

Woman Of The Month: Anne Best

By Booth Vance



In December of 2000, then 43-year-old Anne Best was given the news that more than 200,000 American women receive each year; she had breast cancer. The wife of successful businessman and former Canadian Winter team athlete J. Kirby Best and mother to four young boys, her immediate thoughts went to her family. “In one day,” she said from her Brentwood, TN home, “I went from being happy and healthy to trying to figure out how I was going to live as normal a life as possible for my family.”

Following her diagnosis Best went through the expected stages of denial, anger, fear and finally resolve as she worked towards empowering herself with as much information as possible to better face the tough decisions ahead. She read as much as she could about breast cancer, logged every test result, every x-ray and where every pathology sample was stored. “I became an amateur oncologist over night,’ she said.

But one thing she wasn’t prepared for was the juggling act she undertook as a wife, mother and cancer victim. “I was feeling guilty for spending so much of my time and energy on myself,’ she admitted. “But certain issues we face in life demand a little selfishness. Thankfully, I had the complete support of my family and having them go through this journey with me made all the difference in the world. They kept me focused.’

And focus is necessary when considering the reality of breast cancer. It is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer among U.S. women, following skin cancer, and claimed the lives of more than 40,000 women in 2008. While those figures are staggering, with the increased attention on the importance of early detection and advancements in medical treatments the mortality rate has been steadily declining, showing a 24% decrease since 1990.

With her surgery deemed successful, Best then faced the rigorous demands of chemotherapy and its many side effects which vary according to the type of therapy used. For Best, she found herself battling a condition known as hyperhidrosis, more commonly known as “night sweats.’ Chemotherapy depletes the estrogen from a woman’s body which often leads to menopause like symptoms including hot flashes and insomnia. For Best, this meant continually waking up during the night either hot or cold but always soaked in sweat.

“The chemo zapped my strength but sleeping through the night was an impossibility,’ she said. “I was constantly exhausted at a time when having as much energy as possible was so important. And as anyone who has had night sweats knows, it was a very frustrating cycle.’

Greek philosopher Plato said, "Necessity, who is the mother of invention" and necessity was certainly at play for Best when trying to figure out the best course of action in dealing with her condition. About that time moisture-wicking athletic shirts were becoming more popular and her husband suggested she try wearing one of his to bed. While it wasn't especially comfortable, and certainly not the most fashionable, it did the trick and Best soon began enjoying a good, and just as importantly, dry night's sleep.

After she successfully completed her chemotherapy, and with her night sweats a thing of the past, Anne Best became an advocate for women dealing with breast cancer. "I found I could communicate in a way that comes through shared experience," she recalled. She heard many stories and found that night sweats were a common complaint. Recalling her own experience with the moisture-wicking fabric she started doing research and realized there was a glaring lack of products created for women dealing with hot flashes and night sweats due to medical treatments or menopause. She envisioned a line of sleepwear products made specifically for women that melded functionality, comfort and style. Working with some of the top fabric technicians in the industry, and after much trial and error, DryDreams Sleepwear was born.

"I set out to create something that didn't feel 'medical,'" said Best. "We worked hard to design a fabric that was silky smooth and comfortable but still performed its function. But most of all I wanted women to feel feminine." This consideration has proven to be extremely important to many women who are either going through menopause or dealing with life after surgery where the process isn't just physical but emotional as well.

Today, DryDreams Sleepwear has helped countless women suffering from night sweats and hot flashes to enjoy a restful night's sleep. The line has been created for women of all sizes and includes nightgowns, camis, pajamas and even pillow cases. And with its success, Best is poised to launch a new line of sleepwear aimed at men and younger girls. Performance Sleepwear will utilize the same proprietary fabric but will serve a dual purpose. "There are a lot of men who also suffer from night sweats, particularly those with sleep apnea," says Best. "And we've learned that they'll be more apt to wear the garment because of its athletic feel. As far as the younger girls; they just like the way it looks and feels."

And as further proof of her commitment to serving as an advocate for women, 100% of the profits after operating expenses for DryDreams is donated directly to a host of breast cancer charities. "Our decision to donate our profits to charity raised the eyebrows of some," said Best. "But my perspective all along has been how to best help women facing their own battles. And the added benefit is that anyone purchasing our garments is also contributing. It's a win-win situation."

With close to half the world's population experiencing night sweats due to illness or menopause at some time in their lives, Best is committed to providing as much relief as possible through her sleepwear line. But she still holds a special place for those women fighting breast cancer.

"The diagnosis is both hardening to a person's psyche and liberating to its soul," she explains. "I came out the other side a different person and feel it's my obligation to pass on what I've learned and provide support in whatever way I can."

And as a member of a fraternity that chooses its members indiscriminately, and for life, Anne Best can certainly serve as an inspiration as one who turned "What If" into "What Is."

For more information on Anne Best and DryDreams Sleepwear go to www.drydreamssleepwear.com.