Providing Cancer Patients With Hope and Support

Advertising executive Meryl Kern had just celebrated her one-year wedding anniversary when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2015. “Breast cancer does not run in my family and I don’t have the BRCA gene. It really came as a shock,” Kern told the Journal. A double mastectomy, 18 rounds of chemotherapy and 36 rounds of radiation at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center over two years erased all evidence of cancer, but the emotional scars remained.

“In the beginning, I was angry at God. I always did good things. I thought, ‘How could God do this to me?’ I felt that God had let me down, and I battled with that,” Kern said. Her rabbi at Beit T'Shuvah helped her realize that God got her through her ordeal. But she still searched for meaning and purpose. She found it by continuing the tradition of philanthropy her parents had instilled in her by helping others who have cancer. She established the Meryl Kern Survivorship Program at Tower Cancer Research Foundation to help patients cope post-treatment.

“I faced so many difficult issues following treatment and thought, ‘If I’m facing them, other cancer patients are facing them.’ I knew there were other women that needed help and support,” Kern said, noting that the program offers educational and discussion groups and underwrites wigs for women who can’t afford them.
Kern knows firsthand how important appearance is to women who have lost part of their femininity to surgery and treatments that rob the body of estrogen. “I didn’t feel good about myself. I didn’t like what I saw in the mirror,” she said.

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Her solution was to put on a wig, makeup, a dress and high heels for her treatment sessions. “It was my way to control part of my life,” she said. “When you look good, you feel good. It’s not about vanity. It’s about being able to look at yourself and say, ‘I look good,’ and gain the confidence that you lost.”

The desire to improve her appearance motivated her to launch a new business called Liftique, a nonsurgical, minimally invasive procedure that rejuvenates and tightens the skin. Kern donates a portion of the revenue to fund cancer research and provides free procedures to women who can’t afford them. “The more money I can make, the more I can give back,” she said.

Kern explained that philanthropy has always been a part of her life, thanks to her mother, who worked for the Reiss-Davis Clinic at Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services. Philanthropy is her greatest joy in addition to her son, daughter and four grandchildren.

Having gone through a devastating illness and survived, “I’m trying to learn to live with my new normal,” she said. “I’ve become stronger in my belief to give back. I believe God wanted me to do more in the world, and I’m trying to do more. That’s the legacy I want to leave. Even if it’s a dollar, you always give back. I teach my children that and they in turn will teach their children.”