

# Eye on Editorials

## Campus Speaks: THE PINK RIBBON

By Karrie Bowen  
 Penn State Brandywine  
 Communications, Faculty  
 kab44@psu.edu

This is my grandmother.

My grandmother personifies the pink ribbon. Soft and delicate, yet tough enough to hold things together, her life was one filled with intelligence, love, family and dedication to the things she believed in most. She spent her life raising children and spoiling grandchildren, gardening and farming with my grandfather, and always had a book or a magazine in her hand. My grandmother loved nature and reflected that relationship very much in her persona. She lived humbly but proud, and never ceased to give.

On April 11, 1994, Grandma went to the emergency room. She had a lot of pain in her left hip and lower back area which had been coming and going since the October previous, and she woke up that morning and the ache was simply unbearable. After x-rays and tests, an emergency room doctor finally came into her little curtained room, where she was with my grandfather, my aunt and me, and told us that she had a hairline crack in her hip and had some arthritis. He said he wanted to admit her to take care of the problem and left to get the paperwork started. With smiles and relief that that was all it was, I left the room to call my mother to give her the news. Halfway through the ER and out of earshot, that same doctor stopped me and asked if Ruth was my mother. I know I looked baffled and said that no, she was my grandmother, and asked him why.

He pointed to two sets of x-rays on the light board by the nurses' station. One was a typical x-ray... white bones on black background. Another, next to it, showed white bones that were riddled with black splotches. The doctor looked at me and said very matter-of-factly, "The ones on the right are your grandmother's from October. The ones on the left are this morning. She is full of bone cancer and it is terminal. Probably within the year. I'm sorry."

I was 23 years old. It was not her, nor my grandfather, or my mother, my aunt, or my uncles who knew first that she was going to die. It was me.

Over the course of the next 10 months, my grandmother embodied the color pink. She once again battled breast cancer, the stuff she thought was gone. Thirteen years after a seemingly successful mastectomy, she had braved the lump and won. This time, in true pink



Instructor Karrie Bowen, at one year of age, sits on her grandmother's lap during her grandmother's birthday party in 1972. Bowen's grandmother died from breast cancer in 1995. (photo courtesy of Karrie Bowen)

fashion, she was no different. She was determined to live her life and she never let any of us cry for her. Grandma spent her summer doing what she always did, but I believe in her own quiet way she appreciated those little moments that so many of us take for granted...growing crimson radishes in her garden, trimming her beautiful fuchsia rose bush, and beaming over the big pink peonies that bloomed in her yard. The pink ribbon of her life was everywhere, weaving and coloring and gently tying all of the things in her life together in a never-ending bow.

On a crisp September day, as the leaves started to change color, and the pinks of summer turned to the jewel tones of fall, my grandmother too began to wane. The cancer had moved, the doctor said. No longer in her hip, it was now in her back. It had started its journey up her spine, and we were told it was just a matter of time.

Through laughter, through tears, through pain, I watched as the ribbon of my grandmother's life faded from pink to gray. Hour upon hour and day upon day, our family cared for her in her home, giving everything to her as she died little by little, at the hands of something beyond our control or power. I watched her bear the humiliation of having to be bathed, dressed and placed on a toilet by her children and grandchildren. I watched as she spent days drowning in her own body fluid, and had to choke back every emotion I had as I watched her too

messed up on morphine to even recognize who she herself was. Worst of all, I had to watch this woman, this personification of pink, turn gray, retreating into herself, not wanting to be bothered by any of us. Her once rosy disposition had been replaced by resentment because she felt she was a burden. While she grappled with her anger, we battled our own frustration, simply because we did not understand what this amazing woman had done to deserve this fate.

It was a bitterly cold February morning when the ribbon snapped in the wind, all of the pink gone from it, and it blew off into the dreary sky that it matched so well. As my family gathered in the house to hold her hand, spend those last moments with her, the pink ribbon that had faded suddenly began to reappear. As we held each other and cried, or stood in corners silently, and wished this day wasn't happening, it's satiny stings wove their way around all of us, tying us together the same way our grandmother did in her 77 years on earth. Grandma's ribbon enfolded her family and joined us all to one another, and we knew then that even though she was gone, the pink of her life still shimmered in the winter sunlight and I knew somehow, it was going to be alright.

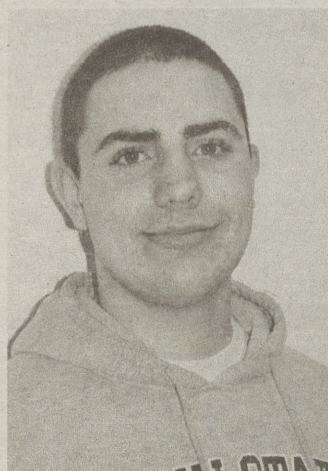
This is the face of breast cancer.

### Want to be heard?

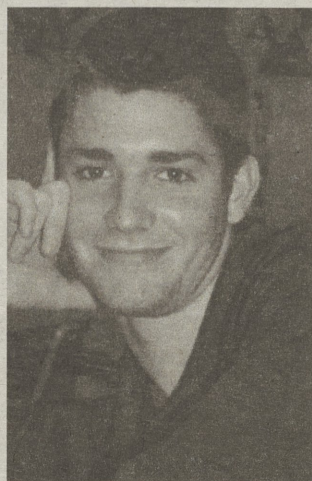
Campus Speaks is a new recurring column of The Lion's Eye featuring editorials and opinion pieces submitted by faculty, staff and the student body of Penn State Brandywine. The Lion's Eye welcomes submission about any topic of general interest by it's readership for publication. Articles should be submitted to kab44@psu.edu.

## People Poll with Caitlin Olszewski

What is the first thing you think of when you hear the name Sarah Palin?



**Dave Leaf**  
 Engineering  
 "Who's that?"



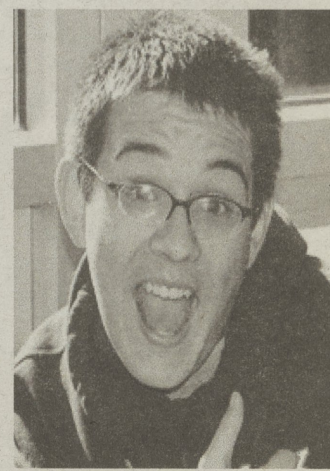
**Jim Donahue**  
 Undeclared  
 "Low Taxes!"



**Katie Cleary**  
 Art Education  
 "She sucks."



**Ray Gaspari**  
 Undeclared  
 "I can't say anything acceptable for media coverage"



**Andrew Shaner**  
 Undeclared  
 "Failin'."