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People



FARRAH BATTLES CANCER

Facing her sudden diagnosis, the *Angels* star begins treatment and leans on her ex, Ryan O'Neal. "She's so strong," he says. "I love her all over again"

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FIGHT AGAINST CANCER

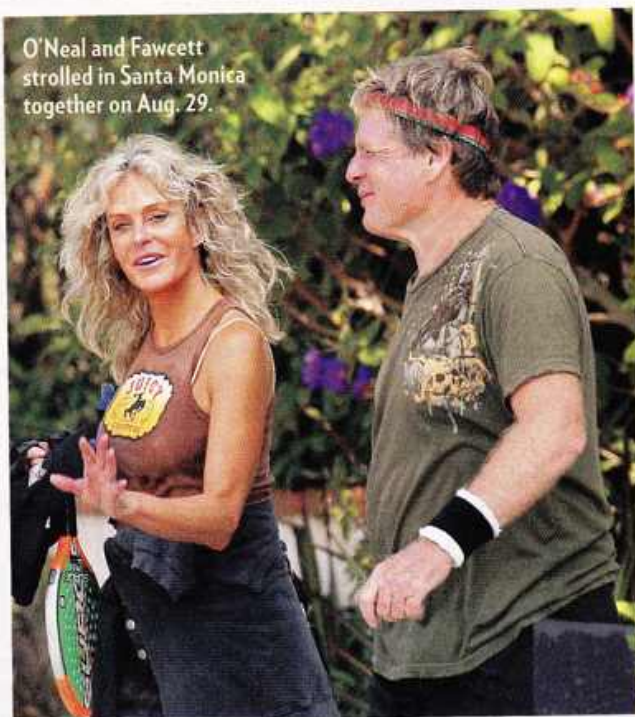
FARRAH FAWCETT—WITH SUPPORT FROM THE OTHER ANGELS—BEGINS CANCER TREATMENT AND RETURNS ONCE AGAIN TO THE ARMS OF RYAN O'NEAL

At the Aug. 27 Emmys Farrah Fawcett made a triumphant appearance, reuniting with her *Charlie's Angels* costars Kate Jackson and Jaclyn Smith. For Fawcett, the public reunion—to honor the late TV producer Aaron Spelling—was an emotional boost, a career highlight, a chance to savor the public's enduring affection and applause. But in the days following, despite her good spirits, she knew something wasn't right. She told friends she felt fatigued. "She had been playing a lot of sports and paddleball, and she was saying, 'My body is just killing me,'" says Craig Nevius, a Fawcett pal and producer of Fawcett's 2005 TV Land reality show *Chasing Farrah*. When she couldn't shake her exhaustion, she began to suspect something was seriously wrong. "She thought maybe she had eaten some spinach and had the E. coli [virus]," says her friend Joan Dangerfield (widow of comic Rodney Dangerfield). So in mid-September, Fawcett, 59, went for a physical. After two weeks of tests, Fawcett was devastated to hear on Sept. 29 the diagnosis: anal cancer. Suddenly the famously athletic woman who played fierce weekly games of tennis—and was set to launch her endorsement of a beverage line called O.C. Energy drinks—was pondering her chances of survival. When Fawcett called her the next day, says Dangerfield,

Fawcett and her *Charlie's Angels* costars Kate Jackson (left) and Jaclyn Smith became icons in '76.



O'Neal and Fawcett strolled in Santa Monica together on Aug. 29.





Holding hands with her fellow Angels at the Aug. 27 Emmys "gave me confidence," says Fawcett.

ANGELS UNITED

Forever linked by *Charlie's Angels*, the trio of Fawcett, Kate Jackson and Jaclyn Smith now have a common enemy: cancer. Smith, 60, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2002; she underwent a lumpectomy and radiation treatment and since then "has been fine," says her rep. Says Smith: "It's all about clean living." Jackson, 57, battled breast cancer twice, first in 1987 and then again in 1989, when she had a partial mastectomy and reconstructive plastic surgery. "Farrah is overwhelmed by the wave of love and concern," says Jackson, whose cancer remains in remission. "I ask that people who do pray, stick in a word for Farrah."

she was in tears: "It was such a shock. Farrah has always been so healthy. She was crying. I was crying."

Fawcett also phoned Ryan O'Neal. The former couple, who have a 21-year-old son, Redmond, ended their tumultuous 17-year relationship in 1997, but any remaining rancor was swept away. She sobbed when she told him the news, and O'Neal once again became a steadfast presence at her side. Soon Fawcett was splitting her time between her Beverly Hills condo and his Malibu home. On Oct. 9 O'Neal stood by her as she got a chemotherapy treatment and accompanied her as she left the hospital with a chemo pack attached to her side. Sitting at his favorite L.A. coffee shop the next day, O'Neal, 65, was visibly tired and upset as he confirmed that Fawcett had anal cancer. "Isn't that great for an actress?" he told *PEOPLE*, shaking his head. "She said she is surprised at how well she is doing." Fawcett even drove their son to work the day after treatment. "She's so strong," he says. "I love her. I love her all over again."

In the three decades since Fawcett seduced the nation with her brilliant smile and red swimsuit—years marked

by professional highs and lows, as well as her older sister Diane's death from lung cancer in 2001 and her mother Pauline's death at 91 in 2005—the all-American sex symbol has never been one to take a hit without swinging back. On Oct. 6, soon after getting her cancer diagnosis, Fawcett, a former spokeswoman for the American Cancer Society, issued a defiant statement entitled "Positivity Is a Necessity": "Throughout the journey of my life, I have maintained a strong faith in the power of the human spirit to overcome adversity. I deeply believe in one's own positive will to overcome even the

most daunting challenges. I am resolutely strong and I am determined to bite the bullet and fight the fight. ..."

While Fawcett readies for battle, she does not lack for reinforcements. The other former Angels, Jackson and Smith—both of whom have beaten cancer (see box above)—have rallied beside her. Says O'Neal: "Kate was with her at the house, and Jaclyn is sending food. Farrah is so touched." According to *Extra*, Katie Couric (who has crusaded against colon cancer since the disease took her husband's life in 1998) has been guiding Fawcett to the field's top physi-



Fawcett visited London with her family—dad James, mom Pauline and sister Diane—in 1978.

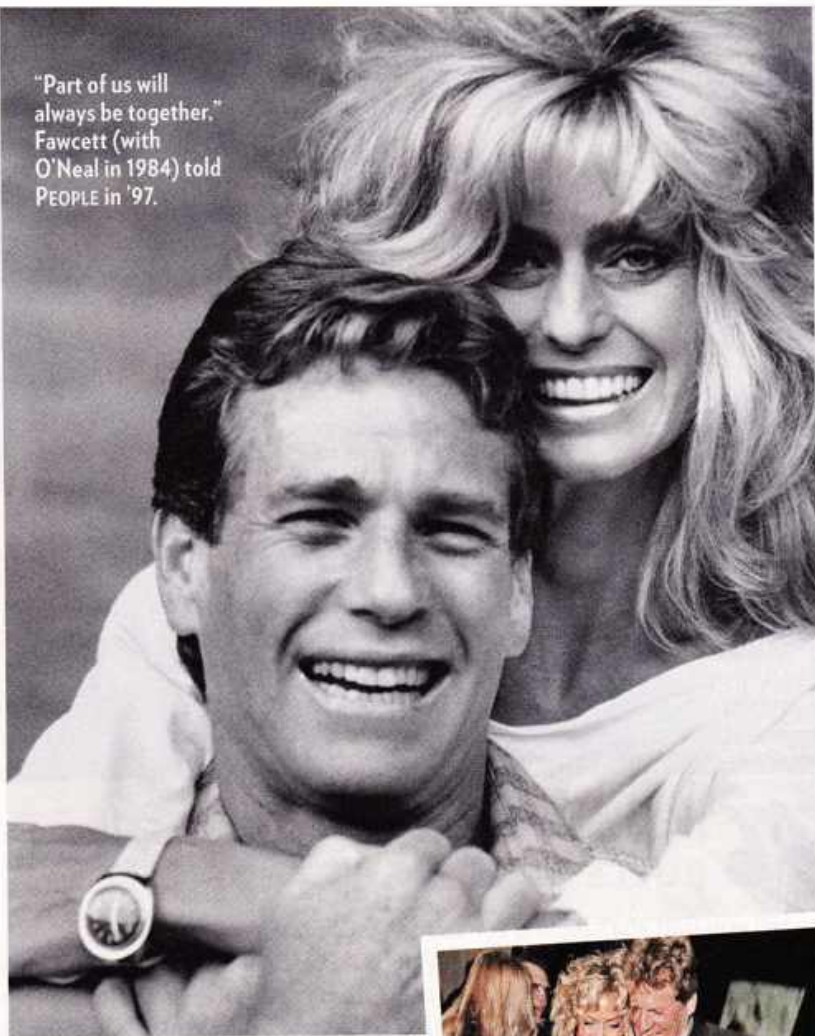
cians and its most up-to-date treatments. (Says Couric's rep: "Katie had gone through similar experiences with family members and wanted to be as helpful as possible.") After hearing her friend's news, Kate Jackson took Fawcett out for a walk "disguised in hats and bandanas," says Jackson. "Farrah is up and around. If anybody has an image in their head of her wasting away on a bed, they are seriously wrong." Fawcett's former neighbor Tori Spelling says, "I know with her perseverance and beautiful outlook on life, she will overcome this."

Her friends back in her native Texas have weighed in too. Sylvia Dorsey, a Houston-based interior designer who is a close pal from Fawcett's days at the University of Texas at Austin, suggested Fawcett get treated at Houston's renowned M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. But Fawcett preferred to stay in L.A., where in addition to her chemotherapy she will undergo five weeks of radiation treatment for the disease before determining the next step. (For more on anal cancer, see box on page 68.) "She has a lot of confidence in her doctors," says Dorsey. Plus, she adds, in L.A., "Farrah's got a wonderful support system—she's surrounded by all her men."

Despite their ups and downs over the years, O'Neal and Fawcett have always turned to each other in times of need. When O'Neal was diagnosed with chronic myelogenous leukemia in 2001, Fawcett helped nurse him back to health. "They are each the loves of each other's lives," says Nevius. For Fawcett, at the moment, O'Neal is also a loving caretaker. "Ryan is a very independent guy," says Nevius, "but he is setting aside everything right now to be with her. Nobody in the world can make her laugh like Ryan does. And right now laughter is very important for her." As Dorsey says, "The doctors have said [her cancer] is curable, but she's got to go through some tough times."

As she goes through radiation treatments in the coming weeks, Fawcett will have to deal with side effects that can range from fatigue to diarrhea. Though Fawcett declined to speak to PEOPLE for this story, she sent word through her close friend Pat Van Patten: "Farrah says

"Part of us will always be together." Fawcett (with O'Neal in 1984) told PEOPLE in '97.



LOVE STORY

It was 1979, and Fawcett had already left her role as Jill Munroe on *Charlie's Angels*. She was married to *The Six Million Dollar Man* Lee Majors; O'Neal was Majors's good friend, a rakish film star whom Majors asked to look after his wife while he was away on location. "I was so overwhelmed by this mental and physical attraction for him," Fawcett later told LIFE magazine, "that I didn't think about anything except what was happening right there." They never married, but that passionate bond kept them together for 17 years, until the bad times outweighed the good. Their acrimonious breakup in 1997 led to separate homes but not to separate lives. Even before Fawcett's recent cancer diagnosis, the two spoke often, especially in all matters regarding their son Redmond. Their close connection—evident last year during his appearances on her reality show, *Chasing Farrah*—often prompts talk of a romantic rekindling. Says her friend Craig Nevius: "She tells me, 'Whether we're together or not depends on the day of the week, the month, the year, the way the wind blows.'" What matters now is that O'Neal is looking after her. Says Fawcett pal Joan Dangerfield: "Ryan has been unbelievably sympathetic. He says, 'I'm in love with her. I don't want to lose her.'"



The pair fueled reconciliation talk after dancing at a premiere party in 2003.



"Ryan's being great, and Redmond is there, of course," says Fawcett pal Sylvia Dorsey of the family (in 2003). "He loves his mom." Right, Fawcett appears in a 1980 American Cancer Society campaign.



“ I AM DETERMINED TO BITE THE BULLET AND FIGHT THE FIGHT.... ”

to tell you that she's feeling good, that everything is under control," says Van Patten. "She has chosen to have the aggressive treatment. There is a high curability for what she has. They are going to shrink the tumor. She's going to attack it. She said to tell you that she will be in a weakened condition for a while and won't look that good. But her spirits are good. Her father is here, and Ryan and her son are with her. She's going to take care of it."

Indeed, her father, James, 90, a retired oil field contractor, flew in from Houston to join O'Neal and Redmond at his daughter's side during her Oct. 9 chemo session. His trademark tough love is, say friends, just what she needs. "Her dad is somebody who doesn't believe in sitting around and complaining and feeling sorry for yourself," says Nevius. "He says you should get up and do something. In some ways, Farrah is very much her father's daughter. She gets her fighting spirit from him." It was the elder Fawcett who lightened the mood just before his daughter's chemo was administered. According to O'Neal, James asked the doctors who were milling around, "Y'all have chemo too?" And they said, "No, why?" and he said,

'Because you're all bald.'

Dangerfield says she visited Farrah the night before doctors prepped her for chemo. "I thought I would cheer her up," she recalls. "But it was the other way around. Farrah had me laughing for hours. She was incredible—with great humor, optimistic and fierce." While Fawcett is not feigning heroic strength, Dorsey says, "she's definitely not falling apart; she's quite calm. She told me, 'This is the time for me to heal. This is the time where I have to think about myself.' She's not afraid."

In fact, Fawcett is trying to keep her life as close as possible to the way it was before. Dangerfield says that she and

Fawcett still plan to vacation in St. Bart's over the holidays. And a few days back, when Nevius called to check in, Fawcett was at O'Neal's house, busy in the kitchen, baking cookies. "She said, 'You know what, right now I'm just focusing on being happy and healthy.'" In the meantime, Fawcett's friends have no doubt that she'll call upon her inner strength and religious faith to pull her through. "The Fawcetts are a very strong family—we've been through a lot, and we're always there for each other," says Farrah's cousin Lisa Fawcett. "And Farrah is a fighter. She knows she can win this battle."

By **Karen S. Schneider** and **Michelle Tauber**, **Michael Fleeman**, **Champ Clark** and **Nicholas White** in Los Angeles, **Anne Lang** in Austin and **Jennifer Frey** in New York City

WHAT IS ANAL CANCER?

Anal cancer, which develops in the area connecting the end of the large intestine to the outside of the body, is rare: An estimated 4,600 new cases are diagnosed each year (compared to 148,000 cases of colorectal cancer). Mainly affecting adults over age 35, its survival rate—like most cancers—depends on how advanced the cancer is when diagnosed. For stage one cancer, "the survival rate is as high as 80 percent," says Dr. Leonard Saltz, a colorectal cancer specialist at New York City's Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center who is not privy to the details of Fawcett's case. Its cause is unknown, and unlike with colorectal cancer, colonoscopies are not an effective means of early detection, says Dr. Saltz.