

## HEROES



## Mara Ginsberg, Esq

Founder and President – To Life!  
www.tolife.org



“To Life! is one stop for information and personal attention – in short, we aim to be a personal source for breast cancer education and support.”

**SM: You are a cancer survivor. How has this disease changed your life?**

MG: My priorities in life were shaped by my experiences growing up, so having cancer didn't realign them. Instead, it added an even greater sense of urgency to everything I felt I needed to do or accomplish. My motto, throughout my youth and before cancer, was plan for the future but be flexible enough to handle what life throws at you. I have tried to teach that to my children too – but after cancer with a greater sense of urgency, as with all the life lessons I want them to truly understand.

**SM: When were you diagnosed with breast cancer?**

MG: I was 37, and our daughter was 7 and our son was 4. The good news is that I just turned 50!

**SM: Had you had a history of breast cancer in your family?**

MG: Indeed – my mother had breast cancer at 28 and 36, and died at 44 (when I was 18). Her sister (my aunt) also had breast cancer at 28 and 36, and died at 44. Because of this, breast cancer has been part of my life in one way or another... all my life.

**SM: What helped you to get through the most difficult times?**

MG: Movies are one of my favorite ways to escape difficult times, but my constant antidote to stress and pain is humor – all best when shared with family and friends.

**SM: Did you have a mentor, or role model?**

MG: My greatest role model was my soulmate, my grandmother. She taught me, by

her example, to use inner strength to deal with adversity and that humor and love can rescue you from the depths of despair.

**SM: Why did you decide to start To Life!?**

MG: I saw and learned about all kinds of programs, services, information, and treatment options in markets outside our region, and thought our community deserved more. When I was diagnosed, I found information, wigs, and fellowship through my own inquiries and investigation, but I didn't think everyone else should have to start from scratch. To Life! was meant to be and has become a personal source for information, friendship, support, and improved quality of life for everyone dealing with or concerned about breast cancer and women's health issues.

**SM: What is the aim of To Life!?**

MG: To Life! is one stop for information and personal attention – in short, we aim to be a personal source for breast cancer education and support. Our mission is to educate our community about breast cancer detection, treatments, and related health matters; and provide support services to breast cancer patients, caregivers, family, and friends.

**SM: Why is it so important for you to help others who are suffering with breast cancer?**

MG: I've seen the devastation that this disease can cause to children, families, friends, and of course women who become ill. I know what it feels like to watch someone you love be ill, and I've been the patient. It just seemed as clear as day that I had to do what I could by setting up an

avenue to provide information – so people can make informed decisions and feel comfortable with their medical decisions. It seemed logical to provide ways to help nurture people's psychological needs through mentoring programs and support groups and fellowships. It was clear that people needed to explore not just medical options, but “wellness” to enhance their quality of life. I just felt I wanted to do my part to help people navigate once they “fell down the rabbit hole” and to do a small part to help them feel as well as possible even during treatments.

**SM: What types of programs and services do you offer?**

MG: To Life! offers a variety of programs and services which are all free of charge. To Life! has 9 education forums every year and has for 10 years now. These education forums feature physicians and other experts on a wide range of topics including the latest in breast cancer treatments, osteoporosis, hormone replacement therapy, ovarian cancer, colon cancer, healthy cooking, legal issues relating to cancer and wellness, and integrative medicine. We provide a mentoring program so women who are diagnosed can meet with and talk to another woman who has gone through treatment. We have ACE groups (awareness, connection, education – our version of support groups that are issue based.) We have these groups for women going through treatment, women with metastatic disease, and women with their partners/spouses. We also run groups and programs for children whose parents have cancer. To Life! runs wellness programs including yoga, tai chi, Reiki, and other opportunities to relieve stress

and improve the quality of life. To Life! offers breast self-exam instruction to groups all over the region and participates in community outreach including health fairs. To Life! runs a boutique where we have private consultations with hair dressers for wigs, as well as prosthesis and bras for women who have had breast surgery. We work with most of the area insurance companies and file the claims for the people purchasing products. To Life! works to provide products at reduced, or no cost for those without insurance or means to pay.

**SM: What is your long term goal for To Life!?**

MG: To positively touch the lives of everyone needing to know more about breast cancer and women's wellness, and to continue to creatively accommodate the needs of our communities.

**SM: What is the best piece of advice that you have received?**

MG: Never give up.

**SM: Aside from being the founder and president of To Life!, you are also a lawyer and a mother of two. Is it difficult for you to juggle all of your different roles?**

MG: I may wear a number of different hats, but they are all just part of who I am and what makes me get up in the morning. I am a partner at the law firm of Hinman Straub, P.C. Many of the partners have strong ties to community organizations, and I am pleased to be a partner at a firm that enables me and others to do our part to give back to our community. My husband and family have been supportive of my efforts and endeavors, and that has helped enormously. I've juggled by letting certain things go – I cook less, clean less, don't work in the yard – ever – and my children learned to make their own lunch very early on. I trained them early to sign up to bring paper goods

for school events – NEVER cooked items – no time!

**SM: To what do you attribute your success with To Life!?**

MG: I approach life as a series of problems that need solutions. To Life! was a solution to the problem of a lack of resources for people dealing with breast cancer. My passion for solving this problem, coupled with a severe lack of patience to wait for anyone else to start the process, lead to the creation of To Life!. The success of To Life! is due in no small part to the volunteers and staff who are committed to bringing our quality programs and services to our region. Another reason To Life! is unique in our success is that we are able to respond to community needs quickly. This sometimes means the expansion of a program to another county, and in the case of Saratoga (where we continue to work closely and still have services in the Saratoga Hospital) we opened a To Life! boutique and office at 110 Spring Street.

**SM: What is the most important characteristic a person can have in order to achieve success?**

MG: Passion for the objective they are trying to achieve, tenacity to keep going, and the ability to inspire and lead others to work with them on the same cause.



**SM: What have you learned about yourself in the process of starting this organization?**

MG: That there aren't enough hours in the day! Good things may come to those who wait, but who has time to wait? I

realized after a short while that a non-profit organization has to be run like a for-profit business to be successful – so what I learned about myself is that I have the heart of an entrepreneur.

**SM: What accomplishment are you most proud of?**

MG: I am pleased that To Life! collaborates with other organizations, medical providers, hospitals and others, which enables us to reach so many people in need of information or assistance.

**SM: What are some of the upcoming events that To Life! will be sponsoring?**

MG: Oct 18, 2008 – Pink Ball – dinner dance to raise money for To Life! – Saratoga City Center

Oct 23, 2008 – education program – Genetics in Every Day Life – Guilderland Public Library, registration 5:30 program 6-8

Oct 30, 2008 – relaxation and memory – Scrapbooking Fun, To Life! 410 Kenwood Ave. Delmar, NY

Oct 1, 8, 15, 22 – Yoga with Judi England – To life! 410 Kenwood Ave. Delmar

**SM: What is the best way that someone can contribute?**

MG: Volunteer services are most welcome – work a health fair; become a mentor; receive training and run a support group; work in our office; join a fundraising committee and work on fun events like the annual gala or the pink ball; become a corporate sponsor or make a personal donation. Contact To Life! for more information.

**SM: What has been the most rewarding aspect of starting To Life!?**

MG: Helping to improve people's quality of life; providing a vehicle for people to have hope, love, support, and friendship.

**SM: If you had to describe yourself in one word, what would it be?**

MG: Driven.