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HEALTH



Stephanie Robin, 42, with Roxy one of her three dogs at home Thursday in Boca Raton. In 2005 Robin co-founded Think Pink a breast cancer charitable organization based in Boca Raton. Robin herself is battling with stage four breast cancer.

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There's a lot of pink in Stephanie Robin's life - on her cellphone, and the racing stripe on her truck. It's the name of her Maltese, who's actually a boy - "He's very secure in his sexuality," Robin jokes.

If a male dog can confidently bear the name, Robin believes, it shouldn't be a stretch that pink is also the color of strength, of feminine power, and of a collective force that endeavors, for once and for all, to save as many people from breast cancer as possible.

Her included.

"Pink isn't just a color. It's an attitude. It's pretty girly, but I feel like it takes on a whole new meaning," says Robin, 42, currently undergoing treatment for Stage 4 breast cancer, and the co-founder of Think Pink Rocks, a series of concerts at the Centre for the Arts at Mizner Park in Boca Raton.



The show, whose third edition on Oct. 9 features 50 Cent, Pitbull, Melanie Fiona, Asher Roth and other artists from SRC/Motown, raises money and awareness about early detection and genetic testing.

Even though Robin's mother, Lois Nelson, had been diagnosed twice with breast cancer, and though she'd had a mammogram years earlier than the generally prescribed age of 40, Robin said she had no idea that there was such thing as a breast cancer gene, or BRCA 1 and 2.

But there is, and women who have it have a 60 percent risk of getting breast cancer, as compared with a 12 percent risk for women overall. Had she known about it, Robin says, she'd have been checked more frequently, and, she believes, her cancer would have been caught before it spread and metastasized to her lungs.

"I had no idea it was genetic," she says. "If they had told my mother that, and asked 'Do you have children?' If I had known that there were red flags, like having a Jewish background. It's ridiculous that no one told her. Had I known, I would have been checked two, three, four times a year. And the lump wouldn't have grown and the cancer wouldn't have spread to my lymph nodes. It could have been different.

"And my purpose is to make sure that this doesn't happen again."

Begun as a fund-raising luncheon, Think Pink Rocks became a concert in 2008, featuring Akon, Flo Rida and Melanie Fiona, hosted by Queen Latifah and with an appearance by actress Gabrielle Union. This year, the foundation is partnering with Florida First Women Care, a network of more than 100 OB/GYNs across the state.

Dr. Kenneth Konsker, chairman of the Delray Beach-based network, says the doctors felt it imperative to address breast cancer, the second most deadly cancer among women, behind lung cancer - "192,000 people in the United States were diagnosed in 2009 -1,900 were men," he says. "We believe in the nature of what they're trying to achieve."

'They made a mistake.'

Four years ago, Robin wasn't an activist, just a Long Island girl and full-time mother who'd moved to Boca Raton in 1998 with husband Michael, then 4-year-old son Coby and 2-year-old daughter Skylar. While she dedicated herself to being there for her children, her son Coby was the one, she says, "who saved my life."

In April 2004, the two were roughhousing on the couch when Coby accidentally nailed her left breast with a kick, causing pain and, she thought, a lumpy bruise. But the lump persisted, and a needle biopsy showed evidence of malignant cells.

"I was hysterical crying. I was in disbelief - I thought 'It has to be wrong. It has to be a bruise. There's no way. I'm 36. I have a 2- and a 4-year-old. I have a career and a husband. They made a mistake,' " says Robin, who'd had a mammogram the previous October whose results were clear.

But it wasn't a mistake - she found out that she did, indeed, have breast cancer, and that with her mother's diagnosis and her Ashkenazi, or Eastern European, Jewish heritage, she was a candidate for having the BRCA gene. "I had never heard of it. It's mind-boggling to me. That should be as well-known a fact as . . ." she pauses, and glances at the rose-colored phone in her hand.

"That should be as well-known as that this phone is pink."

Some remain unaware of gene

And that, simply, is why Robin, who eventually had a double mastectomy with reconstruction and a hysterectomy, started the first Think Pink luncheon in 2005 with friend Elizabeth Weprin, who lives in Delray Beach.

"I still just can't believe that she didn't have to be diagnosed the way she was. If only she had known about that gene ahead of time," Weprin says. "Her story is insane. This is unacceptable. Even with all the awareness about this, there are still women who say 'There's a gene?' "

The first luncheon drew 450 people, including friends of Robin's who flew in from New York to support her. The next year, the cancer returned, and so did Think Pink in 2007, as Robin and Weprin's resolve to get the word out. Robin began an experimental treatment at Memorial Sloan Kettering, around the time that Think Pink took a different, more musical turn. A mutual friend introduced Robin and Weprin to Steve Rifkind, chairman of SRC/Motown and a new Boca Raton resident.

"I had just moved to Boca and didn't know anyone, and somebody told me about this," says Rifkind, whose father is a breast cancer survivor. "It's a nice thing to do with your family, and if I could help someone, I wanted to."

Think Pink Rocks grows

The first Think Pink Rocks show, in October 2008, brought a star-studded lineup across a pink carpet and a little hip-hop flavor to Boca. It also provided a "surreal" moment for Robin, who remembers that "Queen Latifah has her arm around me yelling 'Think . . . Pink! Think . . . Pink!' I was like 'What's happening?' "

That show, the work she and Think Pink Rocks have done, and her treatments have strengthened her resolve to survive.

"I was prepared to say goodbye. I spent the last several years preparing to die. I taught the kids how to do everything around here, because I didn't think I was going to be here" says Robin, who started a grueling workout regimen at Cross-Fit gym in Boca and is now buff and trim. "I feel amazing. I'm in a whole new chapter of all of this. I've spent the whole past year living."

As Robin continues her treatments, Think Pink Rocks continues to grow, not only as a concert but as a full-fledged breast cancer charity. The charity has raised through its various efforts about \$462,000.

This past March, a team of runners raised thousands of dollars for Think Pink at the New York City Half-Marathon. She hopes that those runners in their pink shirts will make someone stop and ask what Think Pink is. And if they do, she's got lots to tell them.

"Know your family's history. Knowledge is power. Ask questions. Know what your grandma had, and what your grandma's grandma had," she says. "It could be lifesaving. You're your own advocate."

Think Pink Rocks

With 50 Cent, Pitbull, Melanie Fiona, Asher Roth and more. At 7 p.m. Oct. 9, Centre for the Arts at Mizner Park, Boca Raton. For tickets, call ThinkPinkRocks.com or call (888) 711-9399.