



NAU ALUMNI **who's news**

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CANCER WARRIOR: Kathy Dalton Van Riper ('91 B.S. ED.)



You know the species – *homo sapiens runneriensis*, all long sinews and cool running gear. Kathy Dalton Van Riper has been competing in marathons and races since she went out for distance running in high school and attended NAU on an athletic scholarship. Healthy and happy, she never thought that someday she would be racing for her life, and racing against time.

Cancer came into Kathy's life when her daughter, Jillian, was three years old and son Ian only eight months. Doctors called it terminal, but six years later, Kathy still eludes that particular finish line, and her struggle has become an inspiration to many others.

Like so many others stricken with cancer, Kathy learned about the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure marathons while she was completing her radiation and chemotherapy treatments. The fit was natural, so she ran. When the Komen Foundation partnered with the Ford Motor Company to feature four "Warriors of the Week" on TV's *The View* in October, Kathy was startled to receive the call. The next thing she knew, a producer from New York was arranging for Kathy and her family to fly from their Northern California home to a taping of the show in Manhattan.

Appearing on national TV, says Kathy, "was a once-in-a-lifetime experience." After the taping, Rosie O'Donnell gave the family a great evening of food and fun at Mars 2112, a Martian-landscaped restaurant, and tickets to the Broadway musical *Wicked* (its appropriate theme: "Defying Gravity"). Ford even gave her family a new car. But Kathy wants her kids to take away a less materialistic lesson from the trip to New York. "I want them to remember that our time is short, and that we have much work to do. I want them to know that as difficult as this is for our family to go through, there are many kids who will lose their mothers to breast cancer. I want them to remember that our story can touch the lives of other people, and help them."

As much as she wishes that suffering was not part of her life, Kathy believes that there might be a higher purpose in it. "Knowing that you have no control of your life, you can use your situation to be a stronger person and to help others. The light will shine through you."

While she can no longer run as far or as fast as she did before, Kathy says with a laugh, "Moving forward at all is a good thing." For more information on Kathy and her fight – including footage of her appearance on *The View* – please visit www.caringbridge.org/visit/kathyvanriper. The NAU Alumni Association thanks Kathy and her family for their willingness to share her story.