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by Vivien Santana Hughes

## Noreen Fraser: The Fighter

Read about Noreen Fraser and you'll be in awe of a Super Woman. After breast cancer spread to her bones – making it stage IV, incurable – the successful TV producer fought back by launching the Noreen Fraser Foundation dedicated to finding cures for women's cancers. Talk to Noreen Fraser and you'll actually be more in awe ... and deeply touched by her honesty, vitality and humor.

When we spoke to Fraser last month, she was battling her third recurrence – at Christmas she was greeted by a scan showing tumors on her liver. Days after the interview, she found out her current course of chemo worked and the spots shrunk to the point of being invisible to the naked eye. But with metastatic cancer, it's all about the business of managing, not curing. And that's what Fraser aims to change.

Says the married mother of two, "My main concern always was, if I'm going to go down, then I'm going to make sure [my daughter] Madeline doesn't go down with this. Ever."

### What made you decide to give back when you were in a fight for your life?

I was devastated for a long time. It was not like I was Mary Poppins and thought, 'Oh well, I could do something!' After feeling hopeless and helpless, a light just came on over my head and I said, 'Wait a minute. I produce television shows.

Why couldn't I do a TV show like the old Jerry Lewis telethons, make it for breast cancer and raise money?'

[Fraser co-founded and co-produced the "Stand Up to Cancer," telecast in 2008, which

raised \$100 million for cancer research.]

Along my journey, I found that one of the big barriers in cancer breakthroughs was that researchers had to apply for grants and were hamstrung because they couldn't get enough money to delve into projects of big proportions. My theory was that instead of giving money amongst many researchers, you had to find the most promising project and then give a ton of money to it. I went over that idea with my doctor and he said, 'You've cracked the nut. That is what the problem is.' No one can get enough money and no one is sharing their information – everyone is trying to win the Nobel Prize. With "Stand Up to Cancer" we said, 'If you want our money, here are the rules: Have five different people from five different institutions who have all agreed that the chosen project could make a difference within three years. Then you all have to work on it together and share information.'

### Any promising outcomes?

There's so much happening in breast cancer! At UCLA, they're very close to coming out with a non-toxic drug – without side effects – that would replace one of the chemotherapy drugs. I am so hopeful.

### How did the idea for your "Men for Women Now" campaign come about?

It's humor as healing. We use videos of comedians to get the message to men that they should ask their wives, sisters, mothers, grandmas to get their mammograms and pap smears. We talked Jack Black into doing a mammogram! They're funny bits but all end with, 'This is serious.' We've got Mother's Day and Father's Day video ecards you can send from our website. I'm picking up on Norman Cousins. Laughter does heal. You've got to be positive, you've got to laugh. ♦

Find out more about the Foundation, see videos and donate at [www.noreenfraserfoundation.org](http://www.noreenfraserfoundation.org). Read Noreen's blog, "Staring Down Cancer," at [www.foxnews.com](http://www.foxnews.com).

Chat Room columnist Vivien Santana Hughes is a former *L.A. Parent* editor and the mother of three – two sons in college and (surprise!) a 6-year-old daughter. She lives with her family in La Cañada-Flintridge.



On her drive to find a cure for women's cancers while battling it herself, Noreen Fraser says early detection is still key. "You have to be proactive. Pony up to the bar and realize the fact that you're in charge of your own health." PHOTO BY MARTINA GEMMOLA