer than two weeks, see a doctor.

— DEE LONG

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