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Promise to a friend envelopes strangers

By [CARLA CAMMACK](#)

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My "breast" friend, Nanci Brown, and I met at a Susan G. Komen for the Cure orientation for volunteers in 1998. She happened to sit next to me and asked what area I was interested in working. When I responded that I wasn't sure, she immediately said that I should work with her in registration because it was fun and rewarding.

For the next six-plus years, we worked every Race registration event together where we laughed, cried and hugged more times than I can remember. She volunteered for the Komen Orange County Affiliate right up until her health forced her to move from Orange County so her family

could take care of her.

Nanci was first diagnosed in 1987 and faced cancer multiple times, but her phenomenal strength and courage as she battled Stage 4 breast cancer the past seven years has been a constant source of inspiration to me in my work with Komen. We spoke at least once a week after she moved. Although she claimed I cheered her up and motivated her, she never knew that I received far more from those weekly calls than I ever gave!

In early June, it was obvious she had taken a turn for the worse. Her kidneys were shutting down and her body was giving up. I immediately made travel arrangements to surprise her on her 64th birthday on June 17. When Nanci's sister called me June 9 to suggest that I come sooner if possible, I was on a plane the next day.

In the hospital, Nanci was lucid and coherent, so I was able to tell her how much she has meant to me and how much I loved her and she was able to tell me the same thing. When we said our goodbyes on June 11, I promised her I would continue to use her story to inspire as many others as I could. As the tears streamed down my face, I smiled and she smiled and I knew that my promise had made her happy.

What an amazing and incredible coincidence that the next day, as I boarded the shuttle to the airport, the driver asked me if I had enjoyed my trip to Florida. When I explained with sadness that my trip was to say goodbye to a dear friend who was losing her battle with Stage 4 breast cancer, he shared that his sister had just been diagnosed with Stage 4.

As we rode to the airport, I told him about Nanci's amazing seven-year battle and the quality of life she was able to experience during that time. He listened with amazement and said that her story gave him hope. He couldn't wait to share her story with his family. They had all been numb with grief and shock and just assumed their sister would be gone in a few short weeks.

I hadn't even gotten on the plane, but was able to start fulfilling my promise to Nanci right then and there.

Nanci C. Brown passed away on June 17, 2010, her 64th birthday. I will love her and miss her every day for the rest of my life and I will never stop fulfilling my promise until we find a cure!

Rest well, my "breast" friend.

Carla Cammack lives in Fountain Valley.