



MEET DUNCAN DARROW

Giving Back

■ Giving Back | October 4, 2015 | By Joan Overlock & Fred Doss, Co-founders of goodcircle.org



Duncan Darrow is the Founder and Chairman of Fighting Chance, a cancer support services organization based in Sag Harbor. This truly essential non-profit organization is a lifeline to people on the East End who have been diagnosed with cancer. In his quest to learn everything he possibly could about cancer, and to share that information with the community, Duncan

*wrote **Cancer Simplified**, an explanation of cancer in layman's terms to enhance patient literacy.*

Fighting Chance and Hampton Jitney are currently teaming up with goodcircle to provide free rides to New York City for cancer patients who need specialized treatment not available on the east end. To learn about the project go to <http://goodcircle.org/projects/fighting-chance-2015/>.

Duncan is a recently retired partner at the law firm of Sidley Austin, and is now "hanging out his shingle" in Sag Harbor. Duncan and his wife Wendy spend their time between Sag Harbor and New York City.

BH: What does this community mean to you?

Duncan: I call Sag Harbor a village by the sea. And the way of people on the sea – sailors, whalers, whatever – is that they always have one another's back. And the spirit of Sag Harbor comes from people on the sea. They are conscious of one another's well-being. It's no coincidence that we have an unusually high number of non-profit organizations. On a per capita basis, it's probably off the



charts! This is the way we live here. We're a family.

BH: You started Fighting Chance. What was – and is – your mission?

Duncan: Simply put, our mission is to improve the quality of care and the quality of life for cancer patients on the East End of Long Island. We treat everything but the cancer itself. We know the disruptions in the patient's life are immense and can overwhelm them – from the side effects of the drugs to their total state of mind. Not surprisingly, there's tremendous sadness and constant worrying. Then there's the quality of sleep and the quality of their family relations, which can become strained just when they need family the most. And then there's work: do they share this with colleagues or hide it? They often ask me about their legal rights. They worry they'll get fired. And there are the financial issues – insurance...what's covered? Does it cover this fancy pill or only the simple one? Interactions with their friends can become awkward, especially at first. How do they cope with this? Are their friends whispering behind their backs? The closest radiation machine is in Riverhead – that's seventy miles round trip. How are they going to get there? You go down this long list and almost EVERYTHING in the patient's life is disrupted. We want to help...soothe and comfort them...make it easier if we can. That's our goal.

BH: How unique is Fighting Chance?

Duncan: Very. We define FC as non-hospital affiliated – we are free-standing, and we are absolutely free. We don't take money from Medicare or anywhere else. Someone with cancer can just walk in without having to worry about money. And we are staffed with professional mental health counselors – oncology social workers. I think there are nine similar organizations in the entire United States.

BH: How did it start?

Duncan: My brother, our mother and I bought a rooming house here back in the late 1970's. Our house, built in the 1830's, had a mother-in-law wing, and a little cottage in the back that we improved. We lived this family-compound existence for twenty+ happy years. In 2000, our mother was diagnosed with Stage IV lung cancer. At that point I knew nothing about cancer. It turns out that our family living arrangement was a good set up for home care. So that's what we did. And, every day I would go to the beach and pray for her to have a "fighting chance" of survival. She lived for about four months. That became my motivation for giving back – to give someone else the chance to fight back in a way she couldn't.

BH: What's next for Fighting Chance?

Duncan: Sustainability. We want to pass this on to the next generation...and in order to do that we need to have:

- A stable real estate situation
- A gala date that no one else touches
- An endowment



The acid test of knowing whether or not you've made a difference is when the community says; "We can't let this fail... we don't care how many bake sales it takes." When the people you serve appreciate what you are doing... it gets into your soul...into your DNA. There's no going back.

BH: Tell us what's special about the East End to you?

Duncan: The sunsets here are incredible – a lot of people measure life by how many sunsets you see, and when you live here you see a lot. The other thing I see when I drive into town is “a lot of picket”, a quintessential element of a very friendly village. A picket fence is open – you can see through it – it's about five feet tall, but it's not like a hedge. And there is a lot of picket in Sag Harbor.

BH: You must have some favorite places or people. Tell us about a few of them.

Duncan: I love the American Hotel. Owner Ted Conklin is in many ways the soul of Sag Harbor. I think many people would say Ted and Sister Anne are the souls of Sag Harbor. And, Joe at Il Cappuccino is special. He reads the Financial Times every day, and he and I love to talk about foreign affairs.