



MJ with her daughter (left) and with her mother (below).



Rethink Your Risk

A Canadian charity reaches out to young moms with cancer BY MJ DECOTEAU

I can't believe it's been 13 years since my mother died of breast cancer. I was just 22 and, while "level-headed," still very much in need of a mom. My grandmother had also had the disease. For the past seven years, I've been working in the breast-cancer field and five years ago, I founded the charity **Rethink Breast Cancer**. The weird thing is, despite my family history and career choice, I rarely thought about my own risk. It wasn't until the birth of my daughter, Annie, two years ago that my concern for our futures (could breast cancer leave Annie motherless, too?) became more prevalent.

When I was about eight months pregnant, I met a young woman who had found what turned out to be a cancerous lump when she was in her eighth month of pregnancy. She was currently in the middle of treatment, with a newborn and 3-year-old at home. I remember waddling home after the meeting with tears streaming down my cheeks, my mind racing. Maybe I was hormonal, but it was a pivotal moment. I became obsessed with the needs of young moms with breast cancer.

Over the past year, I have met other young women who were diagnosed during pregnancy or not long after having a baby. I've met a woman who postponed treatment so she could breast-feed for at least a few days so her child could get colostrum. I've met a mom who had a mastectomy as day surgery, sent home with drains sticking out of her body and a 2-year-old crawling all

over her. I've met women unable to pick up their toddlers because they are too weak from chemo, and women with preschoolers wondering, "why doesn't mommy ever want to play with me anymore?" With so much hype around today's high-achieving Alpha Mom, a new mother with breast cancer may feel guilty she can't be as involved in the formative years of her child's life as she may have planned.

NEW MOM SUPPORT

Rethink Breast Cancer has just launched an innovative support program for young moms with breast cancer and their families. We're working with amazing psychotherapists who facilitate sessions for mothers as well as couples' workshops. We also have excellent early childhood educators from Mothercraft to help us with programming for the partners and children. We're even creating no-cancer-talk play dates as an after-care element for moms. Right now, we're piloting the program in Toronto, so it can be rolled out to other cities in the future.

For me, the hardest part of motherhood has been not having my own mom here, not just to help out, but also to share in my delight. And it's hard knowing what Annie is missing out on, too. Growing up, kids were always drawn to my mom. She was warm and loving and natural. My wish is for a future that frees mothers and daughters everywhere from the fear of breast cancer.

HEALTH

Breast TLC

Rethink Breast Cancer wants you to touch your breasts so you can feel for changes in shape and texture. Check anything unusual with your doctor. Get your significant other involved and turn TLC time into quality time together.



Using the pads of your fingers, make small circles, starting at the outside edge of your breast. Go all the way around once, then move closer to the nipple and go around again. Continue until you check your entire breast, including the nipple.



Or, make small circles in straight lines. Move across the breast in one direction, then lower your fingers and move across in the other direction. Continue until you are well below the breast, and remember to check the nipple.

Socialites Big & Small

Help Rethink Breast Cancer reach its goals by attending the **Little Sweetheart Ball** at the Liberty Market Building, Toronto, on **Saturday, February 11** from 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. This "babylicious" Valentine's party is asking all hot mamas, hip daddies and tiny tots to come out and support the cause. All funds go to Rethink's support program for new moms with breast cancer and their families. For more info, visit rethinkbreastcancer.com/sweetheart.