

Hello everyone. I love good quotes, and I recently came across one that read:

**“There is no force more powerful than a woman determined to rise...”** and I can’t think of a stronger, more inspirational group of remarkable women than the courageous women who have been named as your *Testimonial Speakers* before me. I am both honored and humbled to now be included their company, having been chosen as the **2018 Sheila R. Veloz Breast Center Testimonial Speaker.**

Many words come to mind when we think about our reason for this gathering. I think of the words: “strength” “determination” “courage” “sisterhood” “healing” and “love.” I could name so many more, but I am up here for a different reason, perhaps a word that may not jump to the forefront of your mind when we talk about **Breast Cancer Awareness**. I stand before you tonight because of **“kindness.”** Two simple acts of kindness that two women quietly shared, not for any recognition or reward, but merely because kindness came from their hearts and was simply a lovely and very generous thing to do for a fellow human being. *“Empowered women, empower women...”* And now I will tell you my story.

Election Day 2016 did not go well for me. It was time for my annual exam, so I braved the 5 FWY south during morning, rush-hour traffic, in order to get to Burbank and my doctor’s office on time. “Ah, but it was only once a year” I reminded myself, so I could certainly manage to grin and bear it. After all, having enjoyed decades of “check-in, get a clean bill of health, and check-out,” I thought I had it *wired*. In hindsight, I can see that I was obviously taking my good health for granted. Because on that particular November day, my doctor had found a “complex tumor” on my right ovary and *didn’t like the way it looked*. He wanted to see me again in a week.

Well, this was new to me. I had never been called back to make a “command performance” before. Needless to say, I was dubious. In the meantime, he advised me to schedule my annual mammogram. Now that part was easy—no problem! I had recently

discovered that the Sheila R. Veloz Breast Center now offered Saturday appointments, so that would be a total no-brainer.

Having been a patient there for nearly a decade, I had really come to appreciate our Sheila R. Veloz Breast Center, it's convenience, warmth and cookies, well... I was *hooked*. I sailed effortlessly in-and-out on a Saturday, snagging a cookie as I left, always for **good luck**.

My return visit with my doctor didn't go as well. He now had the audacity to order a **contrasting** MRI at a *partner lab* in Burbank, and as *soon* as I could schedule it. Soooo I took my time, went locally, refused the contrast dye, and showed up for the follow-up appointment very much to his bewilderment. I was not taking any of his concern **seriously** at all. He wanted me to bring my husband to my next visit.

"Wow, *really?*" And he asked me if I had *even bothered* getting my breast exam? Well of course I had! I was just waiting on the letter *clearing me for another year*. It should arrive any day now...

After years of "skipping" merrily in and out of my annual exams, it's as if the Universe decided to grab me by the wrist and say "*Not so fast, Skippy.*" The letter from the Breast Center arrived that afternoon and they too had detected an abnormality that they didn't like. "Please call and schedule another breast evaluation." Ugh. *This can not be happening...*

Well, to make a long story short, I had a fast growing tumor on my right ovary that had to come out. While still very much in denial, I thought my doctor would *at least* let me get through the holidays, and schedule my surgery *sometime* in the new year, but he scheduled my partial hysterectomy that very Saturday, moving me ahead of nine other women to robotically operate on me December 3rd. **Dr. Ahdoot saved my life.**

Meanwhile, back in Valencia, I had taken a second mammogram, and now the doctors there wanted me back for a biopsy. I was mentally heading into a full-blown tailspin as things started to seem pretty bleak for me.

Though I had received news that my ovarian tumor was *benign*, my post surgery discomfort and misgivings were at an all time high that January morning I walked in for my biopsy. Time seemed to stand still, and I noticed every little thing about our beloved Sheila R. Veloz Breast Center that *I had never really focused on before*. I read all the names of the donors, and their various levels, as I barely took note of the television in the lobby. Once inside, I looked at my fellow patients and wondered who had *Lady Luck* with them, and who would be on my side of the fence. I read the quotes on the walls and tried to occupy myself with a **lucky cookie**, hoping my *silly routine* would kick-in and somehow change my fate. Every sound, every person, every detail was imprinted on me, and I can easily say that I was never **more grateful** for the **familiar and warm ambiance** I had come to know, than I had been on that day.

When the technician came to get me, we recognized each other from my second mammogram. She remembered that I had been recovering from surgery and now asked how I had been feeling. Her concern for me that morning, her humanity, and her guidance were so gentle, so focused and personal, that I felt that she could have known and cared for me as a dear friend for years. I didn't merely think I was in good hands, I **KNEW** that I was.

Because of the **excellent care** and **focused concern** shown to me from the angels working at the Sheila R. Veloz Breast Center, I was calm and confident that somehow everything would be ok. Their various acts of kindness shown to me not only on **that** day, but really since the beginning of my days of always *skippin' on through*, touched me deeply to my core and made my experience one I will *never forget*.

The staff didn't see me as a number—a mere statistic, or even as a silly Stevenson Ranch mom “skipping” obliviously through their lobby. They saw me as Patricia, a very vulnerable and

frightened woman, trying my hardest to put on a brave face as I silently and obediently listened to the details of my biopsy procedure. As I winced through the pain, I could feel my technician's supportive hand, and I was grateful for her **kindness and connection**. I was not alone on that fateful and most frightening day. And that in itself, *felt amazing to me*. She showed me more compassion than I had been showing to myself.

When I was 22, I lost a very dear and generous friend to an unexpected accident. I learned back then to **honor my blessings** daily by dedicating myself to charitable endeavors. Nowadays, I try to also use my writing skills to review people, places and things that cross my path in a *positive way*. I try to express myself in a way that beautifies our world. I enjoy taking time to thank those who make me smile or put in an extra effort to give *their very best* in what they do for a living. I want to be sure that I don't just notice the "helpers" but that I also make the effort to **thank them** too. My motivation is to lift spirits and share some sunshine along this road of life.

And that is precisely why I am standing here before you. **I live by the notion that if you can be anything in this world, be kind**, so I wrote an uplifting Tribute for my heroes at the Sheila R. Veloz Breast Center that had all deeply touched my heart that day. *Everyone* at the center had showered me with their humanity and kindness, and I recognized that I was **not the exception**. Quite the opposite: they provide this level of **excellent care** for every single woman that crosses their doorstep, ***each and every day***.

My motto has long been that "All you need is Love" and the staff at Sheila R. Veloz Breast Center definitely put love into everything they do. From the receptionists and billing, to the technicians and the doctors—they serve their fellow community members with excellence and love. Love, not only for what they do, but love for who **we** individually are. I was lucky then, and I am still riding the waves of gratitude for my **benign** breast biopsy results,

but having faced the darkness of what could have been—what I have witnessed some of my dearest friends *endure firsthand*, I guarantee you: I will never mindlessly skip through that waiting room again.

And so I will now leave you with one last quote: “Sometimes the bad things that happen in our lives put us directly on the path to the best things that will ever happen to us.” Being your speaker is one of the **best things** that has ever happened to me. I am so grateful, honored and humbled for being invited here to be with you tonight/today. Thank you for being so kind to listen to my story.