

HEALTH

MetaCancer Foundation will aid those with cancer

By Harriet P. Gross

One year ago, in observance of October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the *Texas Jewish Post* brought you the story of a local woman, Harriet Prostic Hollander of Dallas, and her family's devastating experience with the disease.

Today, one year later, we bring you this important follow-up: the establishment of the MetaCancer Foundation by the family in memory of Elizabeth Prostic Lundblad, Hollander's niece, who died of breast cancer on March 31 of last year at the age of 31.

Lizzie and Mike became parents of a baby girl, Harper, on June 10, 2004 — their fourth anniversary. But Lizzie didn't even live long enough to celebrate her daughter's first birthday. She had been diagnosed with Stage 4 metastasized breast cancer the August before — "six months from diagnosis to death," according to Hollander.

The many diagnoses of breast cancer in the family encouraged the Prostics to have genetic testing, which confirmed that they are indeed carriers of genes which put Jews of Ashkenazi descent at substantially increased risk of the disease. Two Prostic women have had prophylactic mastectomies as a response to these results. But the loss of Lizzie, so young and so quickly, was the toughest blow of all.

At the time of her death, Lizzie was a professional staffer on Capitol Hill while studying law at night at George Washington University. Her husband Mike continues his work in the English department of the University of Virginia, where he is a Ph.D. candidate.

But the Prostic family's roots are in Kansas City, and that is where the new Foundation has been established. Its

mission is "to provide inspiration and psychosocial support for survivors and caregivers living with metastatic cancers," according to Edward and Merry Prostic, Lizzie's parents and Hollander's brother and sister-in-law.

On Sept. 13 of this year, which would have been Lizzie's 33rd birthday, the Prostics announced, "In addition to creating the Elizabeth Anne Prostic Room at Truman Medical Center, we are establishing a new program at Turning Point, the Center for Hope and Healing.

"Although Turning Point conducts support groups for patients and families living with cancer," they continued, "it has not to date concentrated on metastatic and late-stage disease. The MetaCancer Foundation will make this focus a reality."

Additionally, "Because this concept is unique to Kansas City, Turning Point will dedicate the Prostic Room at their facility as an enduring legacy." All Foundation donors will be invited to take part in the forthcoming Nov. 25 ceremony of dedication.

The fledgling Foundation has been officially approved as a 501(c)(3) public charity by the IRS, retroactive to Sept. 27, 2005, which means that all past, present, and future donations are fully tax-deductible. Information on how to donate is available on the Web site, www.metacancer.org, which includes a "Why We Are Here" section devoted to Lizzie's story.

"Development of the Foundation is one of the things that has helped me find meaning and a sense of purpose over the past year," said Lizzie's husband Mike. "The anniversary of Lizzie's death, March 31, will always be a painful day. But our collective task today is to commit our-

selves to keeping Lizzie alive within each of us."

"At Lizzie's unveiling," Hollander says, "everyone 'lost it,' including the rabbi, when Mike and Harper went to put a stone on her grave." On its headstone are these words from "Song of Myself" by Walt Whitman, the poet Lizzie used to quote: "Failing to fetch me at first, keep encouraged...Missing me one place, search another...I stop somewhere, waiting for you."

"Harper and I will always believe," said Mike Lundblad. "She waits for us in our dreams and in our memories. But she also waits to see what kind of woman Harper will become, what kind of road she will follow. Lizzie would not want her daughter to brood or despair. She would want Harper to grow up strong, independent, powerful, happy, and fulfilled..."

Hollander reports that "From my own brief experience with Harper, I can say she is an absolute delight — she sings many nursery rhymes, has an extensive vocabulary, and loves to read books." And there is new reason for rejoicing in the family, too: the simcha of a birth. The latest Prostic baby is named Luke, in memory of Lizzie, with whom he also shares the Hebrew name of the angel Gabriel. At Luke's brit, the mohel offered a special prayer in memory of Lizzie.

Other appropriate memorials to Lizzie Prostic are in the works. George Washington University invited her parents to initiate fund-raising for a scholarship in her memory at the GW Law School, an effort not affiliated with MetaCancer. But the Foundation will implement a grant at the University of Pennsylvania beginning in the spring of 2007 for graduate research in the psychosocial aspects of living with metastatic cancer.



Lizzie Prostic with her daughter Harper and husband Mike Lundblad

The young Foundation has already made its first grant: a computer workstation, plus CD and DVD players and an appropriate selection of materials for them, for use by patients receiving chemotherapy at the Truman Medical Center's Cancer Center in Kansas City. The next grant is planned for The Wellness Community, an international nonprofit organization providing education and resources to all with cancer, regardless of stage; MetaCancer will fund an online metastatic support group linked from its own Web site.

Locally and with her family elsewhere, Hollander continues to spread the word about breast cancer awareness, advocating early detection and genetic

testing in situations like the Prostics', where the procedure is warranted. But despite present and anticipated future successes, past memories make the going rough. "We continue to try to pick up the pieces," she has commented to the *TJP* about the past year's events, "but as I write, the tears flow freely."

Ashkenazi-origin Jews wishing to learn more about whether testing for the breast cancer-related BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 genes is appropriate to their families may get full information from Baylor University Medical Center's Hereditary Cancer Risk Program at Baylor Sammons Breast Center, Dallas. Call (214) 820-9600 or (800) 4BAYLOR(422-9567).

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