

POVERTY, CANCER, AND TENNIS HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON: A DETERMINED WOMAN NAMED MAUREEN RANKINE, BETTER KNOWN AS MO. THE 50-YEAR OLD JAMAICAN NATIVE AND PROFESSIONAL TENNIS INSTRUCTOR BELIEVES THAT TENNIS WAS HER BIG BREAK IN LIFE, AND SHE NOW USES THE SPORT THAT GAVE HER A CHANCE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS.



Returning to



SERVE

by BRENDA GUINAND

With poverty and cancer as her opponents, one woman plays the match of her life.

GROWING UP IN A FAMILY of nine children in Glendevon, one of the most dangerous neighborhoods of Montego Bay, Mo fell into tennis by chance. At 13, she picked up her first racquet in gym class. Despite not having any public courts for practice except for the five-minute windows between tourist bookings at local hotel courts, she loved the game and was playing doubles on her high school team by the age of 16.

"Tennis was a way to keep me out of trouble and safe. We were very poor, and through tennis, four of us attended college here in the United States on scholarships. The saying 'you have come a long way' is about me and my family."

Since attending Broward Community College in Florida, Mo has instructed hundreds as a professional tennis coach at camps and hotels in Massachusetts, Florida, and her current home, New York City. Although tennis success landed her many miles from her native country, she never lost sight of her hometown or the challenges that children there still face today.

On a 1999 return trip to Jamaica after having been away for many years, Mo visited Half Moon Hotel where she encountered a few kids that were ball boys for the visiting tourists. "I asked one youngster his name and where he was from, and he said the SOS Village, a home for orphans and abandoned children. I was surprised but thankful that these kids had been given an opportunity to be ball boys and make a few dollars during the tourist season. I was touched. I met several other children from my area and knew then that I had to get involved."

Mo's mission had begun. She returned to Jamaica again six months later and began a project of giving tennis equipment to the deprived children - a project that would develop into the Rankine Foundation. "Several of the children that I help are from that area of Glendevon, and life is worse now than when I was growing up there. There are no tennis courts in Montego Bay on which the kids can play. Most of the tennis courts are owned by the hotels, and only the tourists are allowed to play unless you work at the hotels. This is the main reason I am committed to

building public tennis courts for the kids to play on very soon."

The Rankine Foundation is just the latest part of her overall mission to help underprivileged children through tennis. Mo sums up the purpose as, "Build tennis courts, get more equipment for these youngsters, promote tennis in schools, and help these kids get a college education, and hopefully, a tennis career. Use tennis; say no to guns, drugs, and criminal behavior."

Another cause Mo fights with racquets and balls: breast cancer. Having seen the positive impacts of tennis on breast cancer survivors, their families, and friends, Mo decided to create Tennis Against Breast Cancer (TABC), a tennis organization that expands awareness and raises funds to find a cure.

In October 1993, Mo gathered a group of 15 friends at Roosevelt Island Racquet Club in New York City to host the first Tennis Marathon in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness month. The evening raised \$250, which was donated to SHARE, a self-help organization for women with breast and ovarian cancer.

Then, in 2006, Mo was touched personally when the disease took her mother's life. "TABC is more important to me now than ever. The main message we have to get out is that early detection can help save many lives. My mother had 'body cancer' at the time of her death. It started in her stomach and spread very fast. Mom did not get regular check-ups, and no one knew she was ill. I am hoping that with TABC, I can establish a cancer clinic in Montego Bay to help these poor women get screening and educate them about all cancers."

Through the Rankine Foundation and TABC, Mo is giving back through the sport that she believes has given her so much. She acknowledges many who have helped her along the way over the years, including her parents, Charlie and Beryl Rankine.

"A good friend of mine once told me that luck has nothing to do with how we prosper, but we are all given a 'break in life.' If you miss it, who knows when you will get another one. I had a few breaks, but tennis was my biggest break. I got into it by chance and am still going. Whether it is in the lives of poor children from the inner cities of Montego Bay or New York, or in the lives of breast cancer survivors and their families, together we can make a difference." 