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'It's been an amazing journey'

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Olivia Newton-John — ~~Hopelessly~~ ^{ful} Devoted to Empowering Women in the Fight Against Breast Cancer

by Laura Shipp

When Olivia Newton-John was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1992, the modern breast cancer movement was just beginning to take shape. October was established as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month just a few years prior, and the pink ribbon had made its debut in 1991 when the then-named Susan G. Komen Foundation handed out the ribbons to participants in its New York City race for breast cancer survivors. While some women openly embraced the movement and proudly donned the pink symbol, many still spoke of the disease in hushed tones and were reluctant to take on the breast cancer survivor label.

“Going through breast cancer 18 years ago, it had a different energy around it,”

1 a Minute Stories of Hope, Courage, and Survival

This fall, Olivia Newton-John will join actors, survivors, and advocates from around the world to help raise awareness through *I a Minute*, a docudrama that portrays one woman’s journey through breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. Throughout the film, breast cancer survivors (including Olivia) will share their own personal stories of hope and survival.

The film is the creation of actress, director, and breast cancer survivor Namrata Singh Gujral, who began the project while undergoing chemotherapy treatment. Olivia says of Namrata, “She was so passionate about doing something to change the breast cancer experience for other women. I have great respect for her.”

You can find out more about the movie, as well as read our interview with Namrata, at www.copingmag.com/1aminute.

Olivia tells *Coping*® magazine. “It’s not something that was talked about a lot. But now we can talk about it. And we have breast cancer walks and drives; it has a month. It’s kind of all over.

“Even still,” she adds, “women are scared to do breast self-examination, which is what I want to encourage.”

The four-time Grammy winner credits her own breast self-exam as the first step to her diagnosis (and successful treatment) of breast cancer. Now 18 years later and cancer free, Olivia has become a passionate advocate for early detection, encouraging women to take a more active role in their breast health. To help, she has launched Liv Aid® (www.liv.com), a breast self-examination aid that helps women exercise breast self-exams correctly.

“I want every woman to have a Liv Aid kit so that she’ll do regular breast self-examinations,” Olivia says of her goal for the Liv Aid initiative. To date,

“...it’s been an amazing journey.”

more than 1.3 million kits have been distributed to women across the globe.

While working to improve women’s health worldwide, Olivia also takes steps to maintain her own wellness. “I eat well,” she says. “My husband [John Easterling, whom she married in June 2008] has a company called Amazon Herb Company. I live off those wonderful herbs. They have all the value of the Amazon rainforest in them. And that’s what keeps me healthy. That and a positive spirit.”

She avows that having a positive spirit is the key to living a good life – and finding it is only a matter of perspective. “Life is a journey,” she says. “You can choose to look at it as a difficult one. We all have difficulties. But if I looked at my life as a whole, it’s been an amazing journey. I’m in a most wonderful place. I’ve married a wonderful man.



photo by Chad Smith, courtesy of Green Hill Music

And my daughter is happy and healthy. It’s a good life.”

She even includes her battle with breast cancer as a significant part of her “amazing journey.” “I wouldn’t say, *No, I wish I hadn’t gone through that*,” Olivia insists, “because if I hadn’t gone through it, I wouldn’t be where I am now.”

Olivia is closing in on 20 years of breast cancer survivorship, a milestone she hadn’t realized was approaching so quickly. A long-term “breast cancer thriver,” as she calls herself, Olivia offers

this advice for women currently facing breast cancer: “Remember that this too will pass. It’s not forever. You’ll get through these treatments, and you’ll be done. And then you’ll start to heal. Life will go on. And before you know it, you’re sitting here 18 years later talking about it.”

Editor’s Note: *This fall, Olivia is celebrating 40 years of music with over 100 million albums sold. Her latest, Grace and Gratitude: Renewed, is a New Age CD designed to promote healing. “I hope these songs will help the listener to take time out of their busy life for relaxation or meditation,” Olivia says. “As a long-term cancer survivor, I have learned how important it is to take care of both my physical and emotional health. In my recovery, I became even more aware of the power of music. It can heal the body, calm the mind, and lift the spirit; but above all, it can connect us to our hearts.”*

Action! For more on Olivia Newton-John, visit www.olivianewton-john.com. ■