

Barb's Beads

By Dawn Berry

A Labor of Love, A Gift of Hope and A Prayer for the Cure

Four years ago, Barb Feezell found out she had breast cancer. After following the recommended medical treatment, she was eventually declared cancer free and was in remission.

It was a moment her sister Julie Conner will never forget. It was a feeling of relief, and a time to celebrate. It was also a time to focus on finding a cure for the disease that has plagued their lives for generations.

Breast cancer—their grandmother passed away from it, Feezell was in remission from it and Conner — well, Conner has been a breast cancer survivor for 23 years. With such prominence of breast cancer in their lives, the sisters decided to participate in the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer 3-Day Walk for the Cure.

"The walk was such a powerful and emotional experience," Conner said. "To see and interact with all these wonderful people who have been affected by the same disease — you can't help but get totally consumed in the moment. Your feet hurt, but you don't care."

Feezell, who was in remission at that time, was too tired to make the full 3-days, but she joined her sister Conner to walk the last stretch. Unfortunately, two weeks after the breast cancer walk, Feezell found out that her cancer had returned.

"The cancer had spread to her other breast," Conner said. "They tried everything. She took every chemo treatment available and tried alternative treatments, but the doctors finally told us her time was very limited."

Two weeks before Feezell passed away, Conner had gone to spend the day with her sister. They talked about a lot of



Barb & Julie



things including one of Feezell's favorite things to do — bead jewelry. Feezell loved beading so much that she had started up a small business. It was called Barb's Beads.

Now, less than a year after Feezell's death, Conner has her own beading company. It's called Barb's Beads by Julie, and every cent of profit made goes directly to the Susan G. Komen Cancer Foundation for research.

"This is my way of honoring my sister's memory," Conner said. "I knew I wanted to do something special and this was something she loved doing."

One of Feezell's favorite things to make were sun catchers because they capture the sun's rays and spread brilliant, glistening colors from the crystals. In a similar way, by carrying on her sister's beading legacy, Conner captures the essence of her sister's spirit in the jewels she makes and spreads the same brilliance.

"It's a labor of love," Conner said. "Each piece I make, I can feel Barbie working with me. She was such a happy, loving and fun person. I try to capture that in the pieces I make."

From bracelets and earrings, to key chains, ceiling fan posts,

eyeglass holders, sun catchers and Christmas ornaments, Conner has learned and honed the craft of beading using a variety of gems and stones including Swarovski crystals.

"I knew nothing about this when I started," she said. "But during Barb's last days, I was sitting with her looking at all of her beads. I mean, there were containers full of them. And I said to her that I'd really like to continue what she was doing with the beads and donate the money to research. I'm still learning every day, but I do

it because I love my sister and because we need to find a cure."

Conner said her sister is not just her angel and inspiration, but that beading has been therapy for her and has helped her heal. It's helped others heal as well.

"People hear my story and they can relate," she said. "Barbie fought a good, long fight. Some people buy my jewelry because they have been affected and they understand. Some buy because they know the money is for a good cause and some people just really like the jewelry."

Conner said she likes the idea that there are Barb's beads in each and every piece she makes.

"Barbie had so many gems and stones left that I haven't had to purchase any. To me, it's touching that the jewelry I make is with her beads. It's like she can live on forever in the crystals."

If you would like to purchase some of Barb's beads and help donate money to breast cancer research, call Julie Conner at 626-536-9167, or email her at barbsbeads2@aol.com. Custom orders are accepted and all profits are donated to the Susan G. Komen Foundation.

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