

Triple Thwart

Three Mother's Cancer Bond

Cancer Survivors:
Jean Liebert,
Shelly Mastrangelo &
Suzanne Schrager (L-R)



“Breast cancer is a minor inconvenience in my life. It is a disease that deserves no power. It is a disease that changes your outlook on life - you learn to be as happy as you can each and every day,” says **Shelly Mastrangelo** a breast cancer fighter and mother of two sons.

Shelly and her sister **Jean Liebert** are the self proclaimed “Cancer Sisters”. Both diagnosed with breast cancer and along with Jean’s daughter **Suzanne Schrager** carry the BRCA2 gene, which indicates an increased risk of breast and ovarian cancer. The sisters were able to detect their breast cancer early and Suzanne was able to avert her cancer due to the sophisticated diagnostic and surgical capabilities at the *Thomas & Dorothy Leavey Cancer Center at Northridge Hospital Medical Center*.

Jean and Shelly lost their mother to breast cancer as teenagers and two of their aunts a few years later, making them at high risk for the disease. “Women with increased risk should talk with their doctors about the benefits and limitations of starting mammograms when they are younger,” says their physician **Carl Singerman, MD**, Oncologist. “Genetic counseling and testing may be a consideration for women who have two or more first-degree relatives (a mother, sister or daughter) with breast cancer.”

Evidence has confirmed that mammograms offer substantial benefit for women. Women can feel confident about the benefits associated with regular mammograms for finding cancer early. Women age 40 and older should have a screening mammogram and clinical breast exam every year and should continue to do so for as long as they are in good health.

♥ The Story of Jean

In 1989 Jean discovered a small lump in her right breast during her monthly self-breast exam. A calcification in the breast proved the mammogram inconclusive, prompting Dr. Singerman to recommend a biopsy. Fortunately, Jean’s biopsy detected the breast cancer in an early and treatable stage.

“Dr. Singerman keeps a close eye on me. For the last 16 years, I’ve come in every six months for testing,” says Jean. This meticulous testing and follow-through is now credited for the early detection of a second round of breast cancer in March of this year. “The BRCA2 gene is ruthless, so being able to detect that my cancer has returned early is critical,” she declares. Jean decided to have a mastectomy in best hopes of preventing her cancer from spreading.

♥ The Story of Shelly

At age 55, Shelly’s mammograms were all negative for breast cancer. But, in 1999 her yearly mammogram caused suspicion. Surgeon **Harold Marks, MD**, performed a subsequent biopsy that revealed a 1^{1/4} cm mass hidden mass.

“I recommended surgery to remove all the affected tissue and surrounding area based on Shelly’s gene and family history,” says Dr. Marks. “This is my cure, it’s not preventative and it’s not a loss. This gene is not kind and I felt I had to do this,” recalls Shelly. During her bi-annual follow-up in November 2002, a PET scan detected early cancer metastasizing to her bones and lymph nodes. Today, Shelly continues her courageous battle with cancer.

♥ The Story of Suzanne

Jean’s daughter Suzanne tested positive for the BRCA2 gene giving her a 95 percent chance of breast cancer and a 28 percent chance of ovarian cancer. At age 37, Suzanne already had two children and had made up her mind what to do.

“To me the decision to have Prophylactic surgery was a ‘no brainer’,” explains Suzanne. Prophylactic surgery is the removing of as much of the at-risk tissue as possible in order to reduce the chance of developing cancer. With the support of her entire family, Suzanne had a preventive mastectomy (removal of healthy breasts) and a full

hysterectomy with the removal of the ovaries. The surgery is not a guarantee, because not all at-risk tissue can be removed. “My risk of breast or ovarian cancer is now the same as the general population - 13.2 percent,” says Suzanne. “I chose to have the surgery, because I couldn’t just wait for the cancer to come. This way, I had some control and was able to do what I could to stop it.”

“So many people don’t realize how devastating it can be to have the BRCA2 gene and not do anything about it. Even getting tested is a positive step, the prevention solutions although drastic, are a much better alternative to what I am dealing with,” emphasizes Shelly.

“Options for women who test positive for the gene are carefully monitored for symptoms through state-of-the-art diagnostics, prophylactic surgery and chemoprevention. At present the genes cannot be repaired. Some day it may be possible to fix or manipulate the genes that increase one’s risk of cancer,” says **J. Gary Davidson, MD** and Medical Director of the Thomas & Dorothy Leavey Cancer Center. “For all other women, yearly mammograms and monthly self-breast exams remain the best screening available for breast cancer.”

Women have already begun to benefit in several ways from recent advances in understanding the genetic basis of breast cancer. At Northridge Hospital, we are in the forefront of cancer research and treatment in hopes that our next generation doesn’t have to take the same journey. For more information about the BRCA2 gene or genetic testing, please speak to your physician.

“I try to live each day as it comes. I’m happy. I listen to my body when it wants to relax, but I don’t let this disease get the best of me,” exclaims Shelly. “And, if it weren’t for Dr. Singerman, what would I do every Wednesday,” she jokes.

Northridge Hospital’s Cancer Center is the only dually accredited program in the San Fernando Valley.

choosing a center for your mammogram

- Make sure the center has a FDA certificate that is issued to all facilities that meet high professional standards of safety and quality and is accredited by MQSA.
- Use a facility that either specializes in mammography or performs at least three to five mammograms a day.
- If you are satisfied that the facility is of high quality, continue to go there on a regular basis so that your mammograms can be compared from year to year.
- Ensure the center uses digital mammography.
- Look for a center that has treatment from diagnosis through recovery.
- When a Computer-aided Detection (CAD) is used to review mammograms, cancers may be found that a radiologist can miss.

We have all this at Northridge Hospital’s Leavey Cancer Center!



J. Gary Davidson, MD
Medical Director,
Thomas & Dorothy
Leavey Cancer Center



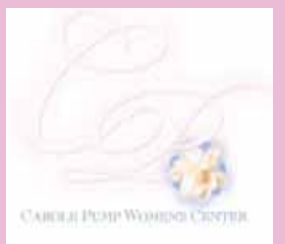
Carl Singerman, MD
Chairman, Cancer Committee
Thomas & Dorothy Leavey
Cancer Center

Mother's Day Special

Treat your mother to a gift that may save her life! Come to the Carole Pump Women’s Center during the month of May, 2005 to receive low-cost mammography and osteoporosis screenings.

Mammogram: \$75
Bone Density: \$99

Present this coupon with your mammogram and/or bone density scan. Also receive a free private breast self-examination.



Please call **(818) 700-5678** to schedule your appointment