

Transcript:  
Remarks by former President Bill Clinton  
NBCCF Annual Gala  
New York, New York  
November 3, 2005

Bill Clinton Speech

Female Voice: President Bill Clinton.

President Clinton: Thank you. Thank you very much.  
Thank you. Thank you very much. Fran, ladies and gentlemen.  
I find it harder to speak after that little film clip. I miss  
my mother every day and you could probably tell in that little  
excerpt why.

But, I want to begin by thanking Fran and the National  
Breast Cancer Coalition for everything you did with me when I  
was President and with Hilary when we were in the White House.  
Thank you for honoring my mother tonight. And thank you for  
what you are doing to try to continue to battle against breast  
cancer and to battle for better policies and better care. I  
told Julianne Moore and Jack Stahl, and I want to thank Revlon  
for what they've done to support this evening. But we were  
outside before we came in and I said, you know, Fran has the  
greatest characteristic any advocate can have in politics.  
She is almost impossible to say no to.

If you think about it - you just think about how many  
people you know that it's easy for you to say no to. You

know, they can be too pushy or too soft. They can make good sense, but be cold blooded or they can be wildly emotional, but not make good sense. She's pushy and nice, rational and passionate. I wanted to get signs made up when I was in the White House and whenever you saw her coming we could just hold up "Yes" before she ever had to say a word. Just save all the trouble, all the talk. We knew we were going to roll anyway, so we might as well just get out of the way on the front end. I say that because I am profoundly grateful.

We were asked to form a national action plan against breast cancer by her and by this group and we did. We were asked to do more on breast cancer research and we set up this remarkable peer-reviewed program in the Department of Defense. And we had a lot of good research because many women in the military have higher than average rates of breast cancer. We increased access to quality clinical trials. We increased access to health care for breast and cervical cancer for low-income women. We increased the availability of mammographies to appropriate groups. All because of the work we did with the National Breast Cancer Coalition.

And so, thank you Fran, for being a friend to me and Hilary and all those millions of women and their families and loved ones who are struggling to make it against breast cancer and all those in the future who will live because of what all

of you have done. Thank you so much.

(Applause)

You know, I was always interested in health care issues 'cause I grew up bumming around the hospital with my mother. Linda Ellerbe, who's also a friend of ours, did a wonderful job with this little picture. One of the kindest things she did was to only show briefly my mother with all those nurses. She only showed a picture briefly 'cause that's me at the bottom in the beanie so fat I could hardly walk in one of my ugly periods of life.

But anyway, I spent a lot of time hanging around hospitals and watching surgery and seeing people who were sick try to get well. And I'll never forget when my mother developed breast cancer. I thought at that point in my life there was nothing more she could possibly do that would surprise me. But she did.

I mean, I knew how much she was hurting. I knew how much peril she was in. And the level of clarity and courage with which she faced it in grace and good humor, the treatments she decided to undertake and the treatments she decided to forego in the end. What she decided to do was amazing. She died when she was 70 years and six months old, exactly on January the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1994, but the background is interesting.

You may know that Barbra Streisand agreed to be the

honorary co-chair of this event. There's a reason for that. She hadn't performed in a massive public concert for decades when she went to Las Vegas over New Year's Eve, 1993-1994, and she invited my mother to go because they met during my inauguration and Barbra fell in love with her and she called my mother every week for the next year until she died. There was never a week that she didn't call my mother and I'll never forget that.

But, anyway, so I called mother and it was almost impossible to see how sick she was because by then she was getting blood transfusions every day from like just before Thanksgiving on 'cause the cancer had spread. And I said, "Mother, don't you want to come up and do our first Christmas in the White House?" She said, "Yeah, I guess so." And I thought, oh, she's not feeling good. She's going to tell me she's finally given up. She said, "I guess so, but you've got to promise to have me home in time to fly to Vegas for New Year's Eve because I'm going to Streisand's show".

As God is my witness, she's taking transfusions - blood transfusions every single day just to stay alive. So, we haul her up for Christmas and I take her home and she flies off to Vegas. Then on New Year's Eve I tried to call her. She was unavailable. I tried for three days to call her.

So, finally I got kind of miffed. I left messages on the

phone. And so on January 6<sup>th</sup> I got her on the phone, and I said, "Have you just quit speaking to me?" I said, "Did I do something as President to make you mad?" She said, "Look, I'm busy, I'm having a good time, and I've got to go to the concert. I got to play the slots and besides, I don't want you to be mottling (sounds like) on me. We'll get around to talking." So, we had this wonderful talk and all she did was just chat along. And I hung up the phone and we acted like we were both going to live forever and she died that night. And that's exactly the way she wanted it.

Last conversation we had one on one was when I let her off in Arkansas to go up to Vegas and we're sitting on the couch and I said, "You got anything you want to say to me?" And she babbled on about Chelsea and Hilary. And I said, "Come on, mother, you got anything you want to say to me?" She said, "Yeah, I do. She said if I don't live long enough to finish my book, you have to finish it. But don't you forget, it's my book, not yours." And she said, "You have to promise me faithfully that you will edit it so I look literate, but that you will not change a word of the meaning unless you think I have been too mean to somebody who's still alive." So, anyway, that was my mother.

Everybody here who's lost anybody from breast cancer's got a story about the person they loved. And, I'm really a

lucky man. I mean, I've been healthy as a horse and I've led a hard life. I've worked like crazy all my life and I barely avoided a serious heart attack. But I think those of us who have been especially fortunate and particularly those of us who have had the benefit of a rich life; the longer we live the more our obligations to the future grow. And I'm here tonight partly because my mother would give me a reaming and maybe a spanking if I didn't show up. And I think that you should all look at it this way.

The one thing I didn't mention in that litany of things we did when I was President was the indirect result of something I did which was to put a massive amount of money into the human genome project so that we could sequence the human genome. After that, all these scientists went to work and on practical applications and you might imagine that I was thrilled that the first significant practical development from the sequencing of the human genome was the identification of the two genetic variances that put even young women at higher risk of breast cancer.

Now, some day we are going to be able to send every mother and father home with their newborn from the hospital with a genetic card that will tell them how to maximize the lives of their children. And that's another reason why I fought so hard against genetic discrimination based on that

information. You can't deny people health insurance or jobs or anything, but we'll be able to know what to do. And some day all this research will lead to preventions and treatments that will make sure we don't lose our loved ones or we don't go through these harrowing years.

And when it happens, it'll be because people like Fran and people like you who have memories of their loved ones that I have of my mother that will never die. There will always be problems in the world. There will always be injustice. There will always be misfortune. But our obligation is to live as long and as well as we can and to help others to do the same. That is our obligation as human beings. You have discharged that duty tonight, and my mama's up there smiling on you.

Thank you and God bless you.

(Applause)

(End of Audio)