

Being the sixth of seven children born into a working-class family, essentially eliminated Ford's higher education path. "I worked during high school to pay for school books and after I graduated from high school, I have pretty much worked ever since. I worked at an advertising and publishing company in Toronto as a receptionist and worked my way up to being the secretary for four salesmen. Then I went to work for the Toronto Maple Leafs and I worked for them in 1967, the last time they won the Stanley Cup. I left the next year when the NHL expanded from six teams to 12, including a team in Los Angeles. People were raving about Los Angeles and I was 21 and getting out on my own, when I decided to move there. I sent my resume ahead and there were quite a few secretarial positions available. This was when California was booming. I arrived in L.A. with \$240 U.S. dollars on July 8, 1968. I started work the following week with a mortgage company."

Before she left Canada, Ford met an Englishman and in 1972 the pair were married on the estate of the Duke of Westminster in Chester, England. Her father-in-law had been a pilot in the Royal Air Force and had social connections. "He was the first person to give me a journal and he told me to write," Ford remembered. "I eventually wrote an article about his parents. They had a grace about them that we seem to have lost."

The couple eventually moved back to Los Angeles and Ford continued her career working for Office Overload in their London, Los Angeles and Newport Beach locations. Later she founded Peg Ford and Associates, a public relations firm that worked primarily in the hospitality world of restaurants, hotels, in addition to bed and breakfast establishments. Ford added, "I did that for 10 years and I eventually became president of the Newport Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau and I was on the Board of the Newport Beach Chamber of Commerce. Then I got divorced."

Following a second marriage in 1995 and a subsequent divorce, Ford wound up in Coronado in 1998 with her two puppies, as she explained. "They are my children, they just come wrapped in fur. I started doing part-time work with retail stores and then I was writing a book about my experience in life and life lessons I learned. Then in 2007, I was walking my dogs, I tripped on the sidewalk and down I went. Three months later, I was in the office of a gynecological oncologist and three days later I was having surgery for ovarian cancer. I had not been sick at any time of my life. When ovarian cancer hit me at 60, I began a whole new path and started early-on doing research. I was caught early and was Stage 1. There are four stages and normally patients receive a late diagnosis. I attended a support group meeting with seven or eight survivors and I was aghast at what women were going through. I had to do something. I realized that the treatment for ovarian cancer, which was chemotherapy, hadn't changed in 40 years. Today more than 75 percent of patients will have a recurrence of cancer and the five-year survival rate is only 45 percent. I am 10-1/2 years in recovery, with no evidence of the disease. If you are diagnosed early, the survival rate is over 90 percent, but there is still no screening test for ovarian cancer. A Pap smear is only for cervical cancer."

But Ford's recovery had several complications, which she summarized. "My guardian angels were trying to get me into care. After I fell, x-rays showed I had fractures in my shoulder and my wrist. I went to an acupuncturist who noticed that I wasn't healing. I was getting worse and more fatigued. And I really started bloating. Due to a timely referral from a physician, I went to a gynecological oncologist who gave me a

trans vaginal ultrasound. Then I had a protein test and they confirmed the mass, but they don't know until they go in and do a biopsy if its cancerous. That Wednesday and Thursday, I had a CAT Scan and blood tests. The following Monday I was in surgery. The cancer was confined to the ovary and it had not metastasized."

The diagnosis and surgery combined to form one very large challenge, but the recovery was yet another. "Due to the size of the tumor and concerns about recurrence, my gynecologist suggested chemotherapy. I had it for four days and developed a severe reaction called hyper-platinum sensitivity. My pulse rate dropped to 29. They called in a young cardiologist and they put in a pacemaker. Now I have an enlarged left ventricle we have to watch. There are long-term effects that you just don't know about. Later I went to a nurse practitioner who noticed a mole on the back of my left shoulder. It turned out to be a classic melanoma and I had to have that removed. I had to go back into surgery for a sentinel lymph node biopsy. Now I go to a dermatologist every year for a checkup and generally a new one pops up somewhere. I have to be checked for the rest of my life. It took me a couple of years to return to full strength. It's a different normal because your body isn't the same."

But something positive arose from experience. "While I was healing from the chemo, that didn't stop me from getting organized and motivated to get an idea of what I could do. I was looking for an organization in San Diego and there wasn't one. I went to the Ovarian Cancer National Alliance website and they didn't show any local organizations, so my co-founder Kathy Hagan and I started a San Diego Chapter. Then I saw a tab on the website about cancer survivors teaching students and I clicked on it. Survivors on the East Coast were making presentations to third-year medical students at medical schools. It became my goal to get the program launched at the UCSD School of Medicine. With my marketing background, I could circle the wagons, only I didn't know anybody at UCSD. It took me a year to get the first okay and we made a presentation in December 2008. We just started our 10th consecutive year of making a presentation every six weeks to medical students, all made by volunteers and survivors. I started the program and I have trained some survivors now. Of the first 100 presentations made to third-year medical students, I did 92. We have expanded the program to 11 schools of nursing throughout San Diego County. Our website lists all the schools we participate with, which are all on-going. We also presented to UCSD Primary Care residents and interns and we were invited back next year. I collaborated with Dr. Afshin Bahador, who is a well-known gynecological oncologist, to present to practicing healthcare providers and physicians at Scripps and Sharp and we were very well received. He did the clinical and I did the human connection. We are looking at collaborating again."

Unbeknownst to me prior to the interview, Ford and I had a mutual friend who battled cancer before succumbing to the disease. Ford said, "She struggled financially with the co-pays. And the added cost is it is inhumane what we have our cancer patients go through. Often, they end up losing their home. In Canada, they won't take your home if there are medical issues. Here, that's not the case. Ovarian cancer is not an old woman's disease. As you age, you are at a higher lifetime risk, but last year I saw a 15-year-old diagnosed."

Ford said of her mission, "The word has to get out. We must save women's lives and empower women.

Education and awareness are the keys. They need to be aware of symptoms and risk factors so they can save themselves and their families. So many volunteers have come forward and we have lost so many. They are dedicated and they have humbled me with their commitment. Some have shared their story and that helps their healing. The reaction from medical students has been very supportive. We want to inspire them to be the best doctors they can be. My goal is to get a screening test for Ovarian cancer, but I don't know how long that will take. Ovarian cancer is unique to every woman and there are 30 sub-types of Ovarian cancer.”

Ford has created a national platform for her advocacy, including being involved on the Federal Drug Administration's Patient Representative Program; working with the National Cancer Institute's Ovarian Cancer Task Force; she has done peer review for the Department of Defense's Ovarian cancer programs; and she is currently on the advisory board for the UCSD Clinical and Translational Research Institute. A grant from the Soroptimist Club that was received two years ago has helped expand the Ovarian Cancer Alliance's community outreach program, which now includes the under-served Spanish community. Ford said, “Because of the Soroptimists, all of our information has been translated into Spanish. Our PowerPoint presentation is bi-lingual and has been very well-received.”

Ford has expanded her efforts internationally as well, traveling to Norway last year to make a presentation to the Evidence-Based Research Network. She said, “To see change happen is fantastic. I have been to Madrid, Spain and Salzburg, Austria to present the case for shared decision making, and empowering patients to be involved in their medical care. I have been involved on the local, national and international levels.”

If you are interested in helping the cause for Ovarian cancer education and awareness, there is a relatively painless way to financially assist the group, which comes to Coronado next month. Ford explained, “We hadn’t done any fundraising until last year in Coronado. Last year we did the Teal Steps fundraiser, which is a 1K/5K walk at Tidelands Park. Last year we had 430 walkers and we are doing it this year on Sunday, Sept. 10 at 8 a.m. We are anticipating over 800 walkers this year and we have had great support from the community. It costs \$30 to walk.”

You can sign up for the event at [www.ocaofsd.org](http://www.ocaofsd.org). For questions relating to the Ovarian Cancer Alliance of San Diego, Ford can be reached by E-mail at [pegford2@gmail.com](mailto:pegford2@gmail.com). Volunteers and donations are welcome.

Ford added as we concluded our interview, “Teal is the Ovarian cancer awareness color and September is the Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month, which is why we walk then. The message is, it’s important to talk to your doctor and get your medical history. Older generations didn’t like to talk about medicine, but it’s a different world today. It’s vital to get your medical history.”