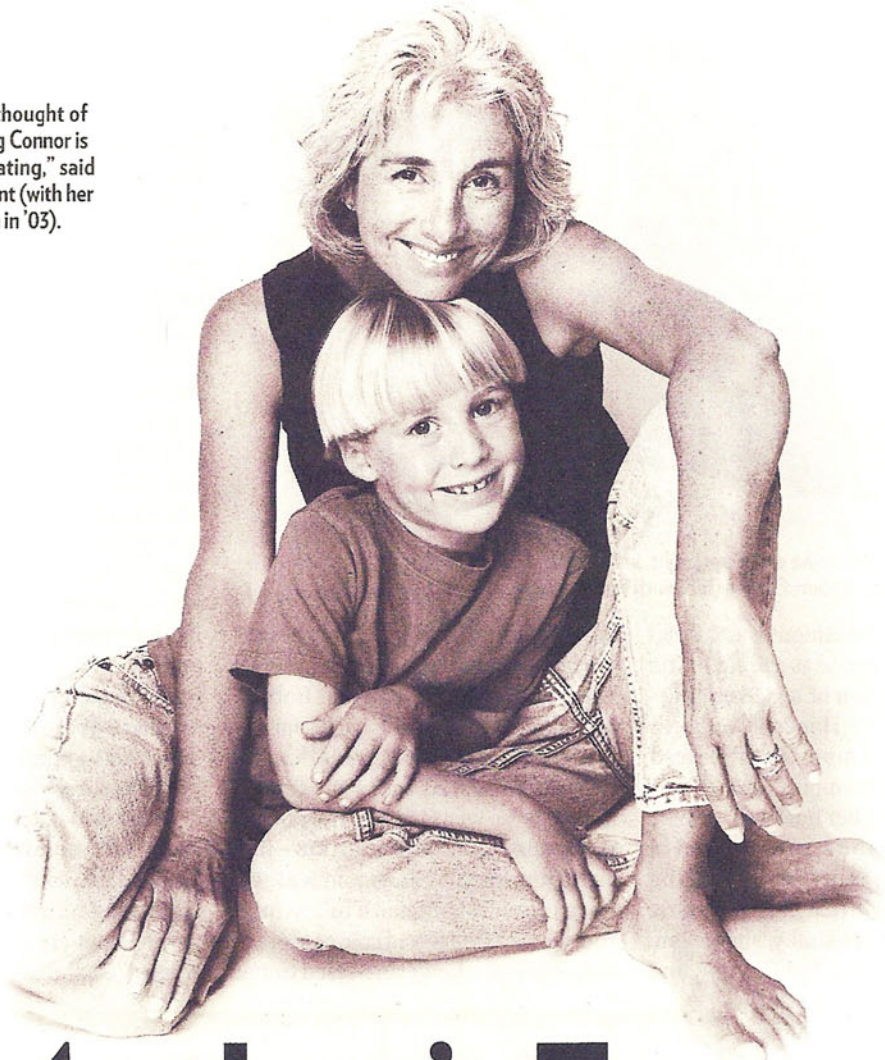


"The thought of leaving Connor is devastating," said Fairmont (with her son in '03).



A Mother's Farewell

At 50 and facing terminal cancer, Pam Fairmont made a video for her 10-year-old son Connor. Her message: 'I'll always be with you' **BY JOANNE FOWLER**

My name is Pamela Margaret Fairmont. I'm 50 years old. I'm recording this for my son Connor.

Pam Fairmont had been hoping this moment would never arrive. She knew she might be dying, but the idea of leaving her husband and young son behind was too painful to contemplate for long, the idea of last words unthinkable. Instead, most days, she would gather her spirits, steel her resolve and hunt for one last cure.

But on June 13 Fairmont was taking a break from her three-year battle with colon cancer. She was done with the chemo and radiation; another

HER PARTING WORDS



'You aren't responsible for what has happened'

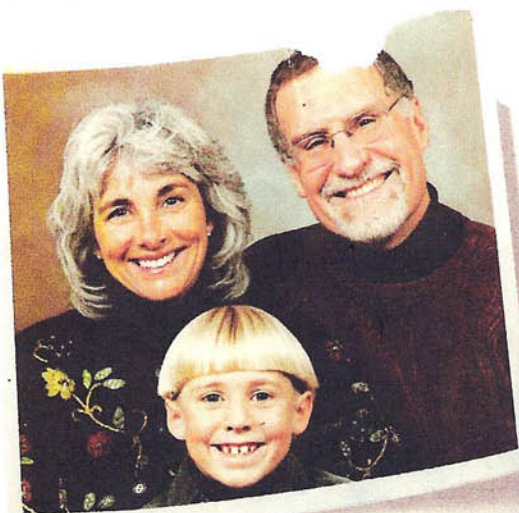


'Life is about taking risks and having adventures'



'I am part of you. You are part of me. I have really enjoyed being your mom'

To see a clip of Fairmont's video, go to WWW.PEOPLE.COM/FAIRMONT



FAMILY LIFE "Even to the end, Pam [right, in 1996] held out hope that she'd beat this," says Robert Elmore (left, with family in '03).



er cutting-edge treatment was failing. She felt oddly serene as she sat in the sun-soaked garden of her Santa Barbara, Calif., home. Her son Connor, a then 9-year-old mop-top who lived for handball and computer games, was off at school, and her husband, Robert Elmore, sat on the staircase, head in hands, wiping away tears. Staring straight ahead into a video camera, her voice at times shaky, she began. She had so much to tell Connor, and time was running out. Later, though, she was smiling almost triumphantly as she explained to a visitor, "For nearly half of Connor's life I've been a patient. I want him to know the gregarious person I once was—and what I value in life."

Put your hand up [to the camera]. Put it to your face and feel my presence. That's my love and support, whether you're 6 or 60.

It started with what Pam delicately called "system problems" and fatigue—a rare feeling for the energetic Fairmont, who had left a career in TV advertising to stay home with her only child. Having waited until her 40s to have a baby, she relished her role as a mom, becoming one of the most active volunteers at Connor's school and spend-

ing weekends biking in their neighborhood and hiking the Figueroa mountains with her son and Robert. Initially told she had a bacterial ailment, Fairmont took antibiotics, but the pain persisted and, after several months, she went back to the doctor. What she found in May 2003—just eight months after Fairmont had gotten a clean bill of health following a routine pap smear and colonoscopy—defied belief: a tangerine-sized tumor

and more than 150 lesions scattered throughout her intestines and reproductive organs. The diagnosis: stage 4 colon cancer. "She was full of despair," recalls Elmore, 59, adding that Fairmont even briefly considered moving out so Connor wouldn't see her deteriorate but soon realized she could never leave. Surgeons removed part of Fairmont's colon as well as her appendix, ovaries and uterus. In the hospital for most of June, Fairmont was determined to make it to Connor's last day of kindergarten, leaning for support on Robert as she walked in. "Telling Connor about my diagnosis was the most difficult day of my life," Fairmont recalled. "He cried and cried and said, 'Mommy, if you lose your hair, I'm going to run away.'"

So what's going on with you today? You must be missing me. Maybe you're feeling lonely.

Determined to preserve a part of herself for her only child, Fairmont decided to make a video—something a growing number of terminally ill Americans are doing [see box]. In August '03 she called LifeChronicles,

A LIFETIME OF MEMORIES

In her last weeks, Fairmont stored mementos for her son



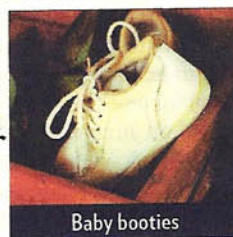
Fairmont puts away a ceramic vase she made with Connor in '99.



A beloved book



Gifts for Mom



Baby booties

a nonprofit organization that assists with such videos; Fairmont poured her heart out to founder Kate Carter. "She wanted this for Connor," Carter recalls. "But she was torn." Carter called back in September, but Fairmont, feeling better, backed off.

Daddy and I were so happy when we saw your heart beating [on the sonogram] the first time. You came so beautiful and perfect—with no marks or wrinkles.

Carter didn't hear from Fairmont for two and a half years. Then, one day, Fairmont called with bad news. Dozens of new lesions had appeared—"it was like they took toothpaste and spread it all over my lungs," said Fairmont. In addition to chemotherapy, she tried a host of alternative treatments, from injections of mistletoe to a strict fruit-and-fish diet. The only daughter of a Farmingdale, N.J., model car race track owner and a home-maker who divorced when she was a baby, Fairmont would tell herself, "If anyone can beat this, you can, Pam."

But the cancer was winning. Fairmont went to see her oncologist, who told her, "'You don't have many options left,'" recalls Elmore, a math professor who met Fairmont when she was a student at Santa Barbara City College. So in April Fairmont—now down to 95 lbs. and at times too weak to get out of bed—asked LifeChronicles to videotape her 50th-birthday party and help her record a personal message for Connor—a secret she kept from Robert until two weeks before she made the video. "I probably would have pooh-poohed it as another project to take her time and energy," Elmore says. "But she felt an urgency."

There was a time when I could bicycle ride on our tandem with Daddy, first with you in a baby seat,

A LASTING LEGACY

No one knows how many terminally ill Americans are making parting-message videos, but one sign of interest are the professional videographers offering their services to the dying. LifeChronicles, the Santa Barbara nonprofit that worked with Pam Fairmont, requests a \$500 "donation" for an hour-long video; other services charge as much as \$15,000 for elaborate productions. "A video gives them a chance to continue to parent," says Kate Carter, LifeChronicles' founder. "They can pass their wisdom on and tell their kids what matters to them." Others making such videos, Carter says, include Alzheimer's patients and World War II veterans. Now, a growing number of funeral homes are incorporating the videos into memorial services.

then with an attachable wheeler. We danced. We rolled down hills. Then there was a time when Mommy couldn't play.

Fairmont hoped the video would one day bring comfort to her son, who had already suffered from her illness. "She is sick all the time," said Connor, who sought solace in online games. "It's pretty tough." More days than not, now, Fairmont was too weak to do much more with him than read together. Elmore, who had thrown himself into work to deal with his anguish, was forced to step up his parenting duties while also looking after his frail wife. "I was struggling," he says. "It was pretty intense."

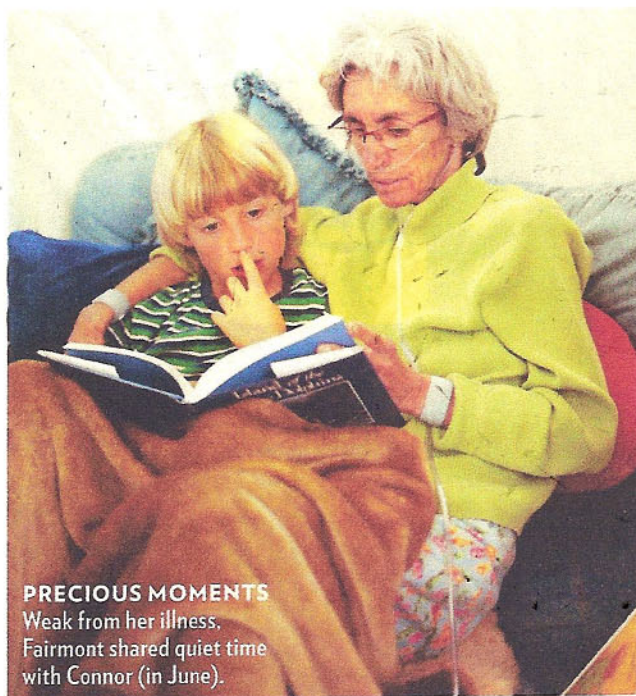
Perhaps I should touch on finances.

Your father and I both put ourselves through college without getting a dime. Invest wisely. Don't squander.

There was one last outing. It was Connor's 10th birthday and Fairmont was determined to do something special. Though hooked up to an oxygen tank and heavily drugged on morphine, she joined her family on a three-day camping trip to nearby El Capitan Canyon in late July to celebrate. "She was watching us blow bubbles," Elmore says. "She was so happy." **Maybe you're viewing this tape because you've had your heart broken for the first time. I've had my heart broken. There's perhaps no deeper pain. But know that you will date again and find pleasure in friends, activities and athletics.**

On the morning of June 13, wearing a bright blue blouse and a sapphire necklace that Elmore had given her, Fairmont dabbed on frosted pink lipstick. Hours earlier she and Connor had chatted over breakfast; she hugged him as he gave her a gentle squeeze and left for school. Holding a typed script, she recited her one-hour-long message.

In this life, Mommy hasn't been dealt the best deck. But I want you to fight the fight in life. And I am sitting here on one sunny June day letting you know how much I love you.



PRECIOUS MOMENTS
Weak from her illness, Fairmont shared quiet time with Connor (in June).

Pam Fairmont died on July 30.