

## **TALK GIVEN BY MRS FAIROOZA GAFFAR AT THE USMAA FUNDRAISING DINNER FOR THE BREAST CANCER FOUNDATION ON SATURDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2009**

Dear Friends, Brothers and sisters, Ladies and gentleman – I wish to greet you with the Islamic Greeting of Peace – May Peace and Blessings of Allah SWT be upon you! Assalamu Alaikum Wa' Rahmatullahi Wa' Barakathu and a very Good Evening to all of you.

My name is Fairooza Gaffar and I would like to share with you my personal encounter with destiny and how it changed my entire perspective of life.

I stand before you **not** to sell the success story of my life ...but to bring you closer to the reality of what helps to make a success of life's strange and seemingly unfair, least expected blows and quirks....

The word CANCER spells stark fear in our minds and strikes a death knell in our hearts. It is a taboo word that none of us wish to be associated with. But let's face up to reality – Cancer is as rampant as the common cold nowadays. Just ask yourselves – how many among your close circle of friends and family have had a brush with it or are faced with it? How many of you have lost a family member or friend to this killer disease? You'll be surprised at the statistics. Coincidentally, early this year, I lost two of my dear friends to this dreadful disease – a colleague at work and the other, a dear friend - 'Fa ' known to many of you - a young mother of three small children. Also, tragically my sister, too has been diagnosed with breast cancer, in February this year...

Two years ago I too had a close encounter with a dreaded Cancer and the reality of the situation makes me shudder even today.

My husband and I came to Australia in June 2005 and we were in the process of settling in when disaster struck on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2007... the fateful day when I was handed down a sudden harsh and shocking verdict of being diagnosed with leukemia, when least expected. It rooted me to the spot, the bottom fell away from my world, and everything around me came crashing down...for days I was in shock, numb and in a state of denial. I thought it couldn't possibly be happening to me.... Why me..???

One can never ever be prepared enough to meet such a fate of destiny.

In my battle with this deadly disease...I came to a stunning realization of what exactly this worldly life was all about. How flimsy is the time span at our disposal.... How much precious time we squander and lose on irrelevant details, what needless pain we cause and suffer.... What we fail to realize is even as I speak, the precious moments of our lives are ticking away.. To be gone and never to be replaced...

Today, I feel blessed to be alive, to be given a second chance in life....

It has made me refocus my vision on life's images...to always focus and concentrate on the bigger picture in every situation... to overlook the many unimportant details, rather to appreciate the effort in every act and not just the outcome.

To take each day and live it to the fullest... because tomorrow may never come. Today is all you've got...

To thank God for what I have and what I had... not regret for what I had not or did not have...

To appreciate even the smallest act of kindness and treasure every single tear and smile that helped me through those terrifying days...

Being in hospital... getting through each phase of treatment is a great test on your will power and faith. There comes a time when giving up and resigning yourself to the situation always seems the easier thing to do, for pitting your will against this killer disease can be very exhausting. Many times it reduces you to hopeless despair, these weary moments usually border around the time when your body is hardest hit and is heaving with the laborious task of coping with the uncertainties that would be decreed upon you. I would lie in bed each morning and await the verdict of the blood counts; the results would dictate my mood and disposition for the day. Such a reaction is natural and needs to be understood and supported by all friends and loved ones.

**“Be positive”** is the key phrase uttered by almost everyone around you...It is easily said than done. It is such an over-used word..

Many a time, all I would want is to be left alone, to be understood and accepted. To be allowed to heal and come to terms with my predicament.

To drag yourself through the daily hospital routine, even to spoon in and push down a morsel of food down your throat, when your entire digestive system is ravaged and wounded, requires great will power. This strength has to originate from within and needs to be supported by those around. I found myself more resilient once I set myself a routine and a goal, so that no matter what the condition of the body may be,... the mind would control all my actions and would coax the body to follow through all difficulties. Thus, disciplining oneself is the key to achievement. **One small step a day will definitely lead to giant strides of recovery.**

I am deeply indebted and grateful to the dedicated and efficient staff of Peter Macallum Cancer Center, the caring and considerate staff members at my workplace – Minaret College, my wonderful family and friends whose moral support and firm belief in the impossible gave me the courage to face my trials and tribulations positively.

You can cheat disease and disaster in the most daring feats if you have profound **faith**. I must mention an unforgettable incident which took place minutes after my diagnosis was declared...my family members were highly distraught and in despair. A theater nurse passing by, hearing the commotion in the room walked in... no body remembers her... all I can remember is the way she held me close, deep blue eyes piercing into mine, and whispering into my ear...that she had been in a similar situation 10 years ago, and with sheer determination and will power she came out of it. She made me repeat over and over again, in a very emphatic manner ... **“Today is the first day of the rest of my days”** ,**“Today is the first day of the rest of my days”** as these were the words she had apparently been saying every single day of her traumatic period. Also she made me promise that I would try my best to overcome and fight the disease...

and when I am out of it that I would give the same reassurance and hope to someone else in a similar situation ten years from now....

**Faith, patience** and **hope** are sisters in the battle against cancer. These three factors are interrelated and go hand in hand. Profound and implicit **faith** in God's Mercy leads one to accept the seemingly unfair blows of fate with **patience** and **hope**.

**Hope** is what gets us through **EVERYTHING** in life.

Dear friends, medical therapy alone cannot be a cure for cancer without **Faith and hope in the One above**, the constant and steady love, support, encouragement and inspiration of all those around us, our family, our friends, neighbours, colleagues and the community at large....

A prayer a day from each one of us to all those millions out there suffering with this disease will certainly find its refuge with the Almighty...and one can never tell whose prayer it was that found the spot...

I take this opportunity to thank all those who prayed for me, **specially the hundreds of children whose lives I have touched**, all **my friends** who were there to support me.. at this point I would like to make special mention of my dear friend Fareena who came all the way from Abu Dhabi, leaving behind her family and job, to be with me in hospital day and night during the most trying times...**my family** who supported me financially through the costly treatment and stood by me at all times. Last but not the least, **my husband** Abdul Gaffar, who was (and is) my constant companion. His unstinted support, untiring efforts, implicit faith and patience gave me hope, courage and the determination to fight the deadly disease...together we found a way to beat all odds... I am truly blessed to have a life partner like him... May Allah SWT bless him – always...

Let us **as a community lend a helping hand to those in need**. You never know who would be next... It is encouraging to note the zest and zeal with which USMA has organized this fundraiser...and the enthusiasm with which the community has participated.  
May Almighty Allah bless and reward the efforts of each and every one of us.

As a survivor of cancer, I would like to pass on this message of **Faith, Patience and Hope** – to anyone in a similar situation, and for the family, friends and carers – to provide those afflicted – with all **the support, care and help, to be patient and tolerant...** for it can be very stressful and demanding at times. Remember... the patient has the additional burden of coping with the disease, the mental trauma and physical pain...

I hope I have passed the **message of “hope” across....** And I encourage all of you to participate actively in future events to give hope and a helping hand to those in need.....

To capture the essence of what I have spoken, I would like to share this short 2 1/2 minute movie - Titled – **‘The Dash’**- sent by a friend, which I thought was very appropriate.

It is about a man who stood to speak at the funeral of a friend. He refers to the dates on her tombstone. He refers to the dash between her date of birth and the date of demise. I leave it to you to figure out the significance of that tiny little **‘Dash’**.

I urge you to please pay attention to every word in this movie...as it is very meaningful....and something to ponder on.....

Movie Link : <http://www.thedashmovie.com/>

Thank you USMA for giving me this opportunity to share my thoughts and feelings.... And thank you all for giving me a patient hearing.....