

HAVE YOU HAD YOUR MAMMOGRAM THIS YEAR?

There is a brave woman on the front cover of the Century City News this issue. Brave not because she has abandoned what society calls decency by shedding the wig and embracing her cancer. No she is brave because she has stared down the Grim Reaper that came a callin' for her a wee bit prematurely. She was recently diagnosed with Breast Cancer and she embraced her situation willing to follow the advice of her team of doctors and fight – for her life. Three weeks ago she was declared “Cancer Free” and has so far won her fight. The threat of cancer is never fully gone.

But the question is put to all of you by Kimberly Michel because she cares about each of you. Have you had your mammography this year? Early detection could save your life. It is a topic that nobody wants to discuss and yet too many of us mourn our friends that have stared at the Grim Reaper and not been victorious. Too many lives have been cut short by the most deadly killer for women. Kim is also brave to buck societal pressures to cover up and hide behind the wig. But those of you who know her and are able to call her a friend also know that this is a woman that is “salt of the earth” even though she has achieved the upper strata of success. She is hoping by shedding the wig she can help to save a few lives. One of those lives might be yours. Have you had your mammography this year? Seriously, have you?

I met Kim a number of years ago when I started this paper. I met her through my Rotary Club as one of her agents is a Rotarian. I was invited into her company, Michel Financial Group, the Mass Mutual Representative on the West Side of Los Angeles. I knew then that I was in the right place because each and every person at the company had such positive energy. I discovered that all of them followed the lead of Kim who is the General Agent of the

Company. Over the years I have become a friend and fan of both Kim and the company and the news that Kim had been diagnosed with breast cancer was very troubling to me. Kim is a woman who has given back to an extent that is certainly not common in our society and she truly is a “pillar of the community”. The day I learned about her battle I felt our community was being shaken. How could someone that is so good be battling something so bad?

One of the ironies is that a particular organization that both Kim and I have worked for is the Lorraine Jackson Foundation that provides scholarships for children that have lost a parent to breast cancer. Kim was extremely involved prior to any awareness that she would be stalked by the disease. Thankfully her children may never qualify for those scholarships. Will your own children qualify? Have you had your mammography this year?

Many of you that know me also know that I participate in humanitarian causes. This past week our little team shipped a container that has 2 echo cardiogram machines and a couple hundred boxes of “single use” medical supplies that will save an unknown but significant amount of lives. I bring it up because those lives are a world away from our community. If we reach out to save them but lose our friends and neighbors in the process how much meaning will it all have? I am grateful that my friend, Kim, elected to take on the fight with breast cancer and has won. What would our community be without all of the Kimberly Michel's in it? Get that mammography today!

I recently had the opportunity to sit behind closed doors and ask all of the inappropriate questions about Kim's battle. Kim was very candid and if you want someone to talk to about her battle with the disease I invite you to call her up and talk. She will be most accommodating.

Kim is a mother, a wife, and a business woman. She never thought she would have breast cancer. She has been faithful about going to her screenings every year and in spite of them was diagnosed with two tumors in each breast that have been present for seven or eight years. They were missed because they were deep within the tissue. Her doctor's appointment for “Hot Flashes” is what led to the discovery of the tumors. She was seeking hormone replacement therapy when the doctor said I think you need to go in for an MRI this Saturday. She quickly assembled an entire team of female doctors that developed a battle strategy that included radical mastectomy and chemotherapy. The result was that Kim needed eight days off every six weeks. The entire process was very painful for her and for the entire family but as a result she tells us that they are all so much closer now. There were a few moments of levity when her five year old grabbed the wig and put it on running around the house yelling “I'm the mommy! I'm the mommy!”

Kim talks about her husband and tears well up. “Tom was a rock. He learned about having to be the daddy and the mommy in our household.” Tom authored a number of letters he called care pages sent out to family and friends to update them on Kim's progress. Through it all he kept his sense of humor. He learned that you can't rush cancer. Cancer takes the time it takes. He has learned that you have to wait things out. Tom and the kids were exposed to the indecency of cancer as during those eight days off Kim would go through various stages of the chemotherapy and some of them were not that pretty.

Kim is in the business of selling insurance. As we look out her window we see Insurance

giant AIG and that brings up talk of the times we live in. One thing she tells me about her brush with death is the experience she had with healthcare. A single bill she received for \$116,000 for a five day hospital stay was renegotiated by the insurance carrier down to \$8,000. I didn't get it at first so I asked her to explain. If you went into the hospital as uninsured you would have paid \$116,000 for the services. When her health insurance company got the bill they called up the hospital and negotiated the bill down to \$8,000. Kim said, “Our healthcare system is broken.” But that doesn't mean that Kim didn't have an appreciation for being insured to the hilt. As an insurance executive she is a believer in being well insured and she has great coverage. Her own experiences have bolstered that belief and she wants to help everyone be prepared for the unexpected. She also wants you to get the medical attention that you need in time to save your life. Have you had your mammography this year?

Like the optimist I have always known Kim to be she tells me about the positive things that have come from her bout with Breast Cancer. She talks about her kids being better kids, the 25 pounds that she has lost, and not having to shave her legs. Now when Kim sits in traffic she no longer gets irritated by it – “Traffic? Big Deal!” Her child was called into the Principal's office twice in one day... she wasn't happy but she was slightly amused. The lesson for Kim is that in the grand scheme of things LIFE IS SHORT AND IT'S PRECIOUS. Not just her life but yours. She has taken her wig off to reveal the smooth bald and the now furry bald head that brings awareness to the issue of breast cancer. She is wearing her baldness to save lives. As we part Kim says, “Thank God for hot flashes!”

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