

For some women, a convertible is a lifeboat

By Rhonda Wheeler
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Dana Jackson used to live a sheltered life. Private education, Sunday school, pleated uniforms, curfews - the whole shebang.

She wasn't one of those carefree girls who would take a dare, a bet or just any old type or risk. She was, for lack of a better word, practical.

At 37, that all changed when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. "I looked back at my life and saw that I hadn't lived it to its fullest," she says. "That was my wake-up call to start living."

So she cashed in a few savings bonds and bought the car of her dreams, a soft-pink 1957 Chevy Belair convertible.

Another love affair with the ragtop begins.

It wasn't a practical choice, she admits, considering the all-too-brief top-down cruising season in her area; but this is a woman who was all done with being practical.

"I used to focus on the end result, I thought about tomorrow. But when I was diagnosed, I was forced to start living in the moment, because I didn't know if there would be a tomorrow. I do what makes me happy now."

That usually means cruising downtown in her convertible, and she doesn't give a hoot about how rustled she'll look after putting the pedal to the metal in her classic. (It helps that her hair's the length of freshly cut grass.)

"When I'm driving (with the top down) and I can feel the sun on my face and the wind in my hair ... oh, now that's the life. That's living. Sometimes I'm so happy I sing at the top of my lungs. I don't care who's looking."

Brian Mulroney - no, not THAT Brian Mulroney - on the other hand, is in it for the ogle factor.

As the kids are saying these days, "he's well preserved."

And he knows it.

The tanned, trim, toned and recently divorced (he asked me to throw that in for him) Mulroney, a soon-to-be-retired investment broker, spends much of his spare time tooling around town in his 2001 Mustang convertible. Top down, music up, muscle shirt on: Heads turn.

"Sure, I drive this car because I want to be seen," he says. "I like to be looked at."

No surprise there - not for a guy whose vanity plates read, HTSTUF and who repeatedly runs his hands through a thick head of silvering hair that kinda matches the colour of his car. (Is Silver Fox a new shade?)

True, he did buy the convertible largely for its image. But once you get past his cheesy pick-up lines and goofy mustached grin, you find a guy who has worked hard all his life, built a career and a home for his family, and now wants to enjoy himself.

"For nearly 35 years, I worked in one high rise after another. Windows or not, you still feel like a caged animal."

The 'Stang allows him to run wild in/on his horse, sort of like a knight in shining armour ... minus a big sword and with much less chafing, I would imagine.

Jackson and Mulroney couldn't be more different. He's "mature", beefy, dark and about to start a new life; she's young, skinny, pale and uncertain about hers. But they have at least one thing in common: they're both looking for an escape, longing for the freedom that only a ragtop can offer.

That, I'm guessing, is the real appeal of the convertible.

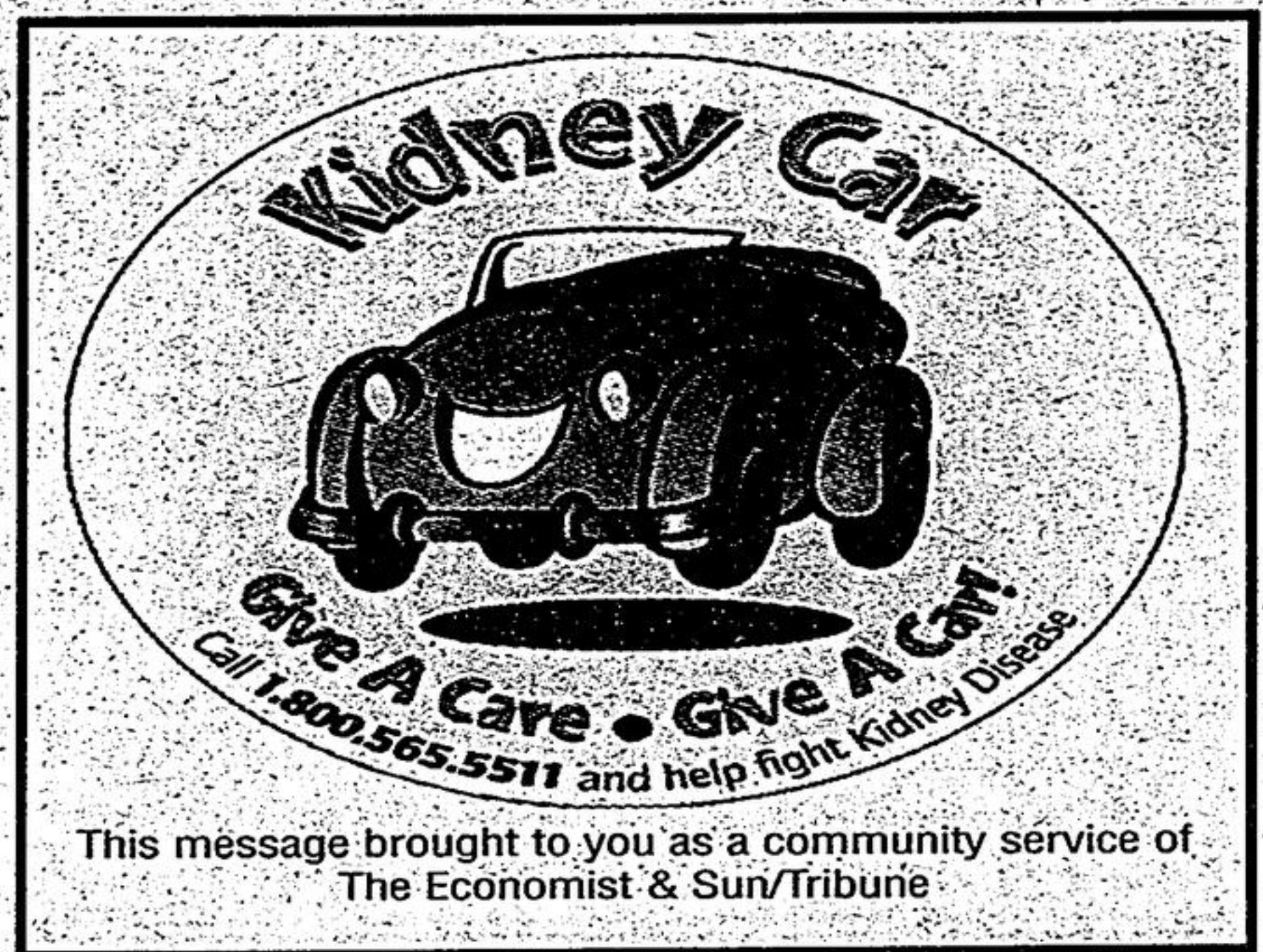
"It is about being free from whatever you feel tied down to," says Jackson, who's about to head into her sec-

ond round of chemotherapy. "When I'm in my car, that's what I feel, free. I'm not worrying about being sick or anything. All I'm thinking about is driving, about living in the moment . . ."


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