



## Fighting Chance for Those “Lost at Sea”

A life is changed in an instant when a cancer diagnosis is made. Discussions about myriad treatments, oncologists and insurance make a person feel at sea.

Sag Harbor resident Duncan Darrow has dedicated the last 10 years of his life to being able to throw a life preserver to those in that whirlpool. Fighting Chance is Darrow's legacy to his mother, Charlotte, who lost her battle with lung cancer. “At the time we weren't looking for a miracle, just a fighting chance,” said Darrow. But he found holes in the system—for example, not enough long-term care for patients in Hospice, where he volunteered for a time after his mother's passing. His vision: a paramedical non-profit on the East End where people could go, free of charge, and get their medical questions answered, find support groups, seek assistance if needed, get counseling, and certainly find a friendly face, in a non-medical environment. Fighting Chance has a “station” packed with information about any and every cancer. Everyone is welcome at this safe harbor, located on the second floor at 34 Bay Street in Sag Harbor—there's an orange life preserver in the window.

Entering this cozy setting last week, I was met by Darrow's right hand gal, Maxa Luppi, Patient Navigator. She gave me a tour of the office, which looks like a house with its wooden floors, rag rugs and homey quilts. Darrow came in and we sipped iced coffee and sat on the comfy couch.

Duncan Darrow is a Wall Street lawyer who comes to Sag Harbor by way of Wellfleet, Massachusetts, also an old whaling town, where the family summered. He was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, his father a small town lawyer, his mother a homemaker. Darrow attended Columbia University, with his brother, Peter, also a Wall Street lawyer now. When their parents divorced and sold the home in Wellfleet, the

brothers and their mother wanted to establish a family center on the East End. In 1980 they found a rooming house for sale in Sag Harbor that was filled with tenants. After meeting with the mayor and finding all 11 tenants homes, they refurbished the former Anderson House and moved in.

Darrow may have inherited his mother's hospitality gene. He's as friendly as a day at the beach—which he enjoys with his brother's family when they visit on weekends. “A little sailing, a little relaxing,” he admitted when pushed, though he would much rather talk about Fighting Chance than himself. He smiled as he told me the story of his mother deciding to have a Thanksgiving open house in 1980, and invite all the folks on Jefferson and Suffolk Streets. “They showed up in force,” he said. “We've done that tradition now for 29 years. My mom turned a white elephant into the Garden of Eden.”

And then she got sick. In 2001, Charlotte had a pain in her arm that turned out to be a tumor that started in her lung. Darrow became the main caregiver, traveling between the city and Sag Harbor. “As you watch the disease, things come up, you need 24/7 help. Not everyone has that option. Where do these people turn?”

Sadly, Charlotte lost her battle with cancer, but Duncan was not done with “the big C” you could say. He would build an organization, like building a boat, and set sail to find people in need of saving. They came. The documentary *Cancer's Journey* on the East End, shows what Darrow had in mind. To “simplify cancer for the average person, explain what cancer is, where it comes from, why it hurts.” Fighting Chance has a Day of Hope every two years. Two Nobel Prize winners come out in the middle of winter to speak to cancer patients—to give them all the latest info; let them know they are not alone, even

way out here, 100 miles from the latest technology and services.

Darrow wants cancer patients and survivors to know they have a home away from home. People at Fighting Chance have already done the homework. “Cancer Patient Literacy is the new buzzword,” Darrow said. He urges the medical profession to better explain cancer to people so that they understand it. “This is what we are about. Fighting Chance is the vanguard.”

Darrow spoke about cancer survivors (12 million Americans), as a special group. “When one is sick and in treatment, people abound. Later, the survivor falls into an abyss. No one calls. People have long-term effects. They need counseling, camaraderie.”

They find both at Fighting Chance. But mostly they find others like themselves, who were “lost at sea,” and are finding their sea legs again, so to speak. There is Scrabble for cancer, journaling for cancer, and soon ballroom dancing for cancer—all on the good ship Lollipop called Fighting Chance.

This Saturday, October 2, is the ribbon cutting ceremony. Refreshments will be served. All are invited to check out the extensive cancer library and meet Darrow and his friendly staff.

I would bet that Duncan Darrow, married to the journalist Wendy Moonan, is a successful Wall Street lawyer, but the man I met is nothing like what that image suggests. His passion is helping people and making them feel better, however that can happen. He is a hope giver, as is revealed in the words of a cancer patient in Fighting Chance's *Book of Hope*: “Hope enables me to go on.”

Opening day ribbon cutting at Fighting Chance: Saturday, October 2, 12:30-2:00 p.m. You can also visit [fightingchance.org](http://fightingchance.org).